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INTERFAITH MARRIAGE IN INDONESIA: LOOKING FOR A LOOPHOLE

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ABSTRACT

This research studies the life experience of interfaith marriage between Christian and Muslem. It aims to answer the following questions: (1) Do religious differences in interfaith marriage partners affect the success of building a family? (2) What are the factors that determine the success of building a family in interfaith couples? This research is qualitative study. The data were collected through the depth interview which were directly done face to face, and indirect interview through WhatsApp and Google Form. Forum Group Discussion was done also with some students who live in the interfaith marriage family. The respondents are cathegorized into the followings: (1) those living in the interfaith marriage between Christian and Muslem, (2) those who converted to other religions following that of the partners, (3) those who converted to the religion of the partners but then reconverted to their previous religions, (4) the parents of the children who do interfaith marriage, and (5) the children who live in the family with interfaith marriage. The results indicate that the difference of religion in the family is not the significant factor which determines the harmonious life in the family. Otherwise, tolerance, mutual concern, and the responsible attitude of each family member in their respective duties and roles are the most important factors. Therefore, the civil and religious laws which prohibit the interfaith marriage are actually not relevant. The civil law does not have authority to interfere the private sectors of family life. Then, religious law which prohibits the interfaith marriage must be revied and understood in its context to strive for the salvation of the religious people.

KEYWORDS:
Interfaith Marriage,
Christian,
Muslem,
Life Experience

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ABSTRAKSI

Penelitian ini mempelajari pengalaman hidup dari pasangan perkawinan beda agama antara orang Kristen dan Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan: (1) Apakah perbedaan agama dalam pasangan pernikahan beda agama memengaruhi keberhasilan dalam membangun keluarga? (2) Apakah faktor-faktor yang menentukan keberhasilan membangun keluarga untuk pasangan beda agama? Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif. Data diambil melalui wawancara mendalam yang dilakukan secara langsung dan secara tidak langsung lewat WhatsApp dan Google Form. Forum Group Discussion dilakukan pula dengan beberaoa mahasiswa yang hidup bersama keluarga pernikahan beda agama. Para responden dikelompokkan dalam lima kategori, yaitu: (1) mereka yang hidup dalam perkawinan beda agama antara Islam dan Kristen, (2) mereka yang berpindah agama mengikuti pasangan mereka, (3) mereka yang berpindah agama tetapi kemudian kembali ke agama sebelumnya, (4) orang tua dari psangan pernikahan beda agama, (5) anak-anak dari pasangan yang menikah beda agama. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa perbedaan agama dalam keluarga bukanlah faktor yang penting dalam menentukan kehidupan keluarga yang harmonis. Sebaliknya, toleransi, saling memperhatikan, sikap tanggung jawab dari masing-masing anggota keluarga pada tugas dan peran masing-masing merupakan faktor-faktor yang sangat penting. Maka, hukum sipil dan hukum agama yang melarang pernikahan beda agama tidaklah relevan. Hukum sipil tidak mempunyai wewenang mencampuri urusan-urusan privat kehidupan keluarga. Maka, hukum agama yang melarang pernikahan beda agama harus ditinjau kembali dan dipahami dalam konsteksnya semata-mata untuk memperjuangkan keselamatan umat beragama.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Interfaith marriage has always been a crucial issue in Indonesia because of the provisions in the Marriage Law 1974, chapter 2 verse 1 that marriage is valid if it is carried out according to the respective religious laws and belief. The regulation was confirmed by the fatwa of the Indonesian Council of Ulema (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) in 1980, and then renewed in 2005, that interfaith marriage is forbidden (haram) and invalid. It really becomes an obstacle for couples of different religions who are going to marry. Therefore, a grueling struggle must be waged so that interfaith couples can obtain civil registration. Judiasih et al. found four practices of legalizing interfaith marriages: (1) submitting court decisions, (2) one of

the parties changed religions and then married according to the partner's religion, after the marriage each returned to their previous religions, (3) married twice, the first was akad nikah at the The Office for Religious Affairs (KUA) after that the blessing at the church, (4) married abroad.[1]

Various dicussions about interfaith marriagre can be found in publications. Radio Katolikana conducted series of talk show regarding the topics. Mostly, they discuss it from legal prespective.[2] R. Cecep Lukman Yasin discussed the 1980 Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council which stated that interfaith marriages were unlawful.[3] Muchammad Ichsan discussed the legality of interfaith marriage from Islamic law and civil law.[4] Erni Hastuti discussed the differences between law and practice regarding interfaith marriages. Many practices describe the struggles of interfaith married couples to seek legalization of their marriages at the District Court and the Civil Registry Office.[5] Two other articles discussed interfaith marriiage from different angles. *First*, Sewenet discussed it from the perspectives of sosiology and religion.[6] He mentioned that the facts of interfaith marriages happening in different countries describe the close relation between communities in the society. Interfaith marriages will occur more in the societies in which close relation among the communities occurred. Other factors such as education, religiosity of the parents, the homogenity of the societies determine the acceptance of interfaith marriage in the society. *Second*, Jana Van Niekerk & Maykel Verkuyten described the position of the people in the majority Muslem countries upon the interfaith marriage. They stated that belief in religion determines the position of the people upon interfaith marriage.[7]

Discussion of interfaith marriage only from a legal standpoint, especially from the aspects of "permissible and not permissible," is certainly not sufficient. Marriage is a private sphere that encapsulates the entire personal life of a person and his partner. The marriage law is intended to regulate marriage, but is not to limit it. In fact, interfaith marriages continue to occur. Noryamin Aini's research provides an interesting picture of the demographic mapping of interfaith couples

1 Sonny Dewi Judiasih, Nazmina Asrimayashab & Luh Putu Sudinic, "Prohibition of Intera Religion Marriage in Indonesia," *Jurnal Dinamika Hukum* 19, No. 1 (2019): 186-203; doi: 10.20884/1.jdh.2019.19.1.2462; Cf. Fransiska Widyawati, When Love and Faith Collide. Women's Conversion to Husband's Religion in Flores. *Journal of Indonesian Islam*. 14 No. 02, (2020):335-358 DOI: 10.15642/JIIS.2020.14.2.335-358.

