

# Reinterpreting the *Ngembah Manuk Mbur* Tradition as a Foundation for Child-Friendly Education in the Context of Karo Community

Maria Sinta br. Sembiring<sup>1</sup>, Justitia Vox Dei Hattu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1, 2</sup> Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologi Jakarta, Indonesia

## Abstract

Attention given to children from the womb plays a vital role in supporting their physical and character development. The Karo tribe has a seven-month pregnancy tradition called *ngembah manuk mbur*, which aims to provide care and attention to pregnant mothers and their unborn children. However, this tradition remains limited in terms of fulfilling the rights of unborn children. Therefore, this study aims to reinterpret such tradition in the light of a biblical-theological context and within the framework of a Child-Friendly Church that it can serve as a foundation for child-friendly Christian education in the context of Karo community. The study employs a qualitative method with a literature review to explore the concept of the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition and the concept of a Child-Friendly Church. These concepts serve as analytical tools to examine the implementation of such tradition. The findings indicate that reconstructing the tradition based on biblical-pedagogical principles and within the framework of a Child-Friendly Church can transform it into a foundation for child-friendly education within the Karo community. Traditionally, *ngembah manuk mbur* is conducted to strengthen pregnant mothers and is only performed for first-born children. This study proposes three key reconstructions of the tradition: it should be performed for all children, it should be carried out throughout the mother's pregnancy, and it should serve as a way for all family members to welcome the child into the family.

**Keywords:** *ngembah manuk mbur*, child-friendly education, basic rights of children, Karo community, child education

## **Introduction**

Law Number 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, Article 1, defines a child as "any person under the age of 18 (eighteen) years old, including an unborn child" (Indonesia, 2007). Based on this law, it becomes clear who qualifies as a child. A child is not only the born person but also unborn one. Both born and unborn children are recognized by law and are entitled to their rights.

In Christianity, a child is regarded as a precious and dignified creation of God, created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, just like adults, children have inherent dignity and should be treated with respect. However, in reality, not all children are treated well or raised in environments conducive to their growth. Often without realizing it, they are neglected, ignored, or even subjected to violence (Anak, 2019a). To address this issue and demonstrate care and concern for children, churches in Indonesia, in collaboration with Christian organizations committed to child welfare, launched the Child-Friendly Church Movement in 2017 (Anak, 2019a). This movement was initiated by the National Child Care Network (*Jaringan Peduli Anak Bangsa*) in cooperation with various church denominations and Christian organizations working to fulfill children's rights. Representatives from different church denominations and Christian schools also supported the establishment of the Child-Friendly Church Movement (Anak, 2019b).

Awareness of creating child-friendly environments is becoming more evident in various aspects of Indonesian society today. This can be viewed in initiatives like Child-Friendly Churches, Child-Friendly Schools, Child-Friendly Communities, and even Child-Friendly Hotels. All these efforts aim to promote the fulfillment of children's rights. However, amidst the growth of the Child-Friendly Church Movement, the rights of unborn children have yet to receive significant attention. While churches have taken steps to establish child-friendly environments, the focus on the earliest phase of a child's life—the prenatal stage—remains limited. Selano (2020) highlights that Christian education often addresses learners from various age groups, such as the elderly, adults, youth, teenagers, and children, but it rarely emphasizes Christian education for unborn children. He points out that the prenatal stage is a crucial starting point for educational development (Selanno, 2020). Similarly, Allo (2022) notes that Christian education typically focuses on children, youth, adults, and the elderly, but the education of unborn children is largely overlooked.

Care and attention toward children should not be limited to the period after birth but must begin while they are still in the womb. This is because the early stages of life significantly influence an individual's physical development and character. Arthur Janov highlights that the experiences of an unborn child have a profound impact on their innate traits, with early prenatal events having the potential to alter ongoing genetic development (Janov, 2009). Many factors affect a fetus during its time in the womb, all of which can have long-term consequences on the child's life. For instance, a baby's well-being is greatly influenced by the mother's diet, emotional state, and mental health, including anxiety and stress. These maternal experiences affect the child's development and can have lasting impacts on their future life (Janov, 2009).

The golden age of a child's development, from 0 to 5 years, is a crucial period as the brain undergoes rapid growth. Even while still in the womb, a child's brain nerves begin to form, and by the time of birth, the brain contains approximately ten billion neurons. This early phase has a significant impact on a child's intelligence. Experiences during this stage shape the individual's lifelong cognitive and emotional foundation. Therefore, it is essential to provide the right support and guidance as early as possible, starting from the prenatal phase (Samatowa & Sani, 2019).

The lack of attention toward children from the moment they are in the womb is evident in issues such as abortion and the experience of baby blues among mothers after childbirth. Abortion is often linked to a lack of awareness about the significance of the developing life within a mother's womb. Every person, including unborn children, has the right to life. Therefore, abortion is a violation of human rights and a breach of child protection laws (Ratnawati, 2022). The issue of baby blues experienced by mothers is closely related to the pregnancy journey and the postpartum period. Support from husbands and other family members plays a crucial role in preventing baby blues, and this support should begin as early as pregnancy (Wahyuni et al., 2023).

Rahmawati and Budiman (2023) highlight that abortion through induction in Indonesia is rarely officially reported to be successful due to strict legal regulations that only permit abortion under limited exceptions (Rahmawati and Budiman, 2023). Their study, conducted in 2000 across six regions in Indonesia, revealed that 37 abortions occur annually for every 1,000 women aged 15 to 39. This figure is higher than the regional abortion rate in Asia, which stands at

approximately 29 cases per 1,000 pregnancies. Further research conducted in 2018 revealed that on the island of Java, there were 1,698,230 abortion cases. This equates to an abortion rate of 42.5 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 49, surpassing the global abortion rate of 39 per 1,000 cases (Rahmawati & Budiman, 2023).

