



Bridging Traditions: The Catholic Church's Engagement with Manggarai Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: The focus of this paper is the Catholic church's faith dialogue with Manggarai culture in the *Penti* rite. This article tries to explore deeper into the important cult values that have relevance to the Catholic faith. *Penti* is a traditional ritual in the Manggarai culture with the nuances of thanksgiving. This thanksgiving has been passed down from generation to generation with the aim of being a way for Manggarai people to appreciate nature. In the end, *Penti* became part of the life of the Manggarai people as a wealth that needed to be preserved. The group uses a critical reading methodology to explore this writing. The group writing argument is how important cultural role is in shaping the faith of Manggarai Catholics. This is because the viewing group Manggarai people are not aware of the meaning of important cultural presence for their faith life. This paper wants to stimulate Manggarai society, especially young people who have been tainted and controlled by the changing times. Hopefully, with this writing, the people of Manggarai will love their identity more and realize that culture is a place of encounter and at the same time a regulator of the rhythm of human life.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is an action as well as a human reaction to maintain its survival and at the same time a shared marker or identity for society which is a guideline for shared life (Allerton, 2012). While regional culture is a culture that lives and develops in a particular region or area which becomes the identity of a region, part of a country. Culture itself has the following characteristics; the tendency to develop and change because it is triggered by internal and external factors, relatively unintegrated and incomplete because it tends to change, as a community identity because of the concept of integrating self-concept (individuals) into a shared concept so that it becomes a group culture, inheritance which is a benchmark in behaving and behave, and as a vehicle for learning to shape themselves for its citizens (Dagur, 2008).

However, it should be realized that culture tends to change in tune with developments in both science and technology, global change, and the relationality of humans to their environment (Widyawati, 2013). Science is the main requirement for people to advance their abilities and also facilitate their survival. Likewise with technology. Technological developments, which are increasingly shocking humans, whether we realize it or not, tend to change human character and behavior. Besides that, the presence of technology has also turned society into consumerism.

In this contemporary era, no one closes themselves off, because now is a world without borders, colored by global competence that is getting sharper and tighter. Humans have a tendency to imitate what he thinks is good and useful. Humans tend to adopt foreign cultures and leave the local culture which is their heritage and identity. For example, westernized lifestyle and so forth. Meanwhile, in their interactions with the environment, humans tend to be less aware of the role of the reciprocal relationship between me and the environment. The environment referred to by the group in this paper is a place for humans to carry out their lives in all aspects. If traced to the context of the availability of necessities of life, humans have always considered themselves masters of their environment. But due to the continuous changes experienced by humans, it causes damage and decreases the culture of taste for the environment.

To answer the phenomena above, the group tried to explore and explore one of the cultures of the Manggarai people, namely the important culture as an effort to overcome the above crises. People have many ways to express their gratitude to the universe, the ancestors and the Creator, for example, through culture and religion. One of them is the *Penti* tradition. The *Penti* tradition is an expression of gratitude for the Manggarai people for their ancestors, *Mori Kraeng* (the name for the Creator) and the universe which is carried out by a group of Manggarai people in a formal setting. The vertical dimension in the *Penti* tradition is that Manggarai people give thanks to God. The creator and former God (*Mori Jari agu Dedek*) must be worshiped and glorified. Respect God as the source of human life and livelihood. The Manggarai people acknowledge the omnipotence of God. Don't forget to give thanks to the ancestors (*empo*) who have inherited the land (*lingko*), make appropriate offerings for them for all their services and kindness (Abon, 2022).

The *Penti* culture in the Manggarai people has been inherited from generation to generation since the time of their ancestors. The *Penti* culture is practiced in almost all Manggarai villages, both East Manggarai, Central Manggarai and West Manggarai. The *Penti* ritual is usually carried out in a traditional house (*Mbaru Gendang*) and is led by the traditional leader holding a rooster as a symbol of intermediary between living humans and the universe, the ancestors, and the Creator. If explored in depth, it is found that the church life of the Manggarai people is rooted in Manggarai culture (Chen, 2013). For the Manggarai people, religion and culture are one. The heart of all cultures is religion and rites to the spirits and the absolute Spirit they call *Mori Kraeng*. The Manggarai people do not recognize the separation between the holy and the profane, culture is the path that mediates the relationship between humans and God. This does not mean that the Church replaces the role of mediator Jesus Christ, but it is through the church that this role becomes visible in the world.