2 Retrieved 2022-05-16 from https://www.katolikana.com/tag/nikah-beda-agama/

3 R. Cecep Lukman Yasin, "The Fatwa of the Council of Indonesian Ulama on Inter-Religious Marriage," *De Jure, Jurnal Syariah dan Hukum* 1, No. 2 (2009):82-93.

4 Muchammad Ichsan, "The Legality of Interreligious Marriage in the Perspective of Islamic Law and Indonesian Positive Law," *Profetika, Jurnal Studi Islam* 17, No. 2 (2016): 82-92, doi: https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v17i02.5300.

5 Erny Hastuti, "Polemics on Interfaith Marriage in Indonesia Between Rules and Practices," *Al-Jāmi'ah* 56, No. 2, (2018): 367-394, doi: 10.14421/ajis.2018.562.367-394

6 Alex Minichele Sewenet, Fasil Merawi Tessagaye & Getnet Tadele, "Interreligious Marriage: Social and Religious Perspectives," *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 3, No. 6 (2017):355-362.

7 Van Niekerk, Jana & Verkuyten, Maykel, "Interfaith Marriage Attitudes in Muslim Majority Countries: A Multilevel Approach," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 28, No. 4 (2018): 257-270, https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2018.1517015.

in Indonesia.[8] Achmad Nurcholis, director of the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP) program, who is also an interfaith marriage counselor, stated that from 2005 to March 7 2022 there were 1425 interfaith marriage couples.[9] Even, a monumental interfaith marriage just occurred in 18 March 2022 between Ayu Kartika Dewi, presidential special staff, who is Muslem, and Gerald Bastian Budiman who is Catholic. The marriage contract was held at the Borobudur Hotel. After that, Cardinal Ignasius Suharyo, the highest leader of the Catholic Church in Indonesia, performed their marriage blessing at the Jakarta Cathedral Church. News, photos, videos of Ayu's wedding and wedding blessing wearing a headscarf and Gerald wearing a suit circulated in the mass media and became widely discussed.[10] It seems that interfaith marriage in Indonesia can not be strictly limited.

On the other hand, there is an effort to maintain the existing marriage law. An attempt to review the 1974 Marriage Law article 2 paragraph 1 which was carried out in 2022 by Ramos Petege, a Catholic who is about to marry an Islamic girl was rejected by the Constitutional Court.[11] Even, Circular Letter of the Supreme Court Number 2 of 2023 about Guidelines for Judges in Trying the Application Case Regional and Inter-Religious Marriages Recording Trust asserted that the Court did not grant the application for registration of the marriage among people of different religions and beliefs.[12] That means all legal loopholes have been closed for interfaith marriages.

This research examines the experiences of interfaith married couples, their parents, and their children. The purpose of this research is to know the experiences and feelings of people who experience interfaith marriages and their parents. Two questions are reised for guiding this research. First, do religious differences in interfaith marriage partners affect the success of building a family? Second, what are the factors that determine the success of building a family in interfaith couples?

This research concludes that interfaith marriage cannot be separated from religious life which is one's personal experience with God. Personal experience with God and determining a mate to live together in marriage cannot be interfered with by other people, including the most influential people in one's personal life, namely parents. Indeed, parents are responsible for

8 Noryamin Aini, "Interreligious Marriage in Indonesia," *Journal of Religion and Demography* 6 (2019): 189-214; Cf. https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=mengulik+hasil+penelitian+pernikahan+beda+agama

9 Achmad Nurcholis explains the issues of interfaith marriage in some fora. Retrieved 2022-05-13 from https://www.jpnn.com/news/soal-pernikahan-beda-agama-nurcholish-ungkap-3-pandangan-dalam-islam-simak-ya?page=2; Cf. https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=mengulik+hasil+penelitian+pernikahan+beda+agama

10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfac_J_ccq4

11 https://www.mkri.id/index.php?page=web.Berita&id=18870&menu=2

12 Circular Letter of the Supreme Court. Retrieved 2023-08-16, from https://jdih.mahkamahagung.go.id/legal-product/sema-nomor-2-tahun-2023/detail.

advising children and educating their children. However, ultimately the decision regarding marriage is entirely in the hands of the individual himself or herself. Likewise, religious institutions play a role in providing teachings, directions, laws, and guidance. The state is also responsible for regulating the marriages of its citizens. However, the final decision regarding marriage is in the hands of each person who goes through it.

2. METHOD

This research is qualitative in nature, meaning that the results of this study are not determined by the amount or quantity of data analyzed, but by their quality. That is, in qualitative research what is examined is the quality of the ideas and responses of the respondents regarding the problems posed to them. Qualitative research examines the ideas of the respondents regardless of the number of respondents who express these ideas. In qualitative research, the subjectivity of the researcher is very involved in interpreting and understanding the quality of the respondent's ideas. The researcher draws his conclusions based on the ideas and feelings of the informants who become his research data. So qualitative research is inductive.[13] In that context, this study analyzes data using a reflective method because researchers are involved in interpreting data according to their own experiences as well.[14] In this study, as a Catholic, the researchers understand the experiences and feelings of the informants involved in interfaith marriages from a Catholic perspective.

