

Conference Paper

The Meaning of Love and Love Orientation of Widows Based on Erich from Perspective (A Study at St. Petrus Paulus Church, Wlingi, East Java, Indonesia)

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the meaning of love and love orientation of Catholic widows based on Erich Fromm's theory. The research model used qualitative research with descriptive phenomenology, based on interviews among four widow members of St Peter Paulus church. This interview data was analysed using thematic analysis techniques. The results showed the participants interpreted love as an effort to give what they have. Participant's love orientation tends to be stronger towards children and God. Meanwhile, other orientations were also found namely grandchildren, nieces, neighbours, deceased spouses, friends and themselves. Productive love is experienced primarily in relationships with children, God, and people in their extended social spheres. Relationships with partners and themselves become the least dominant relationships in the life of a widow and less interpreted with productive love. Based on the results of this study it is advisable to the church to add a counselling for their member who has loss their partner (spouse) so that they regain a sense of self-worth.

Keywords: meaning, orientation, love, Erich Fromm, phenomenological, widow, Santo Petrus Paulus Church Wlingi.

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1. Introduction

Marriage in Catholicism is one of the seven sacraments sanctified by the Church. This means that marriage is believed to be one of the signs and means of God's own presence in human life through two individuals who are united. Catholic marriage has three characteristics namely, a bond that lasts a lifetime, a monogamous bond (one husband and one wife), and a bond that is not divorced. The latter characteristic is characteristic of Catholic marriage. This indicates that according to Catholic law, in marriage there is no tolerance for divorce. Divorce only occurs if one individual who is bound by a marriage vow dies not for another reason, such as an affair, for example.

Individuals who lose a partner due to death, experience grief that is not experienced by someone who is divorced due to household problems. Individuals who are separated due to the death of one of the partners will have an impact in the form of greater grief

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because the possibility of their separation is not caused by a problem and death that could have suddenly occurred. Berk (2012) and Santrock (2012) even state that such grief can lead to a lot of emotions, feelings of uncertainty, separation anxiety, sadness and despair. At an advanced level, it can also cause depression and fear in living life.

Based on a survey conducted by the English Longitudinal Study of Aging (ELSA) in the United Kingdom, widows and widowers are reported to be the group that experiences the most loneliness, compared to adult and child groups and ethnic minority communities (Robert, 2015). More specifically, Beaumont (in Robert, 2015) found that individuals who held widow status felt lonelier than widowers. Loneliness is often associated with spontaneous experiences that are present at certain times and places when individuals are aware of the absence of a partner beside them, that is, on weekends, at night or when at home alone (Bennet, 2012). Loneliness has been thought to cause depression symptoms to decrease quality of life (Fried et al, 2015; Jamadar et al, 2015). On the other hand, it was also found that loneliness can actually encourage individuals to better interpret their lives. For example, widows are compelled to have good friendship ties, close relationships with relatives, deepen religiosity and enter into social organizations (Antonucci, Bennett, Leighton, in Santrock, 2012).

Other studies have sought to reveal more specific about the relationship of the widow to the surrounding environment after their spouse passed away. In Britain, the studies showed that Chinese widows prefer to live alone and focus on work (Bennett, 2012), dominating their life by concentrating in her work. While another study in Canada conducted by Lowe (2005) found that widows still have a feeling of being united with their spouse spiritually and their lives are dominated by the activities of being a single parent.

All of the researches above showed that the widows still remain their relationship with their environment. The activities according to Erich Fromm's theory (in Feist & Feist, 2010) is related to the human basic needs, especially the relatedness. Relatedness is one of the basic human needs for existence and maintaining mental health. This connection is divided into several forms, namely surrender, power and love. Love is the only means of fulfilling the need for healthy relationships. Which is, by establishing relationships based on love that individuals are brought to rethink of what has happened in their life and then they can form new meanings.

Love as the basis for a relationship according to Erich Fromm has a broad understanding, not only manifested in relationships with partners (romantic partners), but can be realized in relationships with God, children, relationships with himself, so that the most extensive is the implementation of relationships with fellow humans. In relationships

based on love, individuals are required to unite with others without losing their integrity (Fromm, 1956). In their efforts to love, individuals also strive for care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge that are manifested in a creative form in their relationships with others.