This paper wants to stimulate Manggarai society, especially young people who have been tainted and controlled by the changing times. Hopefully, with this writing, the people of Manggarai will love their identity more and realize that culture is a place of encounter and at the same time a regulator of the rhythm of human life.

METHOD

This research is qualitative research with data collection techniques through observation and literature study. The observation of this research is possible considering that the researcher himself is a son born in Manggarai. The researcher also witnessed directly the life of the Manggarai people and often attended the *Penti* rites. In other words, the researcher knows well the meaning and symbols of the *Penti* rite. This research is also supported by previous research on the same theme. This enriches the body of knowledge about this research. Because of that the researcher divides the sources of this library research into two parts, namely primary sources and secondary sources. The primary source of literature studies comes from books that have analyzed *Penti* for more than the last 10 years. The research process is carried out by collaborating on primary data obtained through observation and previous research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The country of Indonesia has a very diverse cultural wealth that stretches from Sabang to Merauke. One of the many cultures in Indonesia, one culture will be introduced, namely an important culture originating from Manggarai-Flores-NTT (Gunawan, 2021). *Penti* culture is one of the many management systems of the Manggarai community which together and is based on an awareness of various parties merging into one to be grateful and grateful for the blessings received by all Manggarai people (Erb. 2003). *Penti* is a Manggarai traditional party with a nuance of thanksgiving to the ancestors/supernatural/Highest Being (*Mori Keraeng*) which is carried out by a group of people in a formal situation in an atmosphere of joy (Itu, 2020). *Penti* is a sign of gratitude to *Mori Jari Dedek* (God the creator) and to the spirits of the ancestors for all the fruits of their labor that have been obtained and enjoyed, as well as a *sign of wali ntaung* (the seasons change over). Usually done after harvest all is complete. It can be concluded that according to the opinion above that the ceremony is *Penti* it serves as our gratitude to our ancestors who gave us a bountiful harvest the previous year.¹

The term *Penti* is also interpreted as a ceremony to build close brotherhood between humans with one another, both from the old to the young. The old become the main figures in carrying out their duties and the young as successors to follow the lives of their elders. The intended attitude of unification includes several important points which are of great vitality in shared life which are intended for all local people to control customs, or cultural activities or carry out the norms of life without discriminating against age or position by thanking the giver of life, namely *Mori Kraeng* and ancestors as protectors and also givers of blessings for all levels of Manggarai society or called *Empo*.

Penti ceremony is held in July-August until before December. This is the way for the Manggarai people to express their gratitude for all the abundant blessings towards *Mori Keraeng*. The *Penti* ceremony is held in July, namely the seventh month to the ninth month because usually in these months there are many abundant harvests. This *Penti* ceremony also

¹ Savio. Ermelinda, 'The Existence of the "PENTI" Traditional Ceremony in the Golo Wuas Village Community, Elar District, East Manggarai Regency.', *Muhammadiyah University of Mataram*, 2 (2019), 20.

has dimensions, namely vertical dimensions and horizontal and social dimensions. This thanksgiving ceremony, or what is commonly called by the Manggarai community, means that there are vertical, horizontal and social dimensions. It has vertical, horizontal and social dimensions. Where is the vertical dimension as gratitude to God which in Manggarai language is called *Mori* and to the ancestors they call *Empo*. God the Creator in the Manggaraian language (*Mori Kerang Mori Jari Agu Dedek Tana Lino*) must be honored along with all the ancestors who have died (*Empo*) must be glorified because from them all the blessings of an abundant harvest and the source of all life on earth. In addition, this term serves to mobilize and direct the local community to achieve common prosperity and expresses the existence of close kinship ties, for example, all levels of Manggarai society must respect the belief and freedom to embrace religion for every member of the community who believes and important events become the traditional motto that guarantees that the unity between people of different religions and pluralism remains united.