For collecting data, the researchers did in-depth interviews and written interviews through Whattsapp and Google Form to 60 respondents coming from different areas of Indonesia, such as Bali, Bitung, Langkat, Yogyakarta, Sleman, Sidoarjo, Nganjuk, Kediri, Lampung, Bogor, Sanggau, Salatiga, Ciamis, Jambi, Lubuk Linggau, Palembang, Pekan Baru, Pemalang, Sragen, Tamiang Layang Barito Timur, Klaten, and Magelang. With regards to the gender of the respondents, there are 34 males (57%) and 26 females (43%). Regarding the religion or belief, there are 36 Catholics (60%), 13 Protestants (22%), and 11 Muslems (18%).

We classified the respondents into five categories. The first category are respondents who still live together with their partners in different religions (14 people). The second are respondents converting to the religions of the partner (22 people). The third are respondents converting to the religions of their partners and then reconverting to their previous religions (2 people). The fourth are the

[13] Jane Sutton and Zubin Austin, "Qualitative Research: Data Collection, Analysis, and Management", *The Canadian Journal of Hospital and Pharmacy* 68, No. 3 (2015): 226–231. Retrieved 2021-11-15, from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4485510/.

[14] Motari, "Reflectivity in Research Practice: An Overview of Different Perspectives," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* first published online December, 8, 2015:1-9,

children of the interfaith couples (20 people). The fifth are the parents of the interfaith marriage couples (2 people).

The data about the couples show that before marriage, almost all of respondnets (94%) know that the religions of their partners are different from their own. They (94%) also know that their religions and that of the partners prohibit interfaith marriage. A half of the couples had lived in marriage for more than 25 years (50%); 31% are the couples living in marriage for 16 up to 25 years, and only 19% are the couples living in marriage less than 15 years. The similar situation is also shown by the data of the respondents coming from the children of the interfaith married couples. There are 11 % of the parents of the respondents living in marriage for more than 25 years, 83% for 16 up to 25 years, and 6 % for less than 15 years.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

3.1.1. The Experiences of the Couples Living in the Interfaith Marriage

One respondent is a father who has been in a family for almost 40 years. When he wanted to marry a Muslim girl, he felt pressured because his parents were Catholic, even they were a Catholic religious figure in his place. However, he managed to convince his parents that his future wife was willing to become Catholic. His future wife came from a Javanese Muslim (Jv. *kejawen*) family who was less strict about practicing Islam. After his wife was baptized Catholic, the family he built went well, and his wife was able to live life as a Catholic. His wife said that it was only when her husband was seriously ill that she could truly feel "who Christ is" for herself.

Two sons of the respondent above also have prospective wives who are Muslems, even coming from a very devout Muslem family. They never asked their future wives to become Catholics. However, during their courtship, their future wives agreed to be baptized as Catholics before getting married. The reason stated by them is almost the same, namely that they feel fit to be the wives and have loved each other. One of them stated that her future husband was a gift from God. However, a very steep road must be passed before the time of marriage. The parents of the two girls balked at the marriage. It was said that there had been an argument between the parents of prospective bride and groom during a visit to get to know each other and propose. Then, the decision was left to the two girls. In fact, they decided to be Catholic following their future husbands. The two girls were baptized Catholic before getting married. The two girls' fathers felt and expressed the similar thing that they "lost their children." However, after the two couples lived a Catholic married life and lived as a Catholic family, the two fathers

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915618045.

were able to accept it. They even became close with the male family (Jv. *besan*). It should be noted here that these two families of these respondents are still young. One family has only been married for six years, while the younger one's family has only been married for two years. The experience of their married life will still be longer.

Other experience came from a respondent who is a father having married for 46 years. When he wanted to marry a Muslem girl, he knew that his future wife was a Muslem who came from a very devout Muslem family, even the daughter of a hajji. However, at that time his future wife said that she was willing to become a Catholic. So he continued his relationship with the girl to the level of marriage. The marriage was celebrated and legalized in a Catholic tradition with a dispensation, so that the Catholic party lived as a Catholic with all the rights and obligations, while the wife remained Muslem. At the beginning of their marriage, his wife was willing to participate in Catholic services at church, although according to the respondent, his wife did not always make the sign of the cross and participate in Catholic prayers. He "forced" his wife to become Catholic, even by alienating her from the husband's family. But the wife still did not want to become Catholic. The longer the family lived, the more it became clear that this wife was unwilling to become Catholic, even though all her children were baptized Catholic according to the promise made before the marriage. "In fact, I was angry because my wife betrayed her promise to be willing to be baptized Catholic," said the respondent . However, he could not force his will. He only guessed that one of the reasons his wife had canceled her participation in notarial education dozens of years ago was because she objected to taking the Catholic oath of office. Even though at that time the expensive notarial course fees had already been paid for. Apart from that, if this wife became a notary, she would definitely get a lot of customers from her husband's many customers because her husband had a fairly high position in the bank and had many customers. However, his wife still canceled her notarial education because she objected to taking the Catholic oath.