In addition to the prevalence of abortion, the phenomenon of baby blues has also garnered serious attention due to its impact on a child's growth and development. According to WHO data from 2018, around 300 million women worldwide experience baby blues. In Indonesia, the incidence rate ranges from 50% to 70% (Siringo-ringo, 2022). A study conducted in Yogyakarta revealed that out of 68 mothers were surveyed, 44 of them experienced symptoms of baby blues (L. Lestari & Putri, 2022). Similarly, in North Sumatra, 10.17% of women experienced postpartum complications, which are often linked to baby blues symptoms (Siringo-ringo, 2022).

Therefore, the issues of abortion and baby blues, as discussed above, highlight the need for the Child-Friendly Church Movement to also focus on unborn children. Abortion is an act of violence and the taking of life from an unborn child, depriving them of their right to live. Meanwhile, if the issue of baby blues is not addressed seriously, it can have negative effects not only on the mother but also on the child's well-being. For this reason, creating a child-friendly environment for unborn children becomes a crucial concern. According to the Child-Friendly Church Team, children need a supportive environment to foster their growth in line with the dignity and potential granted by God (Anak, 2019a). A child-friendly environment is closely tied to the culture within the community, as each culture influences the child's growth and development. Thus, it is essential to identify cultural elements that support or hinder the fulfillment of children's rights. This identification process is critical to developing a culture that genuinely promotes a child-friendly environment.

In general, Indonesian society acknowledges a child even while in the womb. This is evident in the traditions of various ethnic groups in Indonesia during the seven-month celebration (Panjaitan, 2019). Ethnic groups in Indonesia have their own versions of the seven-month tradition, although the names differ, such as *mitoni* (seven or seventh month) among the Javanese, *Mandi-mandi manujuh bulanan* (seven-month bath) from South Kalimantan, *mambosuri* (feeding) from Batak Toba, and others. Like the general Indonesian society, the Karo ethnic group also has a seven-month tradition called *ngembah manuk mbur* (bringing a

fat chicken). This tradition is still practiced by the Karo community today, not only in Karo land but also by Karo communities in major cities. The tradition is known by different names in various Karo communities, such as *mbesur-mbesuri* (feeding until full), *cekuh gumbang* (reaching out to the food supply), *nggetuk bulung itung* (picking a type of leaf), *maba tinaruh mbentar* (bringing white eggs), and *ndungi bicara kalimbubu* (settling a conversation with the mother's family) (Sembiring, 2014). In Karo society, differences in names and the execution of a tradition are common, influenced by the location and region where the tradition is performed. However, today, the most commonly used term is *ngembah manuk mbur*. The Batak Karo Protestant Church (GBKP) has adopted this tradition as part of their casuistic worship and uses the name *ngembah manuk mbur*.

*Ngembah manuk mbur* is considered the first traditional ritual performed for a child while still in the womb. The responsibility for carrying out this tradition lies with the woman's family and is only done once to welcome the birth of the first child. The event is held to provide encouragement and strength to the family, especially the pregnant mother (Moderamen Gereja Batak Karo Protestan, 2017).

Research on the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition has been conducted by Perangin-angin and Munthe (2022). In their study, they used the term *mbesur-mbesuri*, approached from a dogmatic perspective, and examined its relevance to the GBKP. Dogmatically, the *mbesur-mbesuri* tradition was found not to conflict with the teachings and doctrines of the GBKP. This tradition is viewed as an act of worship to give thanks to God for the new life in a mother's womb. Additionally, it is seen as a form of pastoral care to bring joy and strength to the pregnant mother, ensuring a safe pregnancy and delivery.

While Perangin-angin and Munthe examined the *mbesur-mbesuri* tradition (feeding until full) from a dogmatic perspective, Sembiring (2014) approached the tradition through a linguistic analysis. This study highlights the close, inseparable relationship between language and culture. The phrases used in the tradition carry hidden messages and meanings, but they can be understood by the Karo people, especially those participating in the tradition.

Although the previous two studies discussed *ngembah manuk mbur*, none have examined the tradition from a Christian Education perspective or within the framework of the Child-Friendly Church Movement. Furthermore, previous research has not addressed the fulfillment of the rights of unborn children

through the tradition. Therefore, this study aims to reinterpret the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition from the perspective of child-friendly Christian Education and within the context of the Child-Friendly Church Movement. This reinterpretation seeks to establish a foundation for implementing child-friendly Christian Education based on the tradition. Three aspects will be reconstructed in this tradition: first, the *ngembah manuk mbur*, which is typically performed once at the seventh month of pregnancy, will be extended throughout the entire pregnancy; second, the tradition, which is usually performed only to welcome the first child, will be applied to all children; third, it will not only serve as a means of preparing the mother's mental state but also as an effort by the family to welcome a child into their midst. Based on the problem background outlined, the research question is: How can the tradition be reinterpreted from the perspective of Christian Education and within the framework of the Child-Friendly Church Movement to create a child-friendly education foundation within the Karo community?

## **Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach, with a literature review as the method for data collection. Several stages were followed in this research, including: first, the author aimed to identify concepts related to *ngembah manuk mbur* and the Christian educational values within the tradition. The author then explored and examined sources of literature such as books and journals discussing *ngembah manuk mbur* and the rights of unborn children. The author critically evaluated these sources. Afterward, the analysis focused on the tradition from the perspective of Christian Education and within the framework of the Child-Friendly Church Movement. This study ultimately seeks to establish *ngembah manuk mbur* as a foundation for child-friendly Christian Education within the Karo community.

