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THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN EDUCATING TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE COUPLES	Jefrit Johanis Messakh Desi Sianipar	Universitas Kristen Indonesia

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**THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN EDUCATING TRADITIONAL
MARRIAGE COUPLES**

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ABSTRACT

In general, people in Indonesia are tribal customary societies so that marriage is still regulated based on tribal customary law. However, legal marriages recognised by the Indonesian state are primarily religious marriages and civil marriages (marriages legalised by the state). Customary marriage alone is not valid in Indonesia. At present, there are still people who only conduct customary marriages, without religious and civil marriages. This happens because they consider that customary marriage is more important than religious and civil marriage. In the context of Christianity, if this is allowed, then couples who only conduct customary marriages will suffer losses in the future, namely they do not get their rights as members of the church and do not get their rights as citizens whose marriages are protected by the state. Therefore, the church, which functions to conduct Christian religious education for its people, must educate the customary marriage couple so that they understand the rules or laws of marriage that apply in Indonesia. Based on these problems, the purpose of this study is to describe the role of the church through Christian religious education in educating customary marriage couples so that they are able to understand the applicable marriage laws in Indonesia. The method used in this research is literature study. The result of this study is that the church through the Christian religious education programme provides theological understanding of the meaning and purpose of Christian marriage and civil marriage based on the study of Christian faith. The church also provides an understanding of the impact of customary marriage without religious and civil marriage. This education should be conducted in a structured and sustainable manner.

Keywords: Christian religious education; traditional marriage

Introduction

In general, Indonesian people perform traditional marriages as part of an effort to preserve local wisdom and maintain traditions passed down from generation to generation by ancestors, as well as to maintain the cultural identity of a particular ethnic group or region. Customary marriage refers to a marriage process that is governed by traditions and customs that have prevailed in a particular society or ethnic group (Mendrofa, 2024). Each region has specific practices or rituals governing their marriage ceremonies, which often reflect the values, beliefs and social norms held dear by the indigenous people. Traditional marriage is also understood as a marriage that unites husband and wife through traditional rituals by passing through various stages in the custom (M. Zamroni, 2018). Through these stages, the marriage couple is considered valid under customary law. However, there are still couples who marry only by custom without carrying out religious and civil marriages. Law No. 1/1974 article 2 paragraph 1 on marriage explains that a marriage is considered valid if it is carried out in religious and civil law (M. Zamroni, 2018).

In the context of Christianity, there are still church members who conduct customary marriages, without conducting Christian and civil marriages. For example, in Dalek Esa village, Southwest Rote sub-district, Rote Ndao district, NTT. There are about 18 married couples who have not conducted religious marriage, but have only conducted customary marriage (4). In addition, the total number of couples who have not yet conducted religious marriage from 2019 to 2024 is around 37 couples. This shows that

there are still many couples who conduct customary marriages, without religious and civil marriages, so they need to be educated about the marriage laws that apply in Indonesia.

In this case, the church as a religious institution that carries out religious education for church members should play a role in providing guidance to traditional marriage couples. Based on Christian theology and church regulations, they should be taught to understand the importance of religious and civil marriages, and then facilitate them to conduct them. Customary marriage couples should also be taught to understand the consequences of not conducting religious and civil marriages, namely that their children and descendants will have difficulties in obtaining inheritance rights and obtaining birth certificates in the future (Susanti, et al., 2016). According to Erwinsyahbana, religious marriage provides legal certainty and protection for the parties to the marriage (Erwinsyahbana, 2022). This is emphasised by (Susanti and Shoimah, 2016), that religious marriage is important because of the need for marriage registration (marriage certificate). In the context of Christianity, couples who are not religiously married are considered invalid and cannot participate in church ceremonies such as the baptism of their children, Holy Communion, and various other services, unless they participate in worship.