The respondent and his wife are people who are in a good position in their careers. Financially, they are rich people. It indicates that there was absolutely no motivation related to wealth when they decided to marry of different religions. So strong was his wife's desire to be able to pray as befits a Muslim woman. His father-in-law advised this respondent, before he died, that his wife should be allowed to pray as Muslem again. The respondent finally allowed his wife to pray as Muslem when his wife was bitten by a snake and he was very worried about his wife's health if she died. After his wife recovered, he allowed her to pray as Muslem in a special room, and he

asked that he himself be allowed to actively participate in Church activities. Currently, he is very active in Church activities, while his wife is also active in activities as a Muslem woman.

The next experience coming from the respondent who was married in a Catholic manner, after the prospective wife who was a Muslim was baptized in a Catholic way following his religion. During courtship, he said frankly that he wanted to build a family of one faith. If this girl was not willing to become a Catholic, this relationship should be stopped. His respondent proudly said that if this girl was not willing to become a Catholic there would still be other girls who were willing to be his wife. However, this girl still wanted to continue the relationship and was willing to be baptized Catholic. This girl was baptized Catholic in 1980, then married as Catholic in 1981.

When the respondent was assigned to Singaraja, Bali, his wife and children also lived in Singaraja. Besides working in the health sector, the wife actively participated in the Church accompanying her first child. After five years in Singaraja, the respondent was assigned to Maluku. His wife and children still lived in Singaraja. Afterward, he was moved to Kendari. His wife and children lived in Kendari. The wife was still active in the Catholic Church, and accompanied her children in receiving first communion. After two years in Kendari, he was moved to Pekan Baru. His wife and children also followed him staying in Pekan Baru. His wife no longer worked. By his office, this family was rented in a house owned by a Muslem. This family was also provided a family driver, a Muslem. It seemed that when the respondent was very busy at work and came home late at night, his wife interacted a lot with Muslem families. Perhaps, the Muslem driver and the Muslem community influenced her and his children to reconvert in Islam.

In 1998, his wife began to be reluctant to go to church. After living as a Catholic family for 17 years, this wife reconverted to be Muslem. She was active again in Muslem activities. In the interview, this respondent said that the influence of the Muslem surrounding was very strong, while he had very little time to spend with his family. Then this family moved to Yogyakarta. The wife was active as a Muslimah. In fact, she went on Hajj in 2002. When she left for Hajj, this respondent and her children accompanied her to the Hajj Pilgrimage shelter. But when she returned from Hajj, this wife no longer wanted her husband to hug her. She said that her husband was no longer her mukhrim. Currently, this family lived in one house but in separate rooms. This respondent also agreed to be interviewed by the researcher not at his home, because his wife was at home. He didn't feel free to tell his experience when his wife heard it. He said that at the moment he took care not to get into

conflict. Meanwhile his wife was very active in various Islamic activities.

Other experience coming from a respondent, a 67-year-old man. He married a Muslem girl after graduating from high school 45 years ago because his girlfriend became pregnant before marriage. At that time, he was only 20 years old while his wife was 17 years old and only in the second grade of high school. His girl friend, who later became his wife, was a Muslem woman, the daughter of a lecturer at a well-known university. According to the respondent's story, when he was still dating, his girlfriend's parents loved him. He was so close to her girlfriend's family that she became pregnant before the wedding. To avoid embarrassment from society, the Islamic marriage ceremony was held in Banyuwangi, at his brother's house. After the wedding, this young family lived in Banyuwangi for a month, after which they returned to their hometown in Yogyakarta.

At the beginning of family life, the respondent was still studying, so the family's living needs were met by working "odd jobs" and the financial support of his parents. After graduating from college, he got a good job. As a result, he was busy working and neglected his family. The next consequence was that his wife, who was still a Muslem, had an affair with another man. This affair caused his relationship to his wife to break down. He and his wife no longer slept in the same room, even though they lived in the same house.

This respondent told how much he missed the Sacrament of the Eucharist. He still attended Holy Mass at a Catholic church, although he did not receive communion. In 2019 he was allowed to receive communion by the parish priest after receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Unfortunately, when he was about to receive his first communion, there was a Covid-19 outbreak, so he only received communion after the Eucharist celebration was held offline in mid-2020. Regarding living together with a partner of another religion, he said that "we must be tolerant, look after each other and respect each other. "His wife carries out her obligations as a Muslem woman, while he himself prays and worships as a Catholic.

The next respondent is a Catholic man who really understands and appreciates Catholicism because of the Catholic theological education he had studied. He married in Islam at the Religious Affairs Office (KUA) with a Muslem girl from an active Muslem family. After marriage, he remained Catholic and his wife Muslem. He considered religion as a spirituality that colors all life, not just regulating human actions. Any religion did not limit its adherents from forming alliances, including marriage. So, his marriage to a Muslem woman did not provide any restrictions for mutually developing husband and wife as

human beings who have equality. His marriage at KUA was also not a barrier for him to remain a Catholic and follow Catholic rituals and join as a member of the Church. He understands Church law as a means to maintain and ensure his people remain safe.

With such an understanding and appreciation of religion, he gave his wife the freedom to live and develop her personality as a Muslem woman. In terms of educating children, he did not follow the laws of the Catholic Church which recommends that children be educated in a Catholic way. Children's education is the responsibility of parents. So, he and his wife consulted to determine the best education for their children. He did not mind if his children are educated in Islam if that is what is best for the child's personal development.