## **Result and Discussion**

### ***Ngembah Manuk Mbur Tradition***

*Ngembah manuk mbur*, which literally means "bringing a fat chicken," is a tradition in the Karo community aimed at women who are seven months pregnant. This tradition marks the first celebration for an unborn child (*danak-*



*danak bas bertin*). During the ceremony, *kalimbubu* (the mother's side of the family) and *puang kalimbubu* (the mother's parents) bring food to the pregnant woman and her family. Their visit is meant to offer support and encouragement to the expectant mother while awaiting the birth of her child. The event is also a way to complete the family's joy as they anticipate the birth, ensuring the pregnancy and delivery proceed smoothly and safely. This tradition is only performed before the birth of the first child, based on the assumption that a first-time mother has no experience and faces many uncertainties and worries about childbirth (Sembiring, 2014). Consequently, *ngembah manuk mbur* is not performed for the second pregnancy and beyond. This practice highlights the focus on the pregnant mother rather than the unborn child. Additionally, the assumption that subsequent pregnancies will go smoothly suggests that the experience of carrying a second or third child will be the same as the first, which is not necessarily true. Each child may react differently to the mother, and a lack of attention and support for mothers during subsequent pregnancies seems unjustified. Therefore, the author believes this tradition should be reconsidered to ensure fairness for all children, recognizing each child as equally valuable as an adult.

In Karo tradition, the *ngembah manuk mbur* ceremony is held based on the belief that the cravings of a pregnant woman must be fulfilled for a smooth delivery. Generally, the Karo people believe that unfulfilled desires can hinder the labor process. In the past, the Karo people rarely had access to tasty food, as the types of food available were limited. Meanwhile, pregnant women often craved specific foods that were difficult to obtain on a daily basis. Therefore, the purpose of the *ngembah manuk mbur* ceremony is to provide the pregnant woman with various delicious foods. The hope is that through this event, any food cravings that have not been met throughout the pregnancy can be fulfilled (Perangin-angin & Munthe, 2022).

Typically, the woman's family will bring various types of food to feed the child and daughter-in-law until they are full. The types of food brought include *nakan ras manuk sangkep* (rice with a whole chicken), *tinaruh manuk mbentar* (white eggs), *gulen cipera* (vegetables with corn flour), *kurung ras nurung igule* (a dish of crickets and fish), and several types of Karo cakes such as *cimpa lepat* (cakes wrapped in leaves), *cimpa tuang* (a type of pancake), *cimpa buka siang* (a cake made from glutinous rice flour), *gulame* (porridge with palm sugar), *galuh sileweh sada cikat* (a bunch of bananas), and *pola entebu dasa kitang* (sweet sugar cane). All these

foods are brought by the *kalimbubu* in ready-to-serve form to the home of the pregnant daughter. After the child is born, the *kalimbubu* will give *ndawa* (a carrying cloth) and *bayang-bayang* (ankle bracelets, wrist bracelets, necklaces, and belts made of silver), which are only given to the firstborn child, as younger siblings can use the *bayang-bayang* that was previously given to the firstborn (Sembiring, 2014).

In addition to fulfilling the cravings of pregnant women, this tradition also aims to soothe and heal feelings of heartache, unfulfilled desires, and complaints that have accumulated. This tradition is designed to address the pressures and burdens faced by the expectant mother, whether from her husband's family, her own family, or her surrounding environment. It also serves to strengthen the bond and unity within the extended family (Sigalingging et al., 2023). Darwan Prinst (1996) stated that all psychological issues experienced by pregnant women must be resolved before the day of delivery. If the mother's psychological issues remain unresolved, they could hinder the labor process and even pose a risk to both the mother and child during delivery.

The *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition consists of several stages. First, the expectant mother and father are served food. The *kalimbubu* prepares and arranges a whole chicken and an egg on a large plate. All the food is presented to the couple carrying out the tradition. The husband and wife then sit on a white mat and eat the prepared food (Prinst, 1996). The elders observe how they eat, especially the expectant mother. In the past, there were wise people who could predict the unborn child's behavior based on the mother's eating habits, but this is no longer practiced (Sigalingging et al., 2023). Second, after eating, the next step is to check the position of the egg to predict the child's future (Prinst, 1996). Third, the expectant mother discusses her disappointments with her husband, parents, in-laws, and any other concerns troubling her. Fourth, the family asks about any unfulfilled desires the expectant mother has (Prinst, 1996). Fifth, the family gives advice. Once the mother's wishes are fulfilled, the family offers guidance to the couple awaiting the birth of their child. These pieces of advice play a significant role in mentally preparing the couple for parenthood.

The steps for carrying out the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition vary from place to place. Additionally, the stages performed in the past differ significantly from those practiced today. For example, calling a fortune teller to predict the child's future and character is no longer done. This is because nearly all religious



teachings strongly oppose practices related to fortune-telling. Furthermore, the progress of time and advances in knowledge have led many people to lose faith in fortune-telling (Sembiring, 2014). In the context of the Karo Christian community, particularly the members of GBKP, the event usually begins with a worship service. In fact, the sequence of activities in *ngembah manuk mbur* is now set by the church. This indicates that GBKP does not reject the tradition but recognizes its importance.

The church's decision to embrace the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition is a commendable step and deserves appreciation. By carrying out this tradition, the church (in this case, GBKP) demonstrates its concern for the mental and physical well-being of the pregnant mother. However, the church also needs to provide a sufficient biblical-theological and pedagogical perspective for this tradition, ensuring that it is child-friendly.

