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Swipe to Sin: Online Infidelity as a Challenge for Church Pastoral Counseling

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to critically analyze the implications of online infidelity in the context of church congregations that include threats to the institution of marriage, pastoral challenges and opportunities, and strategic recommendations for mitigation. This study adopts a library study method. This method allows the author to use several literatures in the form of books, scientific journals, online media and contemporary case analysis that are related to the case raised in this paper. The case of online infidelity raised in this study is part of the author's concern over the phenomenon that has degraded and damaged the institution of marriage in the church. In addition, online infidelity does not only occur in married people, but is a serious threat that targets the younger generation, especially Gen-Z.

INTRODUCTION

According to Uer, human beings as individual beings are intrinsically directed to a relationship with others in an interdependency network. Within this framework, humans build bonds with equal parties (homoioi), both ontologically and socioculturally. The pinnacle of human relations is reached in the marriage bond, a sacred union that unites two persons of different genders in a complementary unity. A relationship that is not only horizontal but also a vertical relationship to God. Marriage is an institution established by God Himself. In line with this, simanjuntak stated, marriage is not a human invention, but an idea of God. This idea has existed since man had not fallen into sin. Christian marriage must hold fast to the truth that the Bible teaches: "what God hath joined together must not be put apart by man." A blessed family is one that keeps its marriage eternal. The development of today's digital technology has brought many significant changes in various aspects of human life, including interpersonal relationships and sexual morality. One of the phenomena that has emerged is online infidelity, where a person who is married and committed to a relationship establishes romantic or sexual interactions virtually through the platform Michat, Tinder and other dating apps. Online infidelity is different from conventional infidelity because it generally does not involve physical contact between its users, but it does not rule out the possibility that intense communication can open up the possibility of conventional infidelity in the way the two users of the platform decide to meet physically. Online infidelity can have a destructive impact on trust, marital bonds, and spirituality. For the unmarried in general and Gen-Z in particular, dependence on the Michat app has the potential to ensnare deviant sexual behavior with the threatening dangers of pornography.

Michat is a messaging application from Singapore, Michat has features like other chat applications such as Whatsapp and Line. In a number of countries, this application invites pros and cons, because many users use this application as a means to conduct online prostitution transactions. According to *amp.kr-asia.com*, Indonesia is ranked first as the most Michat application users in the world at 87.73%. Michat has an excellent feature that allows its users to find new friends based on the distance of the nearest location (People Nearby). The People Nearby feature has existed since 2016 on the Line application, through this feature one can detect objects in an area with a certain distance using *proximity* sensors, Michat provides information to users about the distance of other users' locations so that face-to-face meetings can be held. Infidelity through Michat can also be done online, namely fellow Michat users can exchange videos with each other, which is commonly called Video Call Sex (VCS). Video Call Sex (VCS) is a form of digital intimacy that utilizes social media platforms as a means of virtual sexual transactions. This phenomenon has undergone technical diversification, where VCS services are now not only limited to two-way video interaction, but are developing in other platform variants such as VCS Twitter services, Instagram VCS, Telegram VCS, Whatsapp VCS (WA), and even many offer WA VCS group services as their media. Viewed from the perspective of communication psychology, *psychological attractiveness* is one of the key situational variables that affect the process of interpersonal attraction. This phenomenon is manifested in the practice of online infidelity, in which users present themselves visually through a profile photo. The selection of these images serves as a "code" to construct messages that stimulate the interest of other users. Online infidelity is a phenomenon that needs attention and anticipation, online infidelity cannot be seen simply as a violation of marital fidelity, but also as a form of reducing human relationships into commodities that can be consumed instantly. Pastoral counseling is needed as the church's effort to guide its people to live

faithfully not only to their spouse, but also to God in the modern world where the temptation of sexuality is just a swipe away.

METHODS

The research method related to this paper is a qualitative method through an exploratory approach to document studies, ethnography, and natural observations. This exploratory research method is digging and exploring with the aim of exploring findings and every possibility that exists because initial knowledge about this issue is still minimal. The investigation is directed to find new ideas or relationships that have not been explained so far. The resulting theories and conclusions will still be tentative and provide opportunities to be tested in further research. Data is collected by browsing websites that contain related articles and journals, books and encyclopedias that contain related materials. A Bible search related to the topic to be discussed was also carried out.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Sacramental Theological Basis of Christian Marriage

Marriage is not just a covenant between two individuals, but it is also a tangible bond of Christ's union with His church. Marriage is a personal bond between a couple in which husband and wife commit to each other to give and receive themselves completely. For many people, the pinnacle of happiness in a relationship of two different genders is marriage. *Therefore, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, so that the two become one flesh* (Genesis 2:24). This is how the Bible reveals the reality of marriage, two people meeting and falling in love with each other and uniting themselves forever by forming an eternal and inseparable union. Furthermore, the Bible affirms the sanctity of a Christian marriage based on fidelity and love. *Love your wife as yourself, and the wife should respect her husband* (Ephesians 5:33). Sincere love of husband and wife is full of sacrifice, like Christ's love for the church. The decision to marry makes the husband and wife make a joint commitment to make their partner the main by not leaving room for a third party to break up the marriage. Christian marriage is

a school of love in which husbands and wives learn to love each other not according to human measurements, but according to the measurements of God. In the midst of a modern world that views fidelity as an ancient thing, Christian marriage is called to be Christ's witness that fidelity is possible, love is beautiful, and true marriage is the path to holiness and God's blessing.

