THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION TO CHILDREN BASED ON BIBLICAL STUDIES

Desi SIANIPAR

Graduate Program Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Christian Religious Education Program,
ORCID No: 0000000269759926

Jefrit MESSAKH

Graduate Program Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Christian Religious Education Program

Sozanolo TELAUMBANUA

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Setia Jakarta, Theological Program

Abstract

Christian religious education has great responsibility in promoting social cohesion to children, especially in a pluralistic society. Social cohesion is characterized by elements such as: social relationships, social identification, and orientation towards the common good. Strengthening these elements in children is Christian responsibility and vocation. Social cohesion will always face negative potentials, such as: egocentrism or primordialism in religion, tribalism, narrow political and business interests, socio-economic disparities, low levels of empathy and social solidarity, low levels of legal certainty and justice, the decline of civilized values, loss of honesty, moral decadence, and lower national competitiveness. Children must be strengthened with social cohesion from an early age because they are the next generation of the nation. They are the ones who will one day protect and build a nation that has good social resilience and the welfare of its people. Therefore, the role of Christian religious education is needed in promoting social cohesion that enables Christians to participate in strengthening national resilience. Based on this background, the purpose of this study is to describe the role of Christian religious education in promoting social cohesion in children based on biblical studies. The method used in this research is a literature study. The result of this study is that Christian religious education should be an effective tool in providing children with the teaching and practice of social cohesion built on the values found in the Bible. Thus, Christians can be role models in promoting social cohesion and strengthening national unity and integrity.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education, social cohesion, children

Introduction

Christian Religious Education can be interpreted as a learning process aimed at providing individuals with understanding, knowledge, and experience related to Christianity (Daniel Numahara, 2008). The purpose of this education is to introduce and teach the teachings, values, principles, and practices contained in Christianity to its adherents (E.G. Homrighausen and I. H. Enklaar, 2014). Christian religious education also helps individuals understand, live, and internalize Christian teachings so that they can become the basis for people's lives. Christian religious education also plays a role in developing faith and a personal relationship with God, so that spirituality experiences good growth. This teaching is delivered in schools, churches, families, and other Christian institutions. The material is taught according to the level of education, the cultural context, and the ecclesiastical tradition (E.G. Homrighausen, 2013).

Christian religious education also has a major role in promoting social cohesion among children, especially in a pluralistic society. Social cohesion is characterized by elements such as: social relationships, social identification and orientation towards the common good. Strengthening these elements in children is a Christian responsibility and calling. Social cohesion must be taught and internalized as early as possible in children because society will always face negative potentials that can disrupt and destroy individuals, families, communities and nations, such as: egocentrism or primordialism in religion, tribalism, narrow political and business interests, socio-economic disparities, low empathy and social solidarity, low legal certainty and justice, deterioration of civilized values, loss of honesty, moral decadence, and low national competitiveness. Children must be strengthened with social cohesion from an early age because they are the next generation of the nation. They are the ones who will one day maintain and build a nation that has good social resilience and prosperity for its people. Therefore, the role of Christian religious education is needed in promoting social cohesion that enables Christians to participate in strengthening national resilience. Lydiah Njoki Wachira states that children should learn social cohesion and practice it with the right reason, good spirit and relevant methodology (Lydiah Njoki Wachira, 2021).

The concept of social cohesion is variously understood, but in this paper the understanding of social cohesion should be geared towards children's perspectives, as it has developed among academics and policy makers. For children, social cohesion is felt when their environment is safe, happy and comfortable, and they can relate well with other children. Social cohesion should be understood by children in the context of children's needs, which vary by gender, nationality, age group, and so on. A correct understanding of social cohesion will help children learn tolerance and prosocial behavior so that they grow into positive members of society who are skilled in building the social fabric of their country and are able to create a safe, harmonious and happy environment in the future. Social cohesion in children's understanding can be related to acceptance and respect for children, good relationships with adults, equality, the presence of friends, trust, freedom of expression and participation, involvement in various activities, freedom from violence and oppression. Fun activities for children include: art, music and dance, storytelling, social activities or ice-breakers, education, skills training, and games related to sports, technology and non-technology (UNICEF Jordan, 2019). This interpretation of social cohesion is based on the Jordanian context, but it is also relevant to children everywhere.