Penti beo (*Penti*= thanksgiving; *beo* = village). *Penti beo* is a thanksgiving for the villagers. *Tua golo* (village head) who gave the general command during the *Penti* ceremony was assisted by *Tua Panga* (head of the family of the sub-clan branch) based on community consultations in one village. According to the Manggarai tradition, the location/position of the village has a certain meaning and role in human life. If the location of the village is strategic/good, it will also bring sustenance for humans, such as: jobs, health education, offspring, positions, getting a good mate, and so on. The Manggarai people think that the village has a power/krakat called *naga beo*. *Naga beo* is also divided into two things (judging from its influence), namely, first, *Naga beo dia* (a good place), and secondly, *Naga beo da, at* (bad place). A good village *naga* will bring blessings to all villagers, while the evil parrot *naga* (dragon), will bring havoc to humans. As for the example of the essence of offerings to the ancestors/supernatural namely: asking for village blessings (*thanks to golo lonto/beo*), blessings to the village yard (*natas Labar*), blessings to places of offerings in 9 villages (*com pang*), blessings to drinking water places (*wae tek*), residence (*mbaru kaeng*), work garden (*uma duat/lingko*) The determination of the time for the celebration of the villagers is not determined routinely. This depends on the agreement of the villagers. Except, if a new village is built/founded, then the thanksgiving is held at the time the village was built right away, or thanksgiving for the anniversary of building a new village.

This term also promotes or controls an attitude of tolerance which is very important by establishing good relations with people of different religions, ethnicities, races and so on because basically the term above can protect a solid and unshakable shared life or in another language, *Etan Tua Wan Koe, Mai Cama-Cama Padir Wai Retu Sai Kudu Mose Cama-Cama as Creation of Mori Agu Ngaran Ata Dedek Tanah Lino Ho'o* meaning that from the old to the young, they must uphold the value of equality in human life as God's creation and those who live in the same world. Thus, the term *Penti* becomes the traditional motto of the Manggarai ethnicity as a unifier of life with the existing.

Penti culture is a culture that emphasizes the value of religiosity. Why, because basically the practice of *Penti* culture certainly puts forward the belief in the creator or giver of all things in the life of the Manggarai people. *Penti* culture, when explored further, contains a lot of positive meanings as believed by the Manggarai people themselves. This can be seen from the ways, actions and important cultural practices carried out by the community. Indeed, if we look at it from the perspective of the life of the Church, there are bound to be irregularities there. However, what the Church must underline is that basically the Church exists through the culture embraced by a region. Then the Church can grow. Likewise, to establish a relationship with someone who is, a term was born that will be used to practice gratitude by all people who believe in it, especially in Manggarai, namely *Penti*, so there are several important points that are positive values and should be well regarded by the Church, namely:

In realizing this gratitude, they thank God Almighty for all the gifts, starting from gratitude for the birth of a child, gratitude for an abundant harvest and others. In Manggarai there is a traditional ceremony, namely the *Penti* ceremony where this ceremony is a sign gratitude to the highest form for everything that has been achieved, especially for the abundant harvest. The Manggarai people have agricultural products such as corn, rice, coffee, cloves, and vanilla. The *Penti* ceremony in Manggarai is usually held every year. And this thanksgiving ceremony continues to this day. If this *Penti* ritual is not carried out there will be many disasters that will occur, and they believe it is because *Mori Keraeng Jari Dedek* (God the Creator) is angry for not carrying out this *Penti* ritual. This *Penti* ceremony is held in July.