### ***Biblical-Theological Foundation on Children***

The Bible reveals that God cares deeply for and values children. Genesis 1:27, which describes the creation of humanity in God's image, is not only directed at adults but encompasses all human beings, including children. This means that every person, regardless of age, holds equal value in God's eyes (Anak, 2019a). Children, therefore, hold the same position as adults before God, as they are also created in His image and likeness. Hence, children possess an identity as dignified creations.

Additionally, Matthew 18:14 clearly demonstrates that Jesus is open and welcoming to children, just as He is to adults. This reveals that the kingdom of heaven is open to all, both adults and children. Children hold the same place as adults before God and in the kingdom of heaven. For this reason, Jesus rebuked His disciples for hindering children from coming to Him. Believers in Jesus are called to bring children to Him (Tubagus, 2022).

The Bible passages clearly reveals how God demonstrates His care for and values children (Matt. 18:1-11). He listens to the voices of children in times of trouble (Gen. 21:17-21), involves them in His work (John 6:1-15), protects them (Matt. 18:10), and remembers them in His vision (Isa. 11:8; 65:20) (Anak, 2019a). Moreover, Mark 5:21-24; 35-43 and 7:24-30 explain that Jesus loved and helped all children, without discrimination. He helped Jairus' daughter (Jewish) and the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (Greek). Jesus also ensures the growth of

children (Gen. 1:28 and 31) and reminds adults to give their best to children (Matt. 18:6). God protects children from evil (Lev. 19:29), from poverty (Deut. 24:19-22), from false spiritual practices (Lev. 20:1-7), and ensures their rights are well upheld (Deut. 21:15-17) (Supartini, 2017). These Biblical explanations emphasize that God places children significantly in His ministry. He positions children in an important and strategic role, not merely as ordinary figures. A survey of Biblical texts also reveals that terms related to children appear over 8,000 times in the Bible (Anak, 2019a; Hattu, 2018).

Hattu (2018) states that the Bible presents "various faces" of children, revealing both actions that support the continuation of life for children and those that threaten their lives. Some examples include: first, the presence of children is greatly desired, and they are considered as the heirs of future generations (Gen. 1:28-29) (Hattu, 2018). Second, Deuteronomy 6 reveals that children grow within the care of their families and communities (Hattu, 2018). According to Deuteronomy 6, parents are responsible for raising and teaching their children in every opportunity they have, using various methods of instruction. In Jewish tradition, parents play a key role in their children's lives. They are tasked with passing down the story of God's salvation in the past, including His covenant with the Israelites, so that the new generation understands what God did for their ancestors (Mary, 2020). Parents are also responsible for teaching their children to love God, and this teaching must be repeated continuously, not just occasional. Deuteronomy 6 emphasizes that the family is the primary and foundational place for shaping a child's spirituality, as children spend much of their time within the family (Salu, 2022).

Third, children serve as an example of humility for adults (Hattu, 2018). In Matthew 18:1-5 and Mark 9:33-37, Jesus instructs His disciples (who are adults) to learn humility from children. This request contrasts with the Roman society's view at the time, which considered children to be incomplete humans. Fourth, the continuity of children's lives is prioritized, as reflected in the story of Ishmael and Hagar (Gen. 21:14-21), Jesus healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28), healing the daughter of Jairus (Matt. 9:18-26), healing a child with epilepsy (Matt. 17:14-20), and healing a child in Capernaum (John 4:46-54) (Hattu, 2018). Fifth, children are given space to express their opinions, as shown in Luke 2:41-51, where the young Jesus is allowed to ask questions and share His thoughts among the adults (Hattu, 2018).

God's concern for children extends not only to those who are born but also to those unborn ones. Psalm 139:13-16 describes how God forms a person even while in the mother's womb. Therefore, an unborn child is viewed as a dignified individual, not because of any achievements, but because they are God's creation, made in His image and likeness (Anak, 2019a). Psalm 139:16 reveals that God pays close attention to a child from the moment they are in the womb. This affirms that, even before birth, a child is deeply valued by God, with His eyes set upon them, and He has a good plan for their future (Selanno, 2020).

The Bible testifies that pregnancy and birth are magnificent works of God (Ps. 139:13-14). God has a purpose and plan through the birth of a child. The prophet Jeremiah recognized that God called him even while he was in the womb (Jer. 1:5). Isaiah was formed to be God's servant while still in his mother's womb (Isa. 49:5a). David acknowledged God's protection from the time he was in the womb (Ps. 22:10). The Apostle Paul recognized that God's calling for him to be an apostle began even before he was born (Gal. 1:15). Similarly, children such as Samson, John the Baptist, and Samuel were chosen from the womb. This reveals that children are valuable, even before birth. Therefore, children require special attention, love, and protection, as God has a plan and purpose for their lives (Budiarjo, 2019).

Each child is created by God with a unique background, making them an individual of great value. Jesus has set an example by accepting and appreciating all children, prioritizing them, and making them the focus of His attention. If Jesus demonstrates such care for children, then the church is also called to value, embrace, protect, and educate all children without discrimination (Supartini, 2017).

God desires children to be treated well as they are His creations, holding a special place and worth before Him. Genesis 1:28 speaks of God's blessing for humanity to multiply and grow. This emphasizes that God has given children the potential to grow and develop holistically, and it is the responsibility of others to protect and nurture them (Prov. 31:8) (Supartini, 2017).

