

“Burning Candles at the Grave” Implementation of Christian Religious Education on the Tradition of Burning Candles at the Grave

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: education, tradition, burning candles at graves, ritual ceremonies</p>	<p><i>The phenomenon of respect for ancestors is as old as human civilization itself. This occurs due to the belief that deceased individuals can communicate God's will to those still living. A particular issue arises in the tradition of burning candles at graves, a practice believed to connect the living with their ancestors. The absence of this ritual is thought to bring adverse consequences for the community. Using descriptive qualitative methods and the theoretical framework of Ancestor Worship, this study examines the tradition of candle burning at graves. The objectives of this research are to explore the cultural and spiritual significance of the candle-burning tradition, identify its role in fostering ancestral respect, and assess its implications for religious practices, particularly among the Fatululi Carmel congregation in Kupang City. Additionally, the study seeks to analyze the potential for syncretism between traditional beliefs and Christian teachings. Research findings indicate that the Fatululi Carmel congregation performs this tradition on December 24th and 31st to strengthen relationships with ancestors, based on the belief in life after death. This practice reflects a perception that ancestors can contribute to a peaceful life for the community. The study highlights the Church's role in providing a Biblical perspective on such traditions through educational methods like Bible study classes, sermons, and cultural inculturation efforts. Furthermore, Christian Religious Education contributes to fostering faith, critical cultural awareness, and greater appreciation for cultural diversity while promoting tolerance and respect across traditions.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Church AD Evangelicals in Timor get great influence from culture that is owned inhabitant his congregation. Culture meant namely traditions adhered to by members congregation from ethnic group certain. In particular general influence the is reasonable because even though has live and settle in the area urban, a tradition that has inherited by ancestors become something important for done. Cannot be done denied with existence influence said, often appear issues and tensions that come into contact with Christian faith. Meanwhile, on one party church want to develop his mission in accordance with calling in a way pure, but on the other hand party, church No Can release self from values culture member the congregation that brought tradition culture into the life go to church.

As done in some places in the East Nusa Tenggara region, also carried out in Kupang City, namely tradition respect to ancestors with unique way. It is said unique because, *first*, it is done approaching day raya religious December 24th (Christmas) and approaching changeover Year (December 31). Tradition This started with prepare potpourri (mixture leaves and flowers colorful fragrant scented) and candles Then to be continued with journey going to tomb / grave Then flower potpourri sown as well as candle turned on and off with pray. *Second*: done simultaneously by all inhabitant society. Tradition This done simultaneously on Christmas Eve (by Christian community members) and before year new (by all public from various religions) with objective as form respect to ancestors before enter Christmas and New Year celebrations new. This is done as form remember / remember and believe that ancestors who have die is part from human beings who are still life and celebration of Christmas and the change of year year will feel complete and bring joy. If not done so will bring in trouble for family.

In tradition on two things were found interesting, namely the community that does tradition This originate from all group ethnicities and religions that reside in Kupang City. This is show that tradition This has become part from life the community in Kupang City. *Second*, why? tradition This done by citizens society that has living in an

identical Urban area with a society that practices religion and style modern aiming find Understanding of Kupang City Community about meaning tradition burn candles on graves, and the influencing factors his understanding as well as Why tradition this carried out by the community who have embrace modern religion?