The *Penti* ceremony when viewed from the life of the Church is certainly a very good thing because the Manggarai people really appreciate what is called *Mori Kraeng* or the creator above all that exists on earth. This is since humans are created in the image and likeness of God and have the same degree, it's just that some are born first and some later, so to unite all these mottos it becomes a unifier in controlling and living life together. Without reducing respect in the life of the Church, there are similarities that draw attention to important ceremonies and their relationship with the church, as follows: There are many values that can be learned from *the nongko gejur Penti* itself, in addition to the *nongko gejur Penti* as a tradition in the life of the Manggarai people. The values that are very important from *Penti nongko gejur* include: such as educational values, family values, mutual cooperation values, spiritual values, normative values, and democratic values. In addition, *Penti Nongko Gejur ceremony* is a ceremony that is usually carried out by the people of Manggarai, especially the people of East Manggarai Regency. Which is carried out by the Manggarai people to be grateful for all the blessings that have been given by *Mori Jari Dedek* (God the Creator) for the rice plants that are ready to be harvested, so that the time has come to pick these agricultural products. The *nongko gejur* is usually held around January-May, depending on the time of the harvest season. The *Penti nongko gejur* ceremony is held as a sign of gratitude to *Mori Jari Dedek* (God the Creator) for everything He has given, especially the results of the community's hard work in agriculture and plantations and also as a thank you for the health of those who care for them. the plant.

The church places great importance on the value of love from every aspect of life. Likewise, what is done and practiced in important culture which is inherited and carried out from generation to generation based on the beliefs that have been carried out. Even if you see a striking difference, especially the sacrifices offered to God in the form of offerings, namely: As for the essence of the offerings at this Thanksgiving, it can be understood through the following figurative examples: *kapu lami sangged gejur cama nuhu wua pau ai itas lami hang ciwal, haeng hang kawé lincik ici, weras wua lebo kala weri, wua raci po'ong* (we hold all gifts, the results of our efforts are the same as we hold mangoes because we have found the results of work in the garden to get the food we seek, clean seeds and ripe fruit, all betel leaves thrive, all areca nut planted bear fruit). This means that all efforts to get abundant results there is success in business.

It is interesting that everything that is done in the *Penti* ceremony is done based on actions in a culture or is done according to rites in the *Penti* culture to get closer to the creator, for example: The animal offered for the thanksgiving event is the chicken (*manuk*). while other animals: goats (for Muslims), pork (for Christians) are only additional side dishes. The main offering is actually buffalo. Why does it have to be chicken? Because *Penti*, which has a nuance of gratitude and joy, is of course carried out by those who have experienced life changes that are already good, established, and successful. From a bad life experience to a good experience, from a failed life experience to an experience that is full of success and better. And one thing that needs to be understood is that because thanksgiving is carried out by a group of people and attended by relatives, the logic is that it is necessary to make offerings of a chicken.

Based on the important opinion in the *Penti* action, a common thread can be taken which is the church's view of the *Penti* ceremony, namely that *Penti* and the Church both teach a group of people who live together, are interconnected, and influence each other, interrelated between one community and another. others to give birth to the same culture, society as a group of people who have lived and worked together long enough so that they can organize themselves as a social unit with clearly defined boundaries both in church rites and important rites in Manggarai culture.

When humans are faced with various life experiences that occur within themselves, with the world around them and also with other people, questions will arise about what is the most basic value that requires a relationship in life? Where is human existence after passing from this world? What is the purpose and purpose of human existence in this world? These questions cannot be answered immediately, but require deep contemplation to bring humans to a deeper understanding of their existence. Human answers to these questions can be viewed from human experience itself. This is the same as a culture that is lived by the people of Manggarai, especially the *Penti* rites. The *Penti* rite is a form of the Manggarai community's faith relationship in the Highest Being with others. And the religious dimension in important rites is a reference that organizes the relationship between humans and humans, humans and the natural environment, and also with the ancestors. This type of relationship always leads to a relationship with the transcendent or God Himself which is manifest through respect for the

highest spirit. Therefore, the relationship that occurs illustrates the important meaning of the bond that exists between humans and each other and nature as a form of embodiment of obedience to the highest and the creator himself. The pattern of human relations in *important rites* gives an emphasis on the view of human status with others who have equal dignity. In addition, everyone is required to respect each other, love each other by creating a good climate of brotherhood among others as God's creatures. Relationships with others are very important in everyday life to ensure joy and happiness among one another. By building a good relationship with others, it means that you have expressed a good relationship with God in an act of faith. In addition to the demands of relationships with others, humans are also called to care for God's creations through nature which is given as a guarantee of human life. Humans not only use all the wealth that has been prepared, but humans are called to protect and maintain nature for the survival of future generations. One form of effort to protect God's creation is seen through *Penti* ceremonies or rites.