According to Fromm (1956), An individual can be said to establish relationships based on love when he has concern for the development and happiness of the object of love, seeks to fulfill the needs of the object of love, appreciates the loved one without changing what has become his character, and recognizes the object of love in depth and trying to connect what is in himself to the object of love. Relationships based on love contain positive aspects of life. Even so, there is still a lack of attention to conduct research related to the topic of relations that are woven in a widow after the death of a partner, especially those based on aspects of love. The research that has been done more researches about the loneliness experienced by elderly widows (Putri, 2016; Nuryani, 2018; Sakti, 2018; Anggraini, 2010) and the topic of depression (Parasari, 2015; Sutinah, 2017; Hasanah, 2014). Meanwhile, researchers see the importance for widows to understand and develop positive aspects such as establishing relationships based on love in their lives. Fromm (1956) sees understanding of love will encourage individuals to experience happiness in their lives. A widow who succeeds in exerting all her efforts to experience complete love in establishing relations with objects of love will live up to the strength, wealth and power that is in her.

East Java is the province in Indonesia with the highest number of widows. Biro Pusat Statistik Indonesia (2010) released a survey that showed the number of divorced dead widows in East Java reaching 1,989,498 people scattered in various regions. The Catholic Church itself divides the area of East Java into two large regions namely Malang Diocese and Surabaya Diocese. One parish that has a large area in the diocese of Surabaya is the Parish of St. Petrus Paulus Wlingi by overseeing five sub-districts. There are 124 Widow in St. Parish Petrus Paulus Wlingi numbered from 781 Catholic marriages during 1992-2019. The number of widows in the parish of St. Peter Paulus Wlingi increasing every year.

In order to deal with psychological well-being and mental health of the widow, this research is a preliminary study among widows of St. Peter Paulus church member to find out more about their definition, their meaning of love after their spouse has passed away and their love orientation in making their life meaningful based on Erich Fromm perspective on love.

2. Materials and Method

In this research, the research method used is a qualitative approach. The research model used in this research is phenomenology research. The nature of this research is descriptive. Data analysis uses thematic analysis techniques. The researcher acts as a planner, collector, interpreter and ultimately becomes a reporter of the results of his research. This research was conducted in the area of the Church of St. Petrus Paulus Wlingi, Blitar Regency. Church of St. Petrus Paulus Wlingi who has a wide area and a high number of widows, around 124 people. The widows are scattered in five sub-districts which cover the Church of St. Peter Paulus Wlingi. The researcher chose four participants who had several characteristics according to the focus of the study. The characteristics of the participants in this study were widows because their partners died and were Catholic in the Parish area of St. Peter Paulus Wlingi. Researchers use interviews and observations as data collection tools. The data were collected about four months including the verification of member check, which the subject of this studies checking the conclusion of the interview before the result will be processed further. The data collected also included the observation of the widow everyday life and the researcher act as a participant (observer as a participant).

3. Result

For all four participants to love means giving what is in them to the people around them, from God to themselves. Participants said that they will give talents, energy and time to seek love for God, people around them, themselves. In addition to the meaning of giving, participants also interpret love as a tendency to receive affection, attention and understanding from other individuals, so that he or she can feel be loved.

Relationships with people around them are shown by the participants through their everyday activities and the interactions with their neighbours. One of the subjects (participant 1) also mentioned that their pets (dogs and cats) are also the object of their love. The relationship established by 2 subjects (participant 1 and 2) can be interpreted as their effort to serve God primarily and believing that it is a command from God. They participated in religious activities such as joint prayer aimed to help people in need and by being an active member of the church voluntarily. They involve in activities around their environment so they can always update the information. They also contribute in ensuring the safety and well-being of people surround them. The subject said that they

are aware that they are taught by their religion to love their fellow humans who live side by side with them.

One subject (participant 3) interact with their neighbours by helping each other and respecting the character of their neighbours. The subject said that they find themselves as a useful person when they can help others. Participant 3 also keep a relationship with her sister, although the relationship was not always in good terms. Participant 3 showed concern by caring for their younger siblings when sick. Other activities that were followed by this subject (participant 3) relating to the people around her were social gathering and religious activities, which made her feel less lonely.

The fourth subject (participant 4), used more of their daily time to manage the business. The reason behind are because she has to pay for her children's school fees, which are quite high, among other bills to pay. This participant says that she rarely interact with her neighbours, except for her employees. Thus can be concluded that participants 4 have not applied productive love in their relationships with the people around them.

4. Discussion

In the meaning of love for others, participants are still influenced by trying to fulfil their physiological and security needs. Maslow (in Feist & Feist, 2010) revealed that after the fulfilment of physiological needs and the need for a sense of security that is in this case economic needs, new individuals develop further needs, namely the need for love and belonging. The need for love is fulfilled by establishing relationships with people around him.