The next experience coming from a couple who formerly was Catholic and Muslem. They got married in an Islamic way at KUA in 1984. They felt that they were a suitable couple. The man did not mind having an Islamic marriage. However, he still felt as a Catholic so he longed for to be able to attend Holy Mass. He also felt ashamed and "outcast" from the Catholic community. So, after about 10 years of marriage, he secretly attended Holy Mass. At Christmas and Easter, he involved himself in church duties and services. He did not force his wife to become Catholic. But in his heart, he always prayed that his wife could become Catholic.

The wife had the same experience. She gave her husband the freedom to remain Catholic, while she herself remained Muslem. However, after almost 20 years of marriage, he relented and converted to Catholicism. She was baptized in 2006. She and her husband gave their children the freedom to choose their own religion. So, the first child became Catholic, while the second child became Muslem. They feel like they are a happy family with their own chosen religion.

The next experience coming from a Catholic girl who converted to Islam following her future Muslim husband. She said that the reason why she converted to Islam was a feeling of love and comfort. She admitted that she was afraid of her parents when she announced her intention to marry a Muslim man. His father was a Catholic figure and he had been a member of local parliament from the Catholic Party. She also felt that his father and family were very disappointed when she was about to marry in Islam and became a Muslem woman. However, she admited that her family had a big heart and sincerely surrendered the decision to convert to Islam. Her family also did not force her to return to Catholicism. Based on her experience of how confused and difficult it was to tell her father and family to change religion and marry a Muslem man, she would give her children

the freedom to choose their own partners. She did not mind if her children married Catholics.

3.1.2. The Experience of Parents and Children of the Interfaith Marriage

3.1.2.1. The Experience of the Parents of the Interfaith Marriage Couples

The two mothers whose children married Muslim partners and converted to Islam shared their experiences finding their children converted to Muslem because of marrying their Muslem partners. The first mother said that she felt sad, disappointed, and frustrated (J: nggresula), "why did God give trials and gifts in situations like this when she had tried to be diligent and active as a Catholic?" When her son had relationship to a Muslem girl, she had reminded him that it was better to have a partner who shares the same faith. However, her son continued to date a Muslem girl until one day he said his intention to marry the Muslem girl. She and her husband could only finally let their children marry in Islam. This mother told her son that the relationship with God is his own responsibility. So, during the Islamic marriage contract at the KUA, she and her husband did not accompany him. They just attended the wedding reception.

This mother felt sad and offended when her Muslim neighbors congratulated her for the Islamic wedding of her son. According to this mother, such expressions were like mocking. However, her nephew, who is Muslem, supported her and accompanied her son during the marriage contract. She also felt comforted when her Catholic neighbors continued to empathize with her and did not isolate her. Even the parish priest still allowed her to serve the people as prodiakones.

After marriage, this new family lived as a Muslem family in another city. This mother felt somewhat relieved because she did not witness before her eyes that her son had become Muslem. However, after only a few months of living in another city, his wife and children did not feel at home. Then they would go back to live with her again. This mother was a bit sad. But she remembered again that years ago she prayed to God to ask for that son. So, this mother sincerely accepted her son and his wife back to live at home with her. She said that she believed to the Lord Jesus who would always be in her son's heart even though he had converted to Islam. This mother continued to pray for her son, his wife and grandchildren. Apart from that, she always reminded her son to be obedient in carrying out his religious obligations as a Muslem.

The second mother experienced that her sister and her two children were married in Islam. When her younger sister got married in an Islamic way at KUA, she was present to accompany her father who

was forced to let his son change religion and marry in an Islamic way. When her own daughter converted to Islam long before her marriage, she and her husband scolded their daughter. She felt like a failure, sad, irritated and angry. Her daughter has been discussed at length. However, her daughter decided to convert to Islam and marry in Islamic tradition. She accepted that her daughter would change religion and marry in Islam. She could only surrender everything to God.

The second child, a boy, also married in an Islamic way at KUA to a Muslem woman. The difference was, when this boy was dating his future wife, she promised to convert to Catholicism. For this reason, this boy was willing to marry in Islam. It turned out that after several years of family life, his wife did not want to convert to Catholicism. This man decided to divorce. Responding to her child's situation like this, the respondent's mother raised her hand and and handed over all responsibility to her child. She didn't want to deal with her son's divorce. She believed that her son was mature enough to be responsible for what he did.

3.1.2.2. The Experience of the Children of the Interfaith Married Couples

As mentioned above, there are 20 respondents coming from the children of the interfaith married couples. There are 14 male respondents (72%) and 6 female respondents (28%). There are 3 Muslems (15%), 6 Prostestants (30%), and 11 Catholics (55%). The followings are their experiences and ideas regarding living in interfaith marriage families.

First, regarding the harmony of their families. There are 13 respondents (66%) who mentioned that their families are harmonious, 5 respondents (28%) mentioned that their families are normal, and 2 respondents (6%) mentioned that their families are very harmonious. It seems that the difference of religions in a family did not determine the harmony of a family. All respondents stated that religion never became a cause of conflict between their parents.

Second, about the difficulties living in the interfaith marriage. Almost all respondents (94%) stated there was not difficulty at all. As mentioned in the previous paragraph that difference in religion never became a trigger for conflict. A very small number of respondents (6%) stated that there is simple problem when there was a child. They mentioned that when they were small, their parents' extended family could not accept the religious differences of their father and mother. But after a while there was no longer any objection.