The tradition of burning candles at graves has long been a spiritual expression in Christianity. This ritual serves not only as a way to remember the deceased but also carries profound symbolic meanings. As part of religious practices, lighting candles at graves is often seen as a reminder of God's eternal presence in the lives of His people ((Salter, 2020)). In the context of Christian religious education, this tradition is used to teach spiritual values to younger generations. According to Brown ((DeMaris et al., 2018)), the candle in Christian tradition symbolizes the light of Christ guiding humanity through darkness. Candles lit at graves also reflect the hope for eternal life with God. This tradition demonstrates how local religious practices can align with broader theological teachings. In Christian education, the candle symbol is often used to explain concepts of hope and faith to students. Research by Jones and Martin (Blyth, 2021)) indicates that local traditions like burning candles at graves can strengthen Christian religious education in specific communities. This tradition not only involves symbolic practices but also serves as a medium to connect spiritual values with daily life. By integrating local traditions, Christian religious education becomes more relevant and understandable, especially for younger generations. Burns and Taylor ((2019)) highlight that implementing religious traditions in Christian education can function as an effective teaching tool. In the context of burning candles at graves, this practice teaches respect for parents and ancestors while instilling gratitude towards God. By involving students directly in this tradition, Christian education can enhance their understanding of faith and spiritual values passed down through generations. Green ((2022)) argues that traditions like burning candles at graves can serve as a bridge between religious teachings and the needs of modern society. In Christian religious education, this tradition provides a space for students to understand how their faith can be applied in everyday life. By utilizing local traditions, churches can expand their impact in building inclusive communities centered on spiritual values. Overall, the tradition of burning candles at graves is not only a part of religious expression but also an effective educational tool in Christianity. By incorporating symbols and local practices, Christian religious education can become more relevant and meaningful to society. As a part of teaching spiritual values, this tradition shows how faith can be manifested through tangible actions, strengthening the connection between religious teachings and daily life ((Rempel, 2020) The novelty of this research lies in its exploration of how the tradition of burning candles at graves, a practice deeply rooted in local cultural heritage, intersects with and influences contemporary Christian religious education in an urban setting. Unlike previous studies that predominantly focus on the symbolic or theological aspects of religious traditions, this research examines the practice as a dynamic cultural phenomenon in Kupang City, where modernity and tradition coexist. By analyzing how this ritual bridges diverse ethnic and religious communities, it sheds light on its potential to foster inclusivity and cultural integration. Additionally, the study introduces a unique perspective on how localized traditions can enhance the relevance of Christian teachings in modern society, particularly among younger generations, by contextualizing spiritual values within everyday practices. This approach offers a fresh understanding of the interplay between cultural identity, religious faith, and education in a rapidly changing urban environment.

The primary objective of this research is to explore and understand the cultural and spiritual significance of the tradition of burning candles at graves among the people of Kupang City. Specifically, it seeks to analyze the factors influencing the community's adherence to this tradition and its meaning within the context of modern religious practices and urban living. Furthermore, the study aims to examine how this practice bridges cultural heritage and Christian teachings, fostering inclusivity and spiritual growth. By investigating the interplay between traditional rituals and modern Christian religious education, the research aims to uncover how such practices can be integrated into educational frameworks to strengthen spiritual values, community identity, and intergenerational understanding.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between cultural traditions and modern religious practices, particularly within Christian religious education. It offers practical insights for churches and educators in utilizing local traditions to make religious teachings more relevant and engaging. Additionally, the findings can serve as a foundation for fostering cultural inclusivity and mutual respect among diverse communities in urban areas. By highlighting the educational potential of traditional rituals, the study provides a model for integrating cultural heritage into religious practices to strengthen spiritual and communal bonds. This research also encourages the preservation of meaningful traditions while adapting them to the needs of a modern, diverse society, ensuring their continued relevance and impact for future generations.

METHOD

Methods used in study This is method descriptive-qualitative that is the method used for see *settings* certain in real life with Meaning For investigate and understand phenomenon certain (Rajaratnam, 2018)). The aim is for make systematic, factual and accurate description about the phenomenon being studied. With method This There is clear and detailed picture for analyze what to see or heard as results research. Writing method descriptive is the usual method used for researching a group human, a objects, conditions and systems thinking man or a events of a nature descriptive. The research nature depiction form a symptom or give a description descriptive to the point a complex social reality until obtained understanding on reality the. With technique data

collection through observation, interviews and also research supporting libraries expected research process can in progress Good.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Candle Burning Ritual as an Act of Respect to Ancestors.

If you pay attention phenomenon respect towards the ancestors in various areas in Indonesia, seen that practices respect the always leave a model of faith that is solid and inherited from One generation to generation next as a preserved traditions. Jebadu ((2009) explains two truths that are base implementation practice respect to ancestors namely, *First*, the existence of belief life after death of the body and *secondly*, the existence of trust about the existence of God from everything that lives, is good life temporary man and also life eternal after death. This shows practice religion centered on respect, love and memory will the ancestors indeed Already aged as old as human and will Keep going in progress even after bodily death.