Penti rite is a cultural practice that lives and develops and is ingrained in the life of the Manggarai people. The *Penti* rite is a form of thanksgiving for the work of the ancestral spirits through abundant agricultural produce. Through this rite, the people of Manggarai want to express their belief in an implementation that gives abundant results to all the work of their hands. Through the *Penti* rites, the Manggarai people believe in the Supreme Being as the creator and organizer of life. The *Penti* rite is a cultural practice that is ingrained in the Manggarai people. Ancestral spirits are present and manifest through the life experiences of the Manggarai people with the Highest Being in nature and history that they weave in the social relations they build. Therefore, *Penti* is a very important part of the life of the Manggarai people whose existence is maintained and maintained. Apart from raising social relations with humans, the *Penti* ceremony also raises the relationship between humans and God as the center of human life. Through rites, the ecological understanding held by the Manggarai community is reaffirmed.

For the people of Manggarai, nature is a good and orderly cosmos. All the elements in it are interdependent on one another. Therefore, there is no reason for humans to exploit nature. Exploiting nature means injuring the integrity of creation. However, they realize that as human beings, they have many weaknesses. They often violate this ecological understanding. They exploit nature for their own benefit. Realizing this weakness, important rites are the right moment to renew ecological understanding that has long been rooted in their lives and to see nature again as a cosmos that is good and needs to be looked after and cared for properly. In the daily life of the Manggarai people, the sense of visible and invisible symbolic contact in traditional practices at research sites is often applied. In the context of religion, customs, and art which are rich in meaning, the symbolic behavior of the community emerges. The peak of the ritual ceremony (*Penti*) represents the unity of the Manggarai people who play a role in maintaining, cultivating, and utilizing cultural wealth as a tourist attraction in addition to the panoramic beauty of Manggarai's nature. An important ritual for the Manggarai community as a form of gratitude for the success of their overseas.

From this explanation it can be said that the *Penti* rite is a very important part of the life of the Manggarai people. *Penti* can be likened to a car wheel which will only function properly if there is a center that unites it, moves and directs it to its true destination. Or if it is likened to the organs of the human body such as the heart or love which helps circulate blood throughout the body to unite all forces, move and animate the whole human being. Seeing the important role played by this important rite which is very appropriate and worthy of being preserved, guarded and maintained. However, it is a pity that today's younger generation is less interested in cultural values and lazy to explore the deepest meaning of the values of a culture itself. The Manggarai people tend to perform *Penti* rites because they only want to follow the customs of their ancestors which have been passed down from generation to generation without knowing their meaning for their own lives. As a result, the original religion adhered to by the people of Manggarai is gradually threatened with extinction because it is not properly preserved by the younger generation. In addition, the reality that has occurred so far proves that the influence of indigenous religions in people's lives is threatened with extinction because it is driven away by the glitz of modernization which has brought progress in all aspects of life. This can be seen from the attitude of today's youth who regard indigenous culture and the aspects contained therein as something traditional and old-fashioned because it is not in accordance with the demands of the times. With this assumption, it results in young people looking for a new culture that suits their wishes and away from their original culture. This situation resulted in an identity crisis for young people who do not have a clear life orientation because there are no cultural values to guide their lives.

The author sees that the *Penti* rite is a very large rite containing the value of life. How do the Manggarai people build an attitude of respect for God's creation of nature? Humans do not only use it to meet the needs of human life, but humans are called to maintain and maintain the continuity of their existence. Just like the philosophical concept that lives in the Manggarai community regarding *Penti* rites The community is invited to maintain and maintain the continuity of the integrity of nature which is increasingly being damaged due to human greed. And the destruction of nature is a problem that has occurred in our eyes. Natural wealth is threatened with extinction because of human greed in utilizing it for their lives. With the *Penti* rite, the value of love for nature, a place where the spirits of the ancestors live, is increasingly maintained and well maintained.