Third, their opinions about interfaith marriage. As many as 18 respondents (89%) agreed or did not object to interfaith

marriage. According to them, marriage is based on love between a man and a woman, and love cannot be limited by religion. As many as 2 respondents (11%) did not agree or object to interfaith marriage, because belief in God cannot be defeated by any reason. They worry that interfaith marriages will interfere with the husband and wife's appreciation of their religion.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Religious Life and Marriage as Personal Experience

In essence, religious life is belief in God, Allah, the Transcendence, or the Divine and is manifested in various dimensions of human life in the world.[15] Belief in God is lived out in life with other people, both family and community, in a society that is diverse both in terms of race and belief. Belief in God is also celebrated in sacred celebrations or rituals, which require physical means to express the relationship with God, and at the same time become a symbol of the relationship with God. Belief in God is ultimately directed towards achieving salvation both in this world and in the afterlife. This requires teachings, guidance, even laws whose source is from God's revelation which has been standardized and recorded. So, religious life is very complex and multidimensional. The classic view from Glock and Stark (1965), which is often used as a reference, states five dimensions of religion, namely knowledge, belief, ritual, spiritual experience, and behavior.[16] Ninian Smart in more detail mentions seven dimensions, namely emotional-experiential, practical-ritual, mythic-narrative, ethical-legal, social-institutional, doctrinal-philosophical, and material.[17] The spiritual experience of God which is the belief of every religious person is celebrated together in practice and ritual. This togetherness is regulated and institutionalized, and directed by teachings, and dogmas. All religious life practices and teachings originate from God's revelation which has been standardized and recorded in the form of narratives and myths. Ninian Smart calls the material elements in religions both as a means of religious life, as a place to celebrate spiritual experiences, and as a symbol of the presence of the Divine.

From the complexity and completeness of these religious dimensions, it is very clear that all aspects of human life are embodied in religious life, including marriage. For religious people, marriage is lived in the context of religious life. Marriage then forms a family which is one of the social dimensions of religious life. So, marriage cannot be separated from religious life.

[15] Komaruddin Hidayat, "Ketuhanan dan Kemanusiaan" in *Kompas*, 6 Juli 2020. Retrieved 2020-07-6, from https://www.kompas.id/baca/opini/2020/07/06/ketuhanan-dan-kemanusiaan

[16] Rafał Boguszewski, Marta Makowska, Marta Bo˙zewicz, & Monika Podkowinska, "The Covid-19 Pandemic's Impact on Religiosity in Poland" in *Religions* 11 (2020): 646; Cf. Abdul Halim dan Husen, "Changing the Religiosity of Indonesian Muslims in the New Normal Era" *Wawasan. Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Ilmu Budaya* 6, No. 1 (2021): 1-12, doi: https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v6i1.13445.

[17] Ninian Smart, *Religions of Asia*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993).

Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage confirms that belief in the Almighty God is the basis of married life. Marriage is "a physical and spiritual bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife with the aim of forming a happy and eternal family or household based on Belief in One Almighty God."[18] The Catholic Church teaches that it is God who created marriage. "Marriage is an intimate communion of life and conjugal love established by the Creator and confirmed by its laws, established by a marriage promise or personal agreement which cannot be withdrawn. God himself is the creator of marriage which includes various values and goals," (GS 48).[19] Catholic marriage is a sign of God's love, meaning that God gives grace and is present in the marriage. Marriage is based on the complete, total and absolute love of husband and wife, like the unity of Christ with the Church (Eph. 5: 22-24). Therefore, marriage is monogamous and cannot be divorced.[20] Marriage aims for the continuity of human life with the birth of offspring, for personal growth and the welfare of each family member, as well as society.[21]

The Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council (1965) has emphasized that marriage is a partnership rather than a contract as stated in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, because it wants to emphasize that marriage is the personal responsibility of each partner. Alliances between men and women in the institution of marriage occur because of personal agreement between men and women to live together as husband and wife. The agreement was made consciously, freely, voluntarily, and mutually agreeing. The agreement (*consensus*) is what causes the marriage to occur legally or *ratum*.[22] So interfaith marriage is a personal decision for each couple. Parents and anyone else are not responsible and cannot interfere with these personal decisions.

In Islam, marriage is also a very sacred institution, because Allah is in charge of marriage. In fact, perfection of the Islamic faith is impossible to be achieved without marriage. Marriage is also a legally binding agreement between a man and a woman who have expressed a mutual commitment to live together in harmony with the teachings of faith.[23] *Surah An Nissa* verse 21 states, "And they (your wives) have taken a firm agreement." By using the term "firm agreement" (*mitsagon gholidon*), Islam emphasizes "the sanctity of the

[18] Law of Marriage Number 1 1974 about marriage.
[19] The writer explained these topics in Catholic perspective.
[20] Code of Canon Law, Can. 1056.
[21] Code of Canon Law, Can. 1055.
[22] Code of Canon Law, Can. 1057; Cf. Rubiyatmoko, *Perkawinan Katolik menurut Kitab Hukum Kanonik* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2012), 2.
[23] Sawenet, Interreligious Marriage: Social and Religious Perspectives in *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research (IJIR).* 2017, Vol-3, Issue-6, p. 359; Quran 30:21. 4; Quran 4:1; Quran 7:189 as cited by Imani Jaafar-Mohammad and Charlie Lehmann, "Women's Rights in Islam Regarding Marriage and Divorce," *Journal of Law and Practice* 4, Art. 3 (2011): 1-13, Retrieved 2022-09-15, from http://open.mitchellhamline.edu/lawandpractice/vol4/iss1/3.