Based on the above background, the purpose of this study is to describe the role of Christian religious education in enhancing social cohesion in children based on biblical studies.

Research Methods

The method used in this research is a literature study. The author investigates literature such as: journal articles, proceedings, books, documents relevant to the topic of this research. According to Sugiyono, apparatus study is a research activity carried out by studying, analyzing, and interpreting literature or library materials that are relevant to the research topics discussed. Through this method, the author can find various data and information needed (Sugiyono, 2017).

Results and Discussion

A. Christian Religious Education

Christian religious education should be an effective tool in teaching children social cohesion built on Christian values in the Bible. Such teaching serves to shape children's lives so that they have positive social attitudes in the social environment and will be able to become a generation of protectors of society and the nation from all harmful threats. In general, Christian religious education serves to shape the character, morals and spirituality of Christians (Arazatulo Telaumbanua, 2020). They are taught to have integrity, honesty, humility, patience, mutual respect, and all other positive things.

They are taught to live according to the principles of virtue, promoting compassion, tolerance, and peace among fellow human beings. In addition, Christians are also encouraged to develop social skills, servant and responsible leadership, the ability to communicate well, cooperate in groups based on Christian values (E.G. Homrighausen and I. H. Enklaar, 2014). Christian religious education also equips people to face life's challenges with faith and hope through Christian doctrines and Biblical stories (Gainau, 2016).

In general, the theological foundations used in teaching Christian values are: a) God's presence and involvement in the world (Husudung Simatupang, 2020); b) God's Word in the Holy Scriptures which serve as God's guidance for His people (Kevin. E. Lawson, 2017); c) Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of life for the people; the Holy Spirit who plays a role in guiding, teaching, and guiding the lives of the people; d) belief in salvation and forgiveness that God has given; e) love and service to fellow human beings which are the core teachings of Jesus Christ; f) the mission of preaching the gospel as good news to the world to bring salvation, forgiveness, justice and peace.

With the above theological foundation, religious education aimed at children is an effort to teach the values of love, patience, humility, honesty, and responsibility (Rohny Pasu Sinaga, 2020). They should be taught about the importance of living according to Christian moral standards in relationships with others and in dealing with various situations of daily life. They are taught to care about the lives of others by emphasizing the importance of praying for others and serving lovingly. They are also taught to develop a sense of dependence on God and a sense of caring for others (Yenni Septiani Purba, 2019). Through religious education, children have the opportunity to learn the stories of the Bible, the teachings of Jesus, and the moral and ethical principles contained therein (Rohny Pasu Sinaga, 2020). Learning is done through stories, spiritual songs, games, and other creative activities appropriate to the age of the child. They should be helped to be able to participate in Christian communities, such as church and Sunday school so that they can build positive and mutually encouraging friendships (Ahmad Susanto, 2017). All these things will help them to be able to coexist with anyone in the spirit of justice, equality and peace.

B.   Social Cohesion Education for Children

Cohesion is a concept used in social science and linguistics to describe the strength and quality of relationships or bonds between individuals in a group or society. It refers to unity, solidarity and a sense of interdependence between group members. Cohesion refers to various aspects of social relationships, including emotional connection, shared values, common goals, social norms, trust, communication, and social interaction. This is closely related to the concept of social solidarity, where strong cohesion can create togetherness, stability and harmony in a group (Agung et al., 2018). Social cohesion refers to the concept of relationships and togetherness between members in a group or society. It includes factors that influence social ties and interactions between individuals, which contribute to solidarity and harmony within the group. Social cohesion involves various elements that influence social interactions, such as norms, values, shared goals, interdependence and trust between group members. Social norms accepted by group members form the framework that governs their behavior and interactions, while shared values provide guidance on what is considered important and valued in the group (Agung et al., 2018). In addition, common goals shared by group members can be an incentive to work together and support each other in achieving the desired results. Interdependence between individuals in the group can also strengthen social cohesion, where the success or failure of one individual can have an impact on other group members (Taufik Abdullah, 2009). Trust is an important element in social cohesion, as group members who have trust in each other tend to be more open, cooperative, and able to resolve conflict more effectively. Strong trust also forms the basis for cooperation and collaboration in achieving common goals (Morida Siagian, 2015). Social cohesion plays an important role in maintaining social stability, reducing conflict, and promoting social integration in society. When there is strong social cohesion, individuals tend to feel more emotionally

connected and have close bonds with each other. They are also more likely to maintain cooperation, respect differences, and share responsibility in achieving collective well-being.