Challenges and Opportunities of Pastoral Counseling

The development of internet technology in modern times as it today continues to experience extraordinary progress. The presence of the internet opens access to information, technology, and communication so that humans can be intense in interaction widely. This ease of communication can be accessed in just one smartphone with a variety of applications that can be easily downloaded. The phenomenon of online infidelity is the most complex challenge as well as an opportunity for church pastoral counseling in this digital age. Online infidelity with social media as a means of not only transforming the sanctity of Christian marriage, but demanding a pastoral approach in a different way that adapts to current technological developments. A fresh and adaptive cosmology paradigm is able to bridge the gap between Christian morality and the ever-evolving digital reality.

The challenges of technological advancement, with its many features of anonymity and all its conveniences, have created a new space in which the boundaries of marital fidelity faced by church pastoral counseling have become blurred. Many people, especially Gen-Z, no longer view online romantic or sexual interactions as infidelity, but instead they are very open to cultural differences and enjoy a practical life by seeking new experiences that can offer comfort. According to *Schilling*, actions that seem trivial, but show emotional or physical attraction to others outside of the relationship that the church pastoral counseling is often unprepared for this new phenomenon. The counseling approach that has existed so far tends to be in the form of reconciliation after physical infidelity occurs.

Today's pastoral counseling needs to understand and learn the algorithms of dating apps like how Michat works, how face-to-face meeting features can have a negative impact on their users' negative dependency and the *swipe to sin* culture has changed the way humans interact with each other. Pastoral counseling needs to broaden understanding of psychological and technological dynamics. Without this understanding, pastoral counsel seems irrelevant and outdated.

The rampant online infidelity that occurs today opens up opportunities for church pastoral counseling to be able to understand more deeply the problems that occur in the congregation. According to Basongan, religious leaders need to master technology to remain relevant in the digital era. Pastoral counseling has the opportunity to improve counseling services in accordance with the times by developing new skills that are in accordance with virtual culture and remaining critical of the development of digital technology without neglecting Christian ethical values.

Mitigation and Applications

The mitigation of church pastoral counseling begins in a more proactive and preventive way. The Church needs to design a pre-marriage guidance program that is relevant to the development of the current times with a focus on how to maintain fidelity in the midst of the challenges of the digital world. Couples who are about to get married are equipped with the understanding that fidelity is not only about not having an affair physically, but also maintaining purity of heart and mind in every digital interaction. Education and clear agreement on the limits of the use of social media and communication apps with the opposite sex as part of marriage preparation. For married couples, pastoral counseling needs to offer a persuasive discussion about the influence of dating app platform use that can trigger infidelity, online. ini it can be a session where couples can reflect together on their technology usage patterns and how it can affect their marital relationship. On the other hand, counselors should be trained to help couples identify potential early online infidelity, such as a tendency

to hide certain messages from their partner or the use of apps that can lead to pornography.

Efforts to enrich integrated programs for Gen-Z need to be made, the younger generation who grew up with technology as a natural part of their lives. For Gen-Z, the boundaries between the online and offline worlds are almost non-existent. The Church is required to find creative ways to convey the values of Christian fidelity and ethics in a language they understand. Programs such as: spiritual podcasts, short videos on digital applications such as Tik Tok, Instagram or even church retreat programs, teachings, joint prayers and seminars with the theme of Love, Sex, and Dating can be options in building Gen-Z in terms of spirituality and maturity of faith. Pastoral counseling also needs to pay close attention to the impact of online infidelity as a whole. Children who overhear their parents' intimate conversations with others on social media or couples who are caught using online dating apps can have a devastating impact and even deep wounds on children and require special approaches and therapies to heal trauma and inner wounds. A child whose parents cheating will cause him to lose his father and mother figures. Indirectly, parents instill in children that infidelity is something natural, and it is possible that children in the future will follow their parents' actions.

The Role of the Christian Community

The Christian community plays an important role in creating harmony in the family environment, building character and supporting a healthy marriage. The Christian community is at the forefront of building a culture of marital fidelity. When faithful couples in long marriages share experiences of how to maintain domestic harmony, it becomes a living testimony that is far more real than just a sermon or a theory. In a Christian community, everyone can encourage and encourage one another to continue to grow in Christ. From small groups, married couples feel safe when sharing their struggles without fear of being judged or exiled. The Christian community can be the right forum for the recovery of couples who have fallen into the sin of

online infidelity. Through appropriate support groups and pastoral mentoring, the Christian community of couples who have fallen into infidelity can find a path of recovery and reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

Online infidelity is emerging as a new challenge for church pastoral counseling that reduces the sacrament of holy matrimony and demands a transformative church response. The study found three critical findings. *First*, online technology has created features that support the occurrence of online infidelity where virtual interactions are often not considered infidelity. *Second*, traditional pastoral counseling approaches are inadequate to address the psychological dynamics that drive online infidelity. *Third*, the church is required to develop dynamic counseling methods in accordance with the times. In the end, online infidelity encourages churches to renew their ministries, churches need to be adaptive to respond to the rapid development of the times. Pastoral counseling needs to be more creative by exploring the needs of its congregation, both married and young congregations, so that it can minimize the phenomenon of swipe to sin and change it to the fidelity of holy marriage.

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