The biblical-theological foundation outlined above reveals that God deeply cares for and values children, including those unborn. God acknowledges and takes into account the existence of children, even making grand plans for them from the moment they are in the womb. Therefore, through Christian education, Christians are called to pay attention to children even before they are

born. An unborn child has the right to be recognized and respected as a dignified individual, as they are created in the image and likeness of God. By acknowledging and understanding the rights of unborn children, we can ensure that every child in the womb receives their rightful respect without discrimination.

### ***Pedagogical Foundation on the Importance of Education for Unborn Children***

Selanno (2020) states that the mother's womb is God's creative area for bringing forth the beginning of human life. This relates to Jeremiah's assertion that God forms, knows, and calls humans from the womb. Therefore, the process of shaping and educating a child begins while they are still in the womb. Bhamani (2017) explains that the sounds from parents and the surrounding environment can be heard and learned by the child from within the womb. The sounds and words frequently heard by the child will make them familiar with these sounds once they are born. Thus, communication between the mother and the unborn child helps form a bond and warmth between them. Teaching mothers to communicate with their unborn children will help them feel more relaxed and calmer, as they develop a sense of connection with their child (Bhamani, 2017).

According to Lee (1995), an unborn child is an individual with feelings and a desire to communicate. Therefore, the growth and development of the child in the womb are also influenced by positive interaction and communication with the mother. Emphasizing the mother's role here does not diminish the father's role, but simply highlights that it is the mother who carries the child and experiences its development in her womb. This aligns with the findings of Yetkin et al. (2023), who state that the fetus can already distinguish and respond to both internal and external sounds. Their research reveals that when a baby hears the mother's voice, its heart rate increases, while hearing a stranger's voice causes the baby's heart rate to slow down. In some cultures, direct communication with the unborn child is not common, yet daily conversations with the child in the womb have a positive impact on its development.

What a child experiences in the womb leaves a lasting impression on the subconscious mind and can endure for a long time. Physiological and psychological factors develop and revolve around these memories as the human brain has a unique ability to remain active even when the individual is at rest (Janov, 2009). From the moment of conception, the brain begins processing

information and storing it in the subconscious. The subconscious mind significantly influences long-term life experiences after birth (Janov, 2009). Therefore, all events experienced by a child in the womb are stored in the subconscious memory, and unknowingly, an individual's life is influenced by this subconscious.

Lestari and Ekaningtyas (N. G. A. M. Y. Lestari & Ekaningtyas, 2022) state that the period spent in the womb is when inherited traits from the parents come together to form the foundation of life, which impacts the child's future stages of development. This process of inheriting traits only occurs once in a lifetime, during the time the child is in the womb, and cannot be repeated (N. G. A. M. Y. Lestari & Ekaningtyas, 2022). Thus, it is crucial to provide stimulation to the fetus in the womb, as physiological and biological factors are shaped during this period. Additionally, the fetus responds to both the mother's voice and external sounds, indicating that the fetal brain is active in receiving stimuli from outside the womb (Kusbandiyah & Astriani, 2015). Given this need, there must be a framework to educate and remind parents about the importance of paying attention to the child in the womb. In this context, we see that the tradition of *ngembah manuk mbur* could serve as an alternative way to provide attention to both the pregnant mother and the unborn child.

The Rabbinic tradition in the Babylonian Talmud states that a fetus in the womb already learns the Torah, and the relationship between the fetus and God begins even before birth (Kessler, 2009). The Rabbis describe the fetus as a pious child, eager to learn the Torah, obeying commandments, and avoiding prohibitions in Judaism. By portraying the fetus in the womb as a devout follower of Judaism, they intentionally construct the identity of the fetus as a Jew (Kessler, 2009). This view demonstrates the importance of early education, even in the womb, as it lays a strong foundation for character development and teaches the child to honor God.

Jewish families have always made a concerted effort to preserve their identity and engage in religious education within the family and community. In the time of Jesus, Jewish family education took place in synagogues and schools. Children were taught the Torah to understand its meaning and apply it in daily life. Parents, as the primary educators, were responsible for imparting the Torah. The goal was to raise a generation that was both intelligent and devout (Selanno, 2020).

John Amos Comenius, as explained by Boehlke, clearly outlines his thoughts on lifelong education, which begins at birth and continues into old age (Boehlke, 2003). A person is shaped by the educational stages they go through throughout their life. The first stage of education occurs while the baby is still in the womb, and this stage is called the birth school. The birth school naturally takes place in every household, under the supervision of the parents themselves. During this stage, the husband and wife must strengthen their commitment to raising their children in the image of God. Therefore, if a married couple has not carefully considered the event of pregnancy, it would be better for them not to become parents. Parents are expected to pray as much as possible in anticipation of the baby's birth as a gift from God. Every individual needs a school that gradually helps them grow according to the needs at each stage of development, starting from within the womb.

Education for a child in the womb is the primary responsibility of parents before the child is born. This signifies that parents thoughtfully prepare their child to have a Christian character, capable of growing in their existence as a Christian (Allo, 2022). Therefore, Comenius' statement emphasizes that the educational stages for each person begin while they are still in the womb. The mother's womb is the first school for a child, and this is possible because the child's brain is already processing everything it hears and feels from within the womb.

### ***Reconstruction of the Ngembah Manuk Mbur Tradition as a Foundation for Unborn Child-Friendly Education***

Essentially, Indonesian society has a positive view of children. However, it is important to recognize that no culture is perfect. Some policies can lead to issues for children, such as cultures that treat boys and girls in a different way, resulting in discrimination against girls (Panjaitan, 2019). In this paper, the author proposes three reconstruction efforts—based on the biblical, theological, and pedagogical foundations discussed earlier—on the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition, which the author believes holds great potential to serve as the basis for Christian education for children in the womb within the Karo community, as explained below.