Given the importance of social cohesion, Christian religious education should take an active part in strengthening it as early as possible in children. There are several ways this can be done, namely:

- Making transformative efforts by teaching children to understand, appreciate and live a Christian life in a pluralistic society based on Christian values.

- Strengthening children to be able to work together with everyone from different backgrounds with the spirit and motivation of love, justice, equality and peace.

- Encouraging the provision of social programs that involve cross-cultural and interfaith children, so that they will form a society that has strong solidarity and is not easily destroyed.

- Strengthening children's ability to interact with peers, family members and other community members.

- Strengthening children's ability to communicate with others effectively by training them to be willing to listen well, express their thoughts and feelings clearly, and understand verbal and nonverbal communication (Susan Daniel, 2021).

- Strengthening children's social skills by training them to practice basic social skills, such as: sharing, taking turns, apologizing, respecting others' boundaries, and working together in groups. This helps children to be able to interact with others positively and resolve conflicts in a constructive way (Thomson Siallagan, 2021).

- Training children's ability to understand and feel the feelings of others which is useful for building healthy relationships.

- Building self-awareness in understanding their roles and responsibilities in social relationships.

- Providing recognition and appreciation to children to strengthen children's social behavior (Siti Muri'ah, 2018).

C.   Biblical Studies on Social Cohesion

There are at least three values that can be developed to strengthen social cohesion in children, namely solidarity, hospitality, and participation-contribution. All three are explored based on the teachings of the Bible as the highest source and norm for Christianity.

Solidarity (James 2:1-4)

> "*My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"*

In this text, James highlights the problem of unjust treatment of the poor and their dehumanization in the congregation. He emphasizes that faith in the glorious Jesus Christ must be lived out through an attitude of love and social justice. He urged the congregation not to discriminate against people based on their appearance or social status. Social cohesion refers to unity and solidarity in society. James reminds Christians not to differentiate people based on their possessions, social status, or appearance, as this is contrary to the Christian faith which should respect all people indiscriminately. In the context of social cohesion, community well-being and unity are strengthened

when there is no discrimination based on external factors such as wealth or social status. In addition, this verse also invites Christians to live according to the principle of social cohesion, which is to respect all people indiscriminately and be fair to all people, regardless of economic, social, or ethnic differences. Christianity is strongly opposed to favoritism and discrimination. Instead, it strongly emphasizes equality before God.

Christians should show empathy and fair or equal social action to all people. Teachers in church, school and family should teach children to have an attitude of respect and treat all people fairly and wisely. Well-internalized teaching should be done by providing materials, methods, means, activities that shape them into people of high solidarity. This effort will be successful if educators provide interfaith, cross-cultural and cross-social programs that children can practice directly. In this case, adults must be involved as active and consistent role models.

Hospitality (Titus 3:1-2)

> *"Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone."*

This verse emphasizes the importance of social cohesion in the Christian life. Swearing and fighting against others reflects an attitude that undermines relationships and unity in society. Instead, Titus calls on believers to be courteous and humble towards all people. Social cohesion here refers to harmonious relationships and mutual respect among individuals in society. Titus reminds Christians to abstain from actions such as swearing, which can damage reputations and interpersonal relationships. Instead, they should practice courtesy and humility towards all people. In the context of social cohesion, courtesy, friendliness and humility play an important role in building good relationships among diverse individuals in society. By avoiding swearing and fighting back, believers should create a more inclusive environment and build respectful and friendly relationships with one another. In the face of differences and conflicts, one should choose a polite and humble attitude, create good relationships, and strengthen unity in society.

In this regard, children should be taught and trained how to communicate well within the family, church and community. They should be trained to show a friendly and polite attitude to everyone.