Love for children is the only unconditional love. This love is given by the mother for free, without expecting anything in return. This love has the potential to cause dominance in children if it is not accompanied by aspects of respect. In interviews and observations conducted by researchers, the three subjects did not show dominance over the future chosen by the child. Relationships with children were the themes found in the interviews of all four participants. Widows in this study interpret love in children who are also related to their nieces and grandchildren. One Participants who do not have children, chooses her niece as a substitute in the object of love, while when her child already married, this subject have her grandchildren to be the object of their love.

Each subject of this studies has varied way of interpreting their love for children. This variation depends on the needs of the child and the personal views of the subjects. There are three subjects who did not show dominance over the future chosen by the

child as a form of respect for each child's decision. Meanwhile, aspects of caring are shown by trying to get to know children and their development, where children begin to enter adolescence, start careers and have families. Aspects of responsibility for children shown by the participants include meeting the needs of children, ranging from school fees to everyday needs. The next aspect, which is the aspect of knowledge that is interpreted by participants by interacting and paying attention to the characters of children at certain times, for example when children are angry or by discussing various things. Participants agreed that by interacting with children, participants were able to get to know the child well and establish a closer relationship. In the application of love to children, there are several things that seem to affect participants such as relationships with parents first.

Love for their spouse is love that is exclusive in terms of commitment and intimacy. This means that love, although exclusive, is not possessive in nature (Fromm, 1956). The four participants decided not to remarry after the death of their spouses. Aside from the love and commitment that has been built with another person, that can be considered as future partners, participants feel there is a lot to consider, including their age, the child's adaptation process and the opinions of others. Meanwhile, one participant also expressed his desire to remarry because of internal needs. These needs such as attention and economic needs. However, again the participants chose not to rush and think of children as the main focus at this time. All four participants have shown acceptance of the couple's death. Participants continue to live by caring for their children and doing what their husbands ask before they die. The three participants showed less relation with the fullness of the love aspect. This is caused by the lack of relationships that are built after the husband died, a long time, and the lack of commitment to the husband's message before dying. According to Sternberg (in Santrock, 2012), the bond that still exists between participants and their late spouse shows aspects of intimacy, namely closeness emotionally and physically. In this case the participant only feels emotional closeness, that is the feeling of being close to their late spouse even though they already passed away.

On the aspect of loving oneself, that implies treating yourself the same as other individuals, the four subjects had different meanings about it, when the researchers asked about themselves. When it comes to things that are needed, the participants' answers include money, health and their relationships with other objects of love. All of the subject agreed that they try to fulfil their own needs by working, exercising and participating in various activities that was held around their environment. All of the

subject also agreed that their happiness come with participating in fun activities such as do yoga, playing with their children or grandchildren and shopping.

In the aspect of self-knowledge, the three subjects tended to hesitate in expressing their strength. They assume only other people can tell and see their strengths, not themselves. This is possible because all the subjects are accustomed to Javanese culture that promote humbleness, by not talking what is good in her. This also can be caused by the influence of the principle of holding morality which Fromm (1956) expressed as an individual's reluctance to state that he can love in ways that are less prevalent in the eyes of the community, which in this case is Javanese society. Javanese society tends to hold the principle that individuals must be humble (Javanese: *andhap asor*). On the other hand, it can also indicate a lack of participant's knowledge of their potential, overlooked of things that are still need to be improved for all participants.

Relationships with oneself become the least aspect to pay attention among all subjects. Participant 4 are the only participants who are able to express aspects of love in their relationship with themselves. She routinely attending yoga classes in an effort to maintain health, seek passive income for their future, know well what their strengths are, and make the past a lesson for the future. While the three participants, have not been able to mention what their strengths are and tend to focus on their weaknesses. Participants 4 felt she was able to reorganize her lives after 18 years of the husband's departure.

Love for God is interpreted by the subjects with actively engaging in a series of religious activities, usually held by the church. The activities included as praying individually or in groups. The subjects showed that their understanding of God love depends on the subjectivity and character of each participants. The four participants interpreted God as being the most omnipresent. God is a place to tell a lot of things, ask for help and forgiveness. For all participants, God seen as a power that enables them to live life, especially after their spouse passed away. Participants also mention that they conduct praying in their home or just by talking silently at every opportunity they have. Relationships with God dominate the lives of all four subjects.

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