First, the implementation of the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition, which was traditionally reserved for welcoming the firstborn child, will shift to a ritual for



welcoming the birth of all children. This shift is based on the theological foundation mentioned above, which emphasizes that all children are created in the image of God and are entitled to equal recognition, regardless of whether they are the first, second, or subsequent children. This view aligns with the 10 rights of children, which include: name (identity), nationality, protection, food, health, recreation, education, play, participation, and equal roles in development (Muzzakar, 2022). Article 28, paragraph 1 of the 1945 Constitution emphasizes that children also require the fair recognition, guarantees, protection, and legal certainty, as well as equal treatment under the law (Indonesia, 2009). The rights of children to receive a name, equal treatment, and recognition are fundamental rights that should be granted to all children. In the creation story in the book of Genesis, it is said that God gave humanity the mandate to name all creatures in the garden. If all creatures require names, how much more so does a human being (Budiarjo, 2001). Therefore, according to the author, the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition should extend attention to all children, regardless of their birth order. The second, third, and subsequent children have the same rights as the firstborn, including participating in the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition. Kusumo (2008) notes that in the Bible, God allowed some firstborn children to inherit the birthright, but God rejected the preferential treatment given to the firstborn. Nearly all the key figures in the Bible were not firstborns, such as Abel, Seth, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Joseph, Ephraim, Moses, and David. This demonstrates that God disregards discriminatory favoritism towards the firstborn. Caldwell (2011), in her book *God's Big Table*, illustrates that all children, from various backgrounds, are invited to dine together at God's table, just as Jesus welcomed all children with unconditional love, listening to them, and blessing them (Caldwell, 2011). Moreover, the theological position of GBKP regarding *ngembah manuk mbur* should also be considered, as GBKP has adopted this ritual as part of its ministry. According to the GBKP Synod's decisions, *ngembah manuk mbur* is an act of thanksgiving to God, acknowledging that a child in the womb is a gift and blessing from God (GBKP, 2017). Based on GBKP's theological view, all children are gifts and blessings from God, and therefore, the thanksgiving service should not be limited to welcoming only the firstborn, but should extend to welcoming the presence of all children.

Second, the attention and prayers that were traditionally given only at the seventh month of pregnancy will now be extended throughout the entire

duration of the pregnancy. This reconstructive proposal is based on a pedagogical foundation, which emphasizes that from the early signs of life, the physical and psychological development of the child in the womb is influenced by both internal and external factors. Education begins as early as the time the child is in the womb, and therefore, continuous support through prayers and attention is needed throughout the pregnancy to foster the child's growth and strengthen the mother's heart. This approach is also supported by medical views, which state that the early stages of pregnancy (the first trimester) are the most vulnerable to the risk of miscarriage. During this period, it is highly recommended that the mother avoids heavy activities and, as much as possible, refrain from stress or emotionally triggering situations that could disturb the peace of mind of the pregnant woman (Suprpto, 2013). As previously mentioned, the church also supports and provides attention to pregnant women through the *ngembah manuk mbur* thanksgiving service. Therefore, the church should extend its attention to both the mother and the child in the womb throughout the pregnancy by regularly praying for them, both during Sunday services and at other opportunities.

The disciplined Jewish tradition of offering a series of prayers for the mother and child in the womb can serve as a valuable lesson and insight for praying for both during the pregnancy process. Marten Stol (2009) explains that the Talmud provides guidance on the prayers that should be said during pregnancy (Stol, 2009). On the first three days, prayers are offered to prevent the seed from decaying; from the third day to the fortieth, praying for the child to be a boy; from the fortieth day to three months, praying to ensure there is no growth restriction; from three to six months, praying to prevent the baby from dying in the womb; and from six months to one month before delivery, praying for a safe and smooth labor (Stol, 2009). Stol's explanation shows us that the ritual of praying as soon as a woman is confirmed pregnant is vital for supporting the growth and development of the fetus, as it reflects hopes and blessings for the child. At the same time, we must recognize that prayers should not solely focus on asking for a boy, but also be open to welcoming a girl into the family. Regular prayers for the mother and child in the womb bring peace to both mother and baby. As noted by Perangin-angin and Munthe, the church's attention and care through the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition have a psychological impact on pregnant women (Perangin-angin & Munthe, 2022). This is also crucial for the

unborn child, as previously mentioned, they already have the ability to hear and feel all the sounds and events outside the womb. The celebration can take place when the pregnancy reaches seven months, but the church should not limit its prayers to just the *ngembah manuk mbur* ceremony.

Third, the focus of the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition, which was originally directed only at pregnant women, is expanded to include both the mother and the child in the womb. This expansion is based on the understanding that not only adults need attention, but children do as well, and that both children and adults stand on equal ground before God. This aligns with a pedagogical foundation that emphasizes the need for attention and external stimuli for the child in the womb. Hattu (2018) mentions that the Jewish people also view children as a gift from God, which is why they have a tradition of welcoming a child's birth with music and celebrations to announce the arrival of the newborn. Additionally, the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition can also serve as a medium for communication and educating the child in the womb. If this tradition has included giving advice to the pregnant mother, it can also be extended to the child in the womb. This is possible because, at a certain age, the child in the womb is capable of hearing and responding to external sounds. Allo (2022) suggests that adults can educate the child in the womb through dialogue. Communication with the child in the womb has a significant impact on developing the child's emotions, character, and intelligence.