Participative dan Contributive (Jeremiah 29:7)

> *"Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

This is part of the prophet Jeremiah's letter to the Israeli exiles in Babylonia. Jeremiah instructs them to live actively and contribute to the society in which they live, even though they are in a state of exile. The social cohesion emphasized here is the effort to seek the good and welfare of the city or community around them. Jeremiah invites the Israelites not to isolate themselves or ignore the society in which they live, but instead, play an active role in building and praying for the good of the city.

In the context of social cohesion, Christians are called to be actively involved in the life of the community and contribute their best for the common progress and welfare. By praying and seeking the good of the city or community in which they live and helping to build good relationships with fellow citizens, strengthen unity, and achieve common prosperity. This should be an important point to teach children so that they understand their role in their community.

Conclusion

Children as the next generation of families, communities and nations must receive teaching and training to understand, live and practice social cohesion. Christian teachings strongly emphasize the importance of social cohesion which contains the values of kindness, justice, equality and peace. The Bible teaches it through important texts that emphasize solidarity, hospitality, and participation/contribution. These should be taught to children as early as possible so that they can become builders and protectors of the communities and nations in which they live.

References

Abdullah, Taufik. (2009). Di Sekitar Masalah Agama Dan Kohesi Sosial: Pengalaman Dan Tantangan. *Masyarakat & Budaya*, *11*(1), 7.

Agung, Yusuf Ratu, et al. (2018). Kohesi Sosial Dalam Membentuk Harmoni Kehidupan Komunitas. *Jurnal Psikologi Perseptual*, Vol 3, No 1 (2018).

Daniel, Susan. (2021). Pengembangan Pemberdayaan Pendidikan Agama Kristen Anak Usia Dini Melalui Pemuridan Dalam Kontekstual Pada Jemaat. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, *2*(1), 109.

Gainau, M. S. (2016). *Pendidikan Agama Kristen Remaja*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius.

Homrighausen, E.G. dan I. H. Enklaar. (2014). *Pendidikan Agama Kristen* (64 (ed.). Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia.

Homrighausen, E.G., R. S. (2013). *Pendidikan Agama Kristen*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia.

Lawson, Kevin. E.. (2017). *Fondasi Sejarah Pendidikan Kristen" Dalam Fondasi Pendidikan Abad 21: Introducing Chritian Education*. Malang: Gandum Mas.

Muri'ah, Siti, K. W. (2018). *Psikologi Perkembangan Anak dan Remaja*. Batu: Literasi Nusantara.

Numahara, Daniel. (2008). *PAK Remaja*. Bandung: Jurnal Info Media.

Purba, Yenni Septiani, D. A. R. (2019). Desain Kurikulum Pak Anak Usia 9-12 Tahun Di Sinode Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun (Gkps) Dengan Menggunakan Teori Wyckoff. *Shanan*, *3*(2), 32.

Siagian, Morida. (2015). Kohesi Sosial Masyarakat di Kawasan Megapolis (Studi Kasus Kawasan Kampung Keling, Medan, Indonesia). *Lingkungan Binaan Indonesia*, *7*(2), 92–98.

Siallagan, Thomson. (2021). Sinergi Keluarga, Sekolah, Dan Gereja Menjadikan Keluarga Sebagai Pusat Pendidikan Agama Kristen Di Masa Pandemi. *Excelsis Deo*, *5*(1), 31.

Simatupang, Husudung, M. N. (2020). *Pengantar Pendidikan Kristen*. Yogyakarta: ANDI.

Sinaga, Rohny Pasu. (2020). Tanggung Jawab Gereja Dalam Pendidikan Agama Kristen (Pak) Anak. *STT Abdi Sabda Medan*, *4*(3), 13.

Sugiyono. (2017). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D. Bandung*. Alfabeta, CV.

Susanto, Ahmad. (2017). *Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*. Jakarta: PT Bumi Aksara.

Telaumbanua, Arazatulo. (2020). Implementasi Pendidikan Agama Kristen di Era Teknologi. *Sanctum Domine*, *19*(2), 49–64.

UNICEF Jordan. (2019), *Towards a Child-led Definition of Social Cohesion.* Jordan: UNICEF for every child.