The effort to find and explore the meaning of the values behind it is a very meaningful contribution (Denar et al., 2022; Ampur et al., 2023; Juhani et al., 2021; Makul et al., 2022). It is not only for the writer but for all the younger generation, especially the younger generation in Manggarai. They should continue to preserve and carry out the meaning of important rites for their lives in accordance with the developments and changes that are taking place to all aspects of life. This is the first step towards dialogue to reconcile the two values between indigenous and modern cultures. *Penti* is a bridge and a foundation for the younger generation to protect and care for the integrity of creation. In this case it has been alluded to in the Encyclical *Laudato si*

CONCLUSION

From these findings regarding the relationship between *Penti* and the life of the Church, two things are interconnected. Within the realm of the Church, all people are invited to respect and protect the integrity of Creation. Preserving the integrity of Creation is part of the faith process. God is present in his creation. Therefore, through the findings discussed which refer to the relationship between *Penti* and the life of the Church, we all need to maintain the integrity of the created Nature. The Nuance of *Penti*, which has always been passed down from generation to generation by the Manggarai community, is also a lesson for everyone. The *Penti* event is a unique event and contains many cult values that are in harmony with the teachings of the Catholic faith.

This article becomes material for reflection so that the Manggarai people continue to carry out this rite and make this a local wealth (Menggo et al., 2021; Adon et al., 2023; Gole et al., 2024). It is also highly expected for young people to maintain this so that it remains sustainable. The thing that needs to be remembered by young people is to actively participate in this activity. *Penti* is not merely a local event but more than that it is an extension of the Church to encourage and invite its people to protect the integrity of Nature. *Penti*, a traditional thanksgiving ritual of the Manggarai people of Flores, Indonesia, holds significant cultural and spiritual value. Rooted in ancestral traditions, *Penti* marks the end of the agricultural cycle and the beginning of a new one, emphasizing gratitude and the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the divine. However, *Penti* transcends being a mere local event; it is an extension of the Church's mission to foster ecological awareness and stewardship among its people. The Church in Manggarai has seamlessly integrated *Penti* into its broader theological framework, emphasizing the sacramental view of nature. This perspective aligns with the Catholic Church's teachings on environmental stewardship, as articulated in Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The encyclical calls for a "cultural revolution" to protect our common home, urging the faithful to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all creation and the moral imperative to safeguard the environment.

The proclamation of the Church's faith does not stop at the building and the rites, more than that, the church's proclamation must touch the lives of its people (Adon et al., 2022; Hamat et al., 2024; Pandor et al., 2023). In this way the people or society are aware of the presence of the Church in the complexity of their lives. The culture of Manggarai, Flores, is deeply intertwined with the Church's presence, reflecting a profound integration of faith and daily life. The proclamation of the Church's faith extends beyond the confines of its buildings and formal rites, permeating the lives of the Manggarai people in tangible ways. This integration is essential for making the Church's presence felt amidst the complexities of their lives. In Manggarai, the Church actively engages with local customs and traditions, ensuring that faith is lived and experienced in everyday situations. This is evident in the way the Church participates in and supports traditional rituals like *Penti*, which celebrates the agricultural cycle and communal harmony. By doing so, the Church reinforces its commitment to ecological stewardship and cultural preservation, aligning with the community's values and practices.

This important event aside from being an extension of the Church, it is also an actualization of the Manggarai people's faith in protecting the integrity of Nature (Menggo et al., 2021; Jegaut et al., 2021; Pasi, 2021). *Penti* will not fall within the scope of animism but is a facilitator for Manggarai people to have more faith and maintain the preservation and integrity of creation. The Church's involvement in social issues, education, and healthcare further exemplifies its dedication to holistic ministry. By addressing the practical needs and concerns of the people, the Church demonstrates its relevance and compassion, fostering a sense of solidarity and support. This approach ensures that the faith is not an abstract concept but a lived reality that resonates with the Manggarai people, affirming the Church's presence and role in their lives.

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