### **Implication**

The church has a responsibility to ensure that every child in the womb receives their rights from both their family and the surrounding environment, thereby supporting the child's holistic development. Through the Karo community's *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition, the church can collaborate with parents and the community to create a child-friendly environment and education system starting from the womb. This is essential because a child in the womb holds an equal position with adults before God. There are three efforts to reconstruct the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition, which can also serve as implications for the church (GBKP) and the Karo community in carrying out the tradition. First, *ngembah manuk mbur* should be performed to welcome the birth of every child. Second, the church should offer prayers and provide attention to both the mother and child throughout the pregnancy. Third, the tradition should

serve as a means of recognizing and welcoming the arrival of a new family member. By doing so, the church (GBKP) can demonstrate its child-friendly approach by maximizing the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition as one of the foundational elements of Christian education that prioritizes the well-being and development of children.

### **Further Research Recommendations**

This research offers broad insights to readers, as it not only presents the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition but also seeks to connect and analyze its implementation through a biblical-pedagogical perspective within the framework of a Child-Friendly Church. The approach of linking the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition with child-friendly Christian education, using the perspective of the Child-Friendly Church Movement, represents a unique and innovative method. By reinterpreting the tradition in the light of Christian education and within the context of a Child-Friendly Church, this study aims to establish it as a foundation for child-friendly Christian education, particularly for unborn children, within the Karo community. The review of the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition also has the potential to strengthen the congregation's interest in preserving and cherishing local traditions, especially those rich in positive values.

The author acknowledges that this study has certain limitations, primarily due to the limited time available to work on the research. Therefore, the author proposes further studies related to the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition, with a focus on exploring and analyzing how its implementation can be adapted to strengthen the younger generation's attachment to cultural heritage within the Karo community. Additionally, future research could adopt an interdisciplinary approach, providing deeper insights into education, parenting, and cultural practices in the context of Karo community.

By integrating cultural and spiritual values, this approach could foster a stronger community bond with their cultural heritage while laying a solid foundation for child-rearing practices. The proposed follow-up research aims to explore the role of the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition in promoting child-friendly education and its impact on preserving Karo cultural heritage. This study will analyze how the tradition can be adapted to support child development while

simultaneously strengthening the connection of younger generations to their cultural roots.

## **Conclusion**

Unborn children possess the same rights and dignity as those who have already been born. One tangible way to demonstrate care for children is by fostering a child-friendly approach, even from the moment they are in their mother's womb. The Karo community's tradition of *ngembah manuk mbur* reflects this value by offering space and attention to children during the prenatal stage. However, this cultural practice requires a reevaluation to serve as a foundation for child-friendly education within the context of Karo culture. There are three proposed efforts to reconstruct the *ngembah manuk mbur* tradition. First, what was once a ritual reserved for welcoming the firstborn child should be expanded to celebrate the arrival of every child, without discrimination. Second, the care and prayers that were traditionally offered at the seventh month of pregnancy should instead be extended throughout the entire pregnancy, focusing on both the mother and the child. Third, the focus of *ngembah manuk mbur*, which typically centers on the expectant mother, should be broadened to include the unborn child as well. By implementing these three reconstructions, the tradition can serve as a culturally grounded framework for child-friendly education, nurturing a child's well-being from the earliest stages of life.

## **References**

- Allo, W. B. (2022). Pendidikan Agama Kristen pada Kehidupan Pranatal Keluarga Kristiani. *PEADA: Jurnal Pendidikan Kristen*, 3(1), 31–42. <https://doi.org/10.34307/peada.v3i1.61>
- Anak, T. G. R. (2019a). *Modul Gerakan Ramah Anak*. Literatur Perkantas.
- Anak, T. G. R. (2019b). *Panduan Gerakan Ramah Anak* (Y. M. Indrasmono & P. D. Setyawan (eds.)). Literatur Perkantas.
- Bhamani, S. (2017). Educating Before Birth via Talking to the Baby in the Womb: Prenatal Innovations. *The Aga Khan University: Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 4(2), 368–375.
- Boehlke, R. R. (2003). *Sejarah Perkembangan Pikiran dan Praktek Pendidikan Agama Kristen: Dari Yohanes Amos Commenius Sampai Perkembangan PAK di Indonesia*. BPK Gunung Mulia.