relationship between husband and wife, similar to the sanctity of the relationship between God and the people He chooses. Therefore, it is not surprising that marriage is seen as a duty from God and children are also seen as a form of God's blessing to husband and wife." Nova Effenty Muhammad explained that in the Holy Qoran only marriage is referred to as mitsaqan ghalizan as a firm agreement to distinguish it from agreements between humans.[24]

From the explanation above, it is clear that according to Islam and Catholicism, marriage is a sacred institution because God Himself wants this marriage. Marriage is a union and bond between a man and a woman that is as strong as God's loyalty to His people. The Catholic Church emphasizes that marriage is monogamous and cannot be divorced because God Himself unites it (Mark 10:2-11, Matt 5:31, 19:3-9, Luke 16:18).[25] The Holy Quran also shows a strong tendency towards teachings about the monogamous and indissoluble nature of marriage. This can be seen in several verses in Surah An Nissa verse 1, verse 35, verse 129. The Prophet Muhammad married to one wife for 25 years, namely Khadija. It was only after Khadijah died that he married other women for social purposes. The Prophet Muhammad SAW also set an example of being fair to his wives.[26]

In short, Islamic law allows polygamy, but with severe conditions. Likewise, "divorce is not prohibited in Islam, but Allah hates divorce. Divorce is the last resort when problems arise and when all means have been done to maintain the household, but there is still no change. So, it takes three steps of divorces (talak) to actually get a divorce."[27]

Interfaith marriages cause problems because of the provisions of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage, especially article 2 paragraph 1 which states that "Marriage is valid if it is carried out according to the laws of each religion and belief." This means that if someone wants to legally marry, a non-Muslim must convert to Muslim in order to carry out an Islamic marriage. Likewise, a Muslim must first convert to a religion of the partner so that he or she can legally marry following his partner's religion. This provision became more explicit with the 1980 Fatwa of the Indonesian Council of Ulema which stated, (1) "the marriage of a Muslim woman with a non-Muslim man is haram (forbidden)," (2) "it is forbidden for a Muslim man to marry a non-Muslim woman." Regarding marriage between Muslim men and women of the People of

[24] Nova Effenty Muhammad, "Realitas Perkawinan Beda Agama Perspektif Keluarga Sakinah," *Jurnal Al-Mizan* 16, No. 2 (2020): 273–298, doi: https://doi.org/10.30603/am.v16i2.1830.

[25] Code of Canon Law, Can. 1056.

[26] Purwa Hadiwardoyo, Al., MSF. Perkawinan menurut Islam dan Katolik. Implikasinya dalam Kawin Campur. (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1990),, 11-12; Cf. Imani Jaafar and Charlie Lehmen, "Women's Rights in Islam," 6.

the Book, there are differences of opinion. After considering that the mafsadah (damage) was greater than the benefit, the Indonesian Ulema Council declared the marriage to be haram (forbidden). The 2005 MUI fatwa reiterated that interfaith marriages are haram and invalid, as well as marriages between Muslem men and Ahlu Kitab women are haram and invalid.[28]

Ibnu Radwan Siddik Turnip wrote that "textually in the Qur'an there are at least three verses that specifically discuss marriage between Muslems and non-Muslems, namely surah al-Baqarah (2): 221, surah al-Mumlahanah (60): 10, and surah al-Maidah (5): 5. In the first verse, the Qur'an prohibits Muslims from marrying polytheists, whether Muslem men marry polytheist women, or vice versa. The second verse, the Qur'an prohibits believing women from marrying unbeliever men and vice versa, namely prohibiting unbeliever men from marrying Muslem women. Meanwhile, in the third verse, the Qur'an allows Muslem men to marry women from People of the Book and prohibits Muslem women from marrying men who are not Muslem, Jews or Christians."[29]

Achmad Nurcholis, who himself did an interfaith marriage, ICRP activist, and advisor to interfaith marriage couples stated that there are three possibilities for carrying out an interfaith marriage according to Islam. The only problem is that the prospective bride and groom do not understand the various interpretations.

The Catholic Church teaches that marriage between a man and a woman who has been baptized as a Catholic is called a sacrament, meaning it is a sign and means of love between Christ and the Church. Marriage between Catholics and non-Catholics is not a sacrament, but is only a blessing as long as they get a letter of dispensation from the leader of the Catholic church. This blessing gives permission to Catholic parties to continue living as Catholics with all kinds of rights and obligations. Non-Catholics can still live according to their religion and beliefs. However, the Catholic blessing of marriage requires both parties to follow the essence and nature of Catholic marriage as an eternal, monogamous and inseparated union. In the pastoral call of Pope Francis Amoris Laetitia which reiterated previous teachings in the Familiaris Consortio, interfaith marriages must receive special pastoral assistance.[30]

The phenomenon of interfaith marriage that continues to occur shows that marriage

[27] Hadith as reported by Abu Dawoud, the friend of Prophet Muhammad PBUH as cited by Imani Jaafar and Charlie Lehmen, "Women's Rights in Islam," 8.

[28] Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Number 4/MUNAS VII/MUI/8/2005 about interfaith marriage.

[29] Ibnu Radwan Siddik Turnip. "Perkawinan Beda Agama: Perspektif Ulama Tafsir, Fatwa Mui dan Hukum Keluarga Islam di Indonesia," *Al-Tadabbur: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 6, No. 1 (2021): 110, retrieved 2022-11-13, from https://jurnal.staialhidayahbogor.ac.id/index.php/alt/article/view/1337, DOI: 10.30868/at.v6i01.1337

[30] Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia. Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation*, Retrieved 2022-08-14, from https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

is not just a matter of law. Regulations and teachings including religious teachings are the way and direction for marriage to bring happiness. Marriage is a personal choice and responsibility of each partner.