Spencer in his work entitled *Principles of Sociology* (1896) introducing important sociological factors in the theory about religion, namely ancestors. According to him practice respect to ancestors understood in a number of matter namely, *First*, after notice overall Population man consists of from various type tribes, communities and nations, found that almost all man own strong faith will resurrection from the other " I " (*the Other 'I'*) from a man after his death. *Second*, the other ' I ' believed life Keep going in term time certain from someone who has dead, *Thir*, a group of people in public certain carry out rites of the time certain after burial. *Four*, in modern civilization that has own cult to the ancestors in the form that has been more forward. *Five*, there is group of people who practice cult respect to ancestors in categories, special and not special. *Six*, there are group of people who respect ancestors as mediator they. Various the rites that Spencer mentioned were effort man for Keep going build connection ancestors and higher beings high. Rite burn Candles on the grave is one of the form expression of respect to ancestors who have die However understood that Still still connected with human and in connection each other notice.

In the description Next Spencer looked at religions in their beginnings. originate from cult respect to the ancestors who were part from culture public certain. Consequently, no There is practice respect to ancestors if people don't believe existence soul man who continues life after death of the body. Based on understanding This research aims at Spencer for prove simplification of religion, namely that every major modern religion is results from a the evolution of traditional religion that gives room longing man will immortality (eternity, immortality, deathlessness) from life. In other words, religion is developing from forms simple going to more form complex and heterogeneous. Respect to ancestors is one of the form at first from modern religion. If so so people should have leave traditional religious practices moment they embracing modern religion, will but fact show that even though modern religions are developing rapid. However No can replace traditional religious practices, including practice burn candles on the grave as one of the form traditional religious practices.

Burning Candles at the Grave: Culture or gospel more first?

In general historical, christianity born on the island of Timor from the presence of two countries that do activity the economy on the island of Timor, namely Portuguese and Dutch. The presence second strength colonial This No only mastery oriented source Power nature, such as wood sandalwood, but also has mission religious namely Gospel. Portuguese introduced the Catholic religion, while the Dutch introduced the Protestant Christian religion. Belo ((2021)) wrote that Colonialism Portuguese in East Timor did not only based on control economy, but also based on religious through evangelism Integrated Catholicism with power politics ". This is show Portuguese own Meaning double When present on the island of Timor in the 16th century. Not only introducing Christianity and Catholicism However the presence of the two European nations also brought profound impact to customs and culture society, especially public The eastern part of Timor Island by the Portuguese and the western part by the Dutch. Ricklefs (2008)) wrote that the spread of Protestant Christianity by the Dutch did not just involving evangelism, but also introduction system values and settings social revolution order custom local. Consequently, many culture / tradition public local destroyed Because viewedNo in accordance with teachings gospel.

Apart from these two aspects life public on namely aspect economics and religion that impact culture / tradition public Locally, the spread of Catholicism and Protestant Christianity in Timor was carried out through two binding systems public namely education and evangelism. Rohmana ((2020)) wrote that presence nation colonial use evangelism as at ror control behavior social and organizing repeat the customary system public local Where second nation This master. As a result everything that smells custom seen as form worship to other gods like sacrifice animals that are prohibited by the Netherlands because considered No in accordance with Protestant Christian values and prohibited by colonial authorities. Not only That, The presence of the Dutch also caused change significant in system Timorese customs and culture with introduce vassal king system. System This make the customary Kings No Again own autonomy full. The Netherlands also moved in the field education namely formal education based Bible as means evangelism and control culture for change behavior public local to suit with European values. With thus The presence of the Dutch and Portuguese in Timor left influence big to customs, culture and religion.

Change meant Keep going ongoing and influencing *The worldview* that is lived in life religious in a way special go to church. However a long the walk time and development knowledge knowledge that impacts the way view society, religion (church) began changed in see culture / customs / traditions. More over Again culture has veined root in life man Even when humans has embrace modern religion and live practice even in modern life. Because of that become clear that culture / traditions adopted by society when seen in a way historical so culture is more formerly present and then religion. This is proven from practice burn candles on the grave that are still Keep going done public until now.

Role Church and Christian Religious Education in the Candle- Burning Ritual at the Grave

a. Attitude Church to Culture.