Christian religious education implemented by the church has a very important role in educating the lives of church members so that they are able to place themselves correctly as religious people and good citizens. Therefore, Christian religious education should seek to develop understanding, beliefs, and spiritual practices based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, including in terms of marriage (Harianto GP, 2012). The main purpose of Christian religious education is to shape character in accordance with Christian teachings, strengthen personal relationships with God, and encourage the application of moral values in daily life (Daniel Nuhamara, 2018). The Bible becomes the foundation, source, and teaching material where the teachings, stories, and principles contained therein guide the teaching of Christian indigenous marriage couples. The Bible becomes an authoritative source that provides the basis for understanding God, life, morality, and human relationships and human relationships with God (Daniel S. Tjandra, 2020). By internalising the values contained in the Bible, individuals can be shaped into human beings who are noble, responsible, and able to contribute positively to society.

Civil marriage provides the legal validity necessary in social and administrative life. Civil marriage is governed by laws in many countries, which set out the procedures and requirements that couples who wish to marry must fulfil in the eyes of the law. For example, in Indonesia, civil marriage is regulated by Law Number 1 Year 1974 on Marriage. This law stipulates that civil marriage is a requirement that must be fulfilled in order to obtain legal recognition of marital status, the rights and obligations associated with marriage, as well as legal protection for the legal spouses. Thus, religious and civil marriages have their own importance in building a solid relationship that is recognised spiritually and legally in society.

Methods

The method used in this research is a literature study. According to (Sugiyono, 2019) literature study is a research method that uses written sources such as books, articles, journals, reports, and other documents as the main material to explore, analyse, and compile information on topics or issues relevant to the research topic. The stages in this research include: searching for sources, determining sources, analysing and drawing conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Based on the background of the problem above, in this section the author discusses the role of Christian religious education in educating traditional marriage couples.

A. Religious Education for Indigenous Marriage Couples

The church must educate church members who only conduct customary marriages. Education can be carried out by opening premarital guidance classes or premarital counselling which aims to provide an understanding of the meaning of marriage, procedures, requirements, obligations and rights in a Christian marriage bond.

Every adult church member must understand the meaning of marriage based on Christian teachings. Christian marriage is a sacramental institution that is considered holy and blessed by God in the Christian

faith. In this union, a man and a woman promise to be faithful and support each other in love throughout their lives according to the teachings of the Bible. Christian marriage is also considered a representation of the relationship between Christ and His church, which is full of love and faithfulness (Andy Langford, 2023). The purpose of Christian marriage is to create an inseparable bond between a man and a woman, based on mutual love, obedience, respect, and sacrifice, as taught in the Christian Scriptures (Joe Paprocki, 1994). In addition, church members also need to understand the meaning of civil marriage as a marriage process that is legally recognised by the state. The purpose of civil marriage is to provide legal recognition and protection to married couples, and to legally regulate their rights and obligations in society. Through civil marriage, the state gives legitimacy to the relationship between two individuals and regulates various aspects of their lives, including property rights, family rights, and legal responsibilities (Khoirul Anam, 2021).

The procedures and requirements for religious or church marriage are: (1) go through a premarital counselling stage, (2) the marriage partner is a member of the congregation, (3) be physically and spiritually healthy (6) comply with the laws of the Republic of Indonesia (Wiludjeng, 2018). Similarly, with civil marriage, the procedures and requirements are (1) identity requirements, (2) proof of previous marital status, (3) parental or guardian consent, (4) legal approval and reading (Rachmadi Usman, 2021).

The obligations and rights of a Christian married couple are to commit their lives to God, practice God's word, engage in church ministry, respect and love each other as taught in the Bible (Andy Langford, 2023). One verse that summarises this obligation is Ephesians 5:25, where the Apostle Paul writes, "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Likewise, wives have an obligation to submit to their husbands,*" as stated in Ephesians 5:22, "*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*" Meanwhile, their rights include being blessed by God, living in a legal bond before God, moral support, spiritual guidance, and means for spiritual growth through various ceremonies and religious teachings conducted in the church. In addition, they also have the right to be respected as a legitimate couple and accepted in their social environment and to receive spiritual guidance from the church (Paath, et al., 2020).

Couples who have entered into a civil marriage have rights and obligations, namely the obligation to comply with laws and regulations relating to marriage, such as the payment of joint taxes, the division of joint property, and the performance of other legal obligations. They are also responsible for maintaining good relations with their social environment, including family, friends, and the community, and for being good role models for their children and future generations. In addition, the husband is obliged to protect his wife and provide all household needs according to his ability and the wife is obliged to manage the household as well as possible as outlined in Law Number 1 Year 1974 article 30 paragraph 1 concerning marriage law. Meanwhile, their rights as legal couple before the law are to obtain a marriage certificate (civil marriage record), the right to live together in legal marriage before state law, husband and wife are obliged to love each other, respect each other, be loyal to each other and provide physical and mental assistance, and get legal recognition from the community that their marriage is valid (Paath, et al, 2020).