All respondents stated that religious life and marriage are personal experiences of each individual that cannot be interfered with by other parties, including parents. They suggested that children should not be restricted and prohibited if they have potential partners of different religions. Let them get to know each other well. If indeed the soul mate, regardless of religion, the partner will not affect the family that will be built. In time, the prospective partner themselves will decide whether they will change religion to follow their prospective partner or remain in the religion they adhere to. Interfaith marriages, whether the husband and wife continue to adhere to the religion they adhered to before marriage, or those who change to follow their life partner, can be successful in building a happy family. One respondent whose wife refused to be baptized Catholic mentioned, "it is very good that the Catholic Church provides dispensations for interfaith marriages so that Catholic parties can still live their faith in a Catholic way. I really do not agree with the annulment of a marriage that seems to be done so easily."

A respondent who converted to Islam felt that they were still happy as Muslem women and living in Muslem family. In fact, as a housewife, she truly becomes the economic pillar of the family because her husband does not have a steady income. Likewise, respondents who converted from Islam to Catholicism also stated the same thing. Marriage and religious liveng is personal in character. As mentioned above, the children of the interfaith couples mentioned thatre eligious differences were never discussed in the family. Likewise, religious differences from parents are not a problem for them.

Parents are of course very happy if their children follow their advices and even follow the religion they adhered. Nevertheless, as mentioned by a respondent, parents must be sincere if their children make their own choices that are different from theirs, because religious life and marriage are personal experiences for each individual. Parents must believe, as metioned by a mother whose son converted to Islam, that the Spirit of God is always present in their children even if they change religions.

3.2.2. *Religious Life Development in the Family*

The data analyzed above show that both Catholic women who convert to Islam and Muslem women who became Catholic remained diligent and loyal believers because of the quality of their respective family lives. Those who live and develop in a family with a good religious life remained loyal to the faith they had chosen. In this case, the fear that those who changed

religions for the sake of marriage would the next day return to the faith they originally adhered to was not proven, as long as the family life they built was good so that their life of faith grew and developed well.

A Muslem woman who had been baptized as Catholic then returned to being Muslem woman could happen because their family life was less than harmonious. The husband was too busy with his work so he was not perfect in accompanying his wife and family in living out their faith. Likewise, other respondent who was unsuccessful in accompanying his wife because he was so engrossed in his work that his Muslem wife had an affair with another man.

In addition, a Muslem woman who truly lived her faith could not be forced to convert to Catholicism, even if she had stated before marriage that she was willing to convert to Catholicism. In living together, participating in Catholic religious activities, she could not live it, so she remained a Muslim, and could not be forced. Fortunately, in the Catholic Church there is dispensation for interfaith marriages so that Catholic parties can still live their lives as Catholics, while Muslem parties can still live their faith in Islam. This woman is happy to remain a Muslim even though she lives with her Catholic husband and children.

So, the key to interfaith marriage is good family accompaniment and fostering religious life in the family. Both those who change religions for the sake of marriage and those who do not change religions because of marriage will still be able to build a harmonious family as long as there is a commitment to building a good family. All respondents said that in the interfaith marriages openness and tolerance must be created. There must be a conscious effort not to create conflict.

4. CONCLUSION

All religions teach and direct their adherents to obtain salvation in this world and the hereafter. So, the teachings and laws of religions regulate the lives of their people in order to obtain this salvation. Likewise, the state establishes civil law so that its citizens can live in peace and prosperity. Laws that do not promote peace and prosperity are not morally good. Therefore, determining a mate and living married life is the personal responsibility of each partner. So even though religion and the state have the duty to regulate the people and their citizens, religion and the state have no right to interfere in matters of determining mate and marriage.

Religious life and marriage are personal experiences that can not be interferred by other parties including parents and state. Interfaith marriages can succeed in building a harmonius family, whether the husband and wife still adhere to the religion they adhered to before marriage, or those who move to follow their

spouses. Family harmony is determined more by care, mutual service, and affection built by the family than religions. The husband's attention to his wife, and vice versa, the wife to her husband, as well as the attention of parents to their children and vice versa, children to their parents are the most important factors for creating a harmonious family. In this way, religious life is manifested in real ways by caring for each other in family life.

The fear of reconversion of those who converted to a religion just for the sake of marriage is not proven. As long as the family life of the couples have been firmly built, the faith will grow and develop well in that family. It is the importance of family coaching and mentoring or pastoral care. Besides, the Catholic Church's policy of giving dispensation for interfaith marriages is good way as the way out of the interfaith marriage.

Religion guides its people with spiritual and moral means. In terms of marriage, religion guides families to achieve a harmonious life without having to interfere with families who follow different religions. So religious teachings or laws that prohibit interfaith marriages must be studied in depth in their essence so that loopholes can be found to carry out interfaith marriages. Likewise, the state must ensure the welfare of the community by providing adequate facilities and living necessities. The state must not interfere in the private affairs of each family, especially regarding interfaith marriages. Laws prohibiting interfaith marriages must be reviewed.

This era is the open one. Because of technology, no boundaries can limit people to connect each other in this world. This world is opened to all, including the youth. The youth should not be restricted or prohibited in having friends from different religions, even, if then becoming the partners of life. Let them know each other well. In time, let them make decision whether they will change religions to follow their prospective partner or stick to their religion.

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