Based on the unraveling of reality above, church No can no need have clear attitude to culture. Rheenen ((Phillipou et al., 2020)) identified three attitude church to culture namely, *First*, Syncretism. Syncretism happen while church assimilate element culture local without reflection critical which ultimately compromise gospel. Elements conflicting cultures like belief in spirits ancestors can enter to in church. This is become threat to purity Christian teachings. Attitude church. *Second* namely Ethnocentrism namely church to force " foreign " culture to in culture local, as if culture foreign the is prerequisite become a Christian. Rheenen to criticize approach this, especially in context mission colonial because of the missionaries fail differentiate culture origin them and culture public natives. As a result, the missionaries tend force culture they become culture local. Attitude church next is Transformation Contextual attitude is the most ideal. In the approach this, church present in the middle culture local, appreciate good values and change conflicting values with Gospel. Transformation This is not coercion, but rather change from in through news God's Word and Action love. This is allow church be the salt and light of the world, right? as destroyer culture. Values conflicting cultures with The Gospel changed, not destroyed. That's it should task church face to face with culture. On one side, church can behave critical to culture but on the other hand the church can also accommodate elements appropriate culture with values Christian with thus church No lost his identity as agent transformation culture. Related with attitude churchmeant, attitude church to tradition burn candles on the grave as one of the culture that still done public until now namely give meaning new from perse ptive Christian teachings so that threat the occurrence syncretism can avoided. Efforts to That can done through sermon, curriculum catechism, deepening the Bible and through dialogue with public for dig things positive culture that can explored For life together.

b. The Role of Christian Religious Education (PAK) in tradition burn candles on the grave

Christian religious education has role strategic in help direct individual to wisdom for understand, criticize, and respond practices the culture that exists around it so that created transformation individual. Against role This Christian religious education (Smith, 2016)) explains that Christian religious education does not only nature informative, but also transformative, so that it can direct individual to wisdom and justice based on faith. Therefore that's important for to study to what extent is the role of PAK in influence, direct, or even correcting practice conflicting cultures with Christian teachings.

Wright ((2020)) defines PAK as a coaching process purposeful faith for to form similar human with Christ through teaching values biblical. This process involving formal education at school, coaching church, and informal education in the family. PAK also touches on with various things experienced by individuals / society, including culture. Bevans ((1994) sees interaction between Christianity and culture nature dynamic. Because of that through inculturation, is possible Christian values applied in practice culture without remove meaning theologically. On the contrary, the conflicting culture with Christian teachings, such as worship idol, need criticized through lens gospel.

A number of role practical PAK towards practice culture including:

1. Push Strengthening the Values of Faith and Integrity

PAK aims to to form based on character values Bible. Smith ((Smith, 2016) states that strong faith allow individual respond to practice culture with wisdom, without lost identity as follower Christ Because with strong faith, individual capable evaluate practice appropriate culture or contradictory with Christian teachings. Even No leave his faith and mixed it up trust to God and to other Gods.

2. Behave Critical to Practice Culture.

PAK teaches individual behave critical to practice conflicting cultures with Christian teachings. Wright ((Wright, 2020) explains, individuals need taught principle *discernment* or ability observe in order to be able to differentiate practice culture that must be accepted, modified, or rejected. This is will help individual behave wise and critical to practice culture.

3. Encouraging the Inculturation Process Culture.

The process of inculturation allow symbols culture changed become Christian symbol. Attitude adaptive This help individual still connected with practice its culture However get meaning new with reinterpret symbols culture to be in line with gospel without sacrifice meaning the result. For example, water in traditional rituals can associated with baptism, while symbol fire can symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit. When associated with tradition burn candles on the grave so reinterpretation that can done is burning candle associated as a symbol of light Christ. Meaning new This without remove meaning the original However more can accepted as A respect than respect to ancestors

4. Increase Tolerance and Appreciation to Diversity Culture

Attitude furthermore is PAK teaches individual value plurality culture Principle This allow individual value differences, avoiding attitude ethnocentrism and prioritizing peace in the middle public multicultural.

CONCLUSION

The tradition of burning candles at graves is A rite respect to ancestors as form belief will existence life after death of the body and also as form connected man with ancestors who have died. Rites This is riches a culture that continues implemented public despite has embrace modern religion because That role Church and Christian Religious Education are very important in to form understanding and attitude to practice culture. PAK builds character based on Christian faith, guiding individual in respond to practice culture, as well as encourage the process of inculturation . Approach This create society that has strong, tolerant, and critical Christian personality to the surrounding culture.

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