- Budiarjo, T. (2001). *Sorotan Alkitab tentang Anak*. Yayasan Obor Mitra.
- Budiarjo, T. (2019). *Merajut Teologi Anak*. Kanisius.
- Caldwell, E. F. (2011). *God's Big Table: Nursuing Children in A Diverse World*. The Pilgrim Press Cleveland.
- Hattu, J. V. D. (2018). Anak dalam Alkitab. In T. KTAK, A. B. B. Gemilang, & J. P. A. Bangsa (Eds.), *Teologi Anak: Sebuah Kajian* (pp. 41–57). Literatur Perkantas.
- Indonesia, P. R. (2007). *Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 23 Tahun 2002 Tentang Perlindungan Anak*. Visimedia.
- Indonesia, P. R. (2009). *Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Janov, A. (2009). Life Before Birth: How Experience in the Womb Can Affect Our Lives Forever. *Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health*, 23(3), 143–184.
- Kessler, G. (2009). "Famous" Fetuses in Rabbinic Narratives. In V. R. Sasson & J. M. Law (Eds.), *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (pp. 185–202). Oxford University Press.
- Kusbandiyah, J., & Astriani, S. (2015). Peran Terapi Musik Terhadap Kesejahteraan Janin di Puskesmas Kendal Kerep Malang. *Jurnal Ilmiah Kesehatan Media Husada*, 4(1), 31–37.  
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33475/jikmh.v4i1.165>
- Kusumo, H. (2008). *100 Bible FAQ: 100 Pertanyaan Paling Sering Ditanyakan Tentang Perjanjian Lama*. Penerbit Andi.
- Lee, B. (1995). Life in the Womb and Beyond: Fetal Patterns of Behaviour and Postnatal Interaction. *JR Soc Med: Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 88(6), 359–362.
- Lestari, L., & Putri, E. B. A. (2022). *Yuk Kenali Syndrom Baby Blues dan Upaya Pencegahannya*. CV. Adanu Abimata.
- Lestari, N. G. A. M. Y., & Ekaningtyas, N. L. D. (2022). Psikologi Perkembangan Periode Pranatal Atau Masa Kehamilan. *KUMAROTTAMA: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 1(2), 124–133.  
<https://doi.org/10.53977/kumarottama.v1i2.286>
- Mary, E. (2020). Implikasi Ulangan 5:16 Dalam Pendidikan Keluarga. *Didache: Journal of Christian Education*, 1(2), 141.  
<https://doi.org/10.46445/djce.v1i2.331>
- Moderamen Gereja Batak Karo Protestan. (2017). *Keputusan-Keputusan Konpen: Si*



- Enggo Iputusken Ibas Persidangan Gereja Si Tetap Ipake Seh Genduari. Percetakan Abdi Karya.
- Muzzakar, M. (2022). *Lindungi Anak dari Bibit Terorisme: Cegah dari Rumah, Sekolah, dan Lingkungan Permainan*. PT. Elex Media Komputindo.
- Panjaitan, S. R. (2019). Anak dalam Budaya. In Y. M. Indrasmono, T. G. Silitonga, & P. D. Setyawan (Eds.), *Teologi Anak: Sebuah Kajian* (pp. 75–97). Literatur Perkantas.
- Perangin-angin, A. E. B., & Munthe, P. (2022). Tinjauan Dogmatis Tentang Acara Mbesur Mbesuri pada Usia Kehamilan Tujuh Bulan dan Relevansinya di Jemaat GBKP Runggun Suka. *Jurnal Sabda Akademika*, 2(1), 1–10.
- Prinst, D. (1996). *Adat Karo*. Kongres Kebudayaan Karo.
- Rahmawati, M., & Budiman, A. (2023). *Kerangka Hukum tentang Aborsi Aman di Indonesia 2023*. Institute for Criminal Justice Reform.
- Ratnawati, E. T. R. (2022). Aborsi dan Hak Hidup Janin dalam Perspektif Hak Asasi Manusia dan Kesehatan. *Juris Humanity*, 1(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37631/jrkhm.v1i1>
- Salu, S. B. R. (2022). Implementasi Metode Pengajaran Berdasarkan Ulangan 6:4-9 bagi Perkembangan Spiritualitas Anak Usia Dini. *Didache: Journal of Christian Education*, 3(2), 107. <https://doi.org/10.46445/djce.v3i2.544>
- Samatowa, U., & Sani, R. A. (2019). *Metode Pembelajaran Sains untuk Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*. Tira Smart.
- Selanno, S. (2020). Menelaah Pendidikan Kehidupan Pra-Natal Berbasis PAK Keluarga. *MAGENANG: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristen*, 1(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.51667/mjtpk.v1i1.250>
- Sembiring, M. C. A. (2014). Themes of Maba Manuk Mbur Texts in Karonese Society. *IOSR: Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(4), 16–20. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-19421620>
- Sigalingging, L. E., Sembiring, E. F., Ginting, L. D. C. U., & Agustono, B. (2023). Penerapan Tradisi Mbesur-Mbesuri di Desa Sukanalu, Kecamatan Tigapanah, Kabupaten Karo. *JPDSH: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Dan Sosial Humaniora*, 2(8), 1143–1152.
- Siringo-ringo, E. (2022). Hubungan Dukungan Suami terhadap Kejadian Postpartum Blues pada Ibu Primpara di Wilayah Kerja Puskesmas Sigompol Kecamatan Lintong Nihuta Kabupaten Humbang Hasundutan. *Jurnal Riset Rumpun Ilmu Kesehatan*, 1(2), 306–319.

- Stol, M. (2009). Embryology in Babylonia and the Bible. In V. R. Sasson & J. M. Law (Eds.), *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion, and culture* (pp. 137–156). Oxford University Press.
- Supartini, T. (2017). Sudah Ramah Anakkah Gereja? Implementasi Konvensi Hak Anak Untuk Mewujudkan Gereja Ramah Anak. *Jurnal Jaffray*, 15(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.25278/jj71.v15i1.233>
- Suprpto, I. H. (2013). *Buku Pintar Parenting: Sejak Kandungan hingga Balita*. Media Pressindo.
- Tubagus, S. (2022). Makna Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Dalam Perjanjian Baru. *Apostolos Journal of Theology and Christian Education*, 2(2), 90–101.
- Wahyuni, N. W. E., Rahyan, N. K. Y., & Senjaya, A. A. (2023). Karakteristik Ibu Postpartum dan Dukungan Suami dengan Baby Blues Syndrome. *Jurnal Ilmiah Kebidanan*, 11(1), 114–120.
- Yetkin, A. K., Güneş, B., & Erbaş, O. (2023). Prenatal Auditory Stimulation and Its Significance for Newborns. *JEBMS: Journal of Experimental and Basic Medical Sciences*, 4(2), 96–103. <https://doi.org/10.5606/jebms.2023.1051>