B. Providing Assistance for Indigenous Marriage Couples

Customary couples who are church members should receive assistance in overcoming their problems when they experience difficulties in conducting church and civil marriages. A common problem for customary couples is that their marriages are seen as invalid and not blessed by God, and are rejected by their neighbourhoods. As a result, the family or couple may experience stress, conflict and uncertainty that can damage their relationship and the overall well-being of the family (Seri Antonius, 2020). In addition, they do not know how to assert their rights when there is domestic violence, neglect, or other situations that require legal intervention. Difficulty in making important decisions, such as the division of joint property, determining child custody, or planning for the future.

Therefore, mentoring is one important approach that needs to be done by the church. The assistance provided by the church to customary marriage couples includes a series of programmes that aim to guide and prepare them holistically to enter and build a solid and sustainable marriage according to Christian values. Purba (2020) said that in providing assistance to couples in customary marriages there are two church programs that are often implemented, namely: premarital education, and premarital counselling.

These programmes are usually aimed at brides-to-be or engaged couples with the aim of providing knowledge and spiritual preparation to build strong and sustainable marriage (Purba, 2020). The material taught covers various aspects of married life, including effective communication, conflict management, responsibilities in marriage, roles and responsibilities of husband and wife, and the importance of building a spiritual foundation together. The methods used in the premarital education and premarital counselling programme include: group discussions, role plays, and practical exercises. Participants are invited to actively participate in these sessions, both individually and as a couple, to deepen their understanding of marriage and practice the skills taught.

In the mentoring activities, teachers also conduct evaluation activities. This can be done through various means, including pre- and post-programme questionnaires to gauge participants' knowledge and perceptions, as well as reflective discussions and feedback from teachers and fellow participants. Evaluation can also be done through assignments or practical exercises that are evaluated by the trainer. The teachers involved in the mentoring activities are pastors. This is because pastors have the necessary knowledge, skills and spiritual authority to guide couples in their marriage preparation. As religious leaders in their communities, pastors have the trust and continuity to provide advice, direction and moral support to couples getting married.

C. Organising Religious and Civil Marriage Ceremonies for Indigenous Marriage Couples

The church not only has a role in providing an understanding of various matters related to church marriage and civil marriage, but Christian religious education must also extend to facilitating indigenous couples in holding church and civil marriages. Things that can be done are to provide complete information about the process and requirements needed to organise church and civil marriages. Churches can provide premarital counselling sessions that address practical and spiritual aspects and guide couples in preparing themselves mentally, emotionally and spiritually before marriage (Anjaya, Fernando and Wahju, 2022). In addition, churches can also provide support in the administration and paperwork required for civil marriage, such as assisting in the process of filing official papers and coordinating with authorities to organise church and civil marriages (Hartono and Kurniawati, 2020).

Through organising these two ceremonies, the church plays a role in providing material, moral and spiritual support to the customary marriage couple. It is a moment that strengthens their relationship personally and reinforces their bond before God and society (Afdal, E Wulandari, 2019). Thus, organising religious and civil marriage ceremonies for indigenous marriage couples is clear evidence of the church's role in supporting and facilitating the formation of strong families based on religious values.

Conclusion

Christian religious education has a very important role in equipping couples who are getting married in terms of marriage law, especially in the context of customary marriage. Through church education programmes, couples are given an in-depth understanding of the theological aspects, meaning and purpose of Christian marriage and civil marriage in accordance with Christian teachings. In addition, they are also given an understanding of the consequences of a customary marriage without performing a religious and civil marriage.

Christian religious education is the foundation for understanding and performing marriage correctly in accordance with Christian teachings and the laws of the country. Structured and ongoing education programmes are needed to ensure couples have sufficient knowledge in conducting their marriages, thereby reducing the risk of legal conflicts and supporting the sustainability of strong marriages based on Christian religious principles.

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