

## Penetrating The Boundary Of Minahasa Women In The Heritage Of Faith And The Dynamics Of Social Change

**Englin R. Manua<sup>1</sup>, Wolter Weol<sup>2</sup>, Denni Pinontoan<sup>3</sup>**

Manado State Christian Institute<sup>1</sup>, Manado State Christian Institute<sup>2</sup>, Manado  
State Christian Institute<sup>3</sup>

		<b>Abstract</b>
Received: Revised: Accepted:	07 July 2025 16 July 2025 23 July 2025	<i>This study examines the role of Minahasa women in maintaining the heritage of the Christian faith in the midst of the dynamics of social, cultural, and economic changes triggered by the influence of colonialism and modernization. The urgency of the research arises from the need to understand how Minahasa women, who are agents of social transformation and guardians of traditional values, are able to adapt their roles in the face of the dual challenge between local cultural values and the demands of modern times. This research uses a literature review method with a qualitative approach, integrating theological hermeneutic analysis and historical sociological analysis to dive into women's perceptions, experiences, and contributions in religious and social contexts. The results of the study show that despite facing economic pressures, patriarchal systems, and changes in social structure, Minahasa women have managed to utilize education and Christian values as a means of empowerment. These findings affirm the strategic role of women in preserving traditions, developing social innovations, and leading transformation towards a more inclusive and equitable society.</i>
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(*) Corresponding Author:		
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### INTRODUCTION

Women have always been an inseparable part of the journey of human life. They play a central role in the family as mothers who care for and educate the next generation (Bascha, et al., 2022), and in society, they contribute as drivers of change and guardians of social harmony (Rochmawati, 2024). However, a woman's journey is never easy. Throughout history, women have often faced major challenges in the form of discrimination, injustice, and limited access in various fields (Aula, 2023). Despite facing various obstacles, women continue to show extraordinary courage and fighting power in overcoming these obstacles. The dynamics of the social change they experience reflect their ability to adapt, survive, and thrive, a process that Minahasa women also experience.

Globally, women are faced with a huge challenge between traditional expectations and the demands of an ever-evolving era. Their role is not only limited to domestic life but also extends to the social, political, economic, and religious spheres (Reza, et al., 2024). The process of women's adaptation in facing this

changing dynamic shows how important they play in the sustainability of society. Changes in women's roles occur not only in personal contexts, but also in their interactions with the broader social, cultural, political, educational, and economic environment (Waty, et al., 2024). This is part of the dynamics of Minahasa women which also reflects the great changes in their social and cultural structure.

Minahasa, located in the northern part of the island of Sulawesi, has a distinctive social structure and is different from many other regions in Indonesia. Before the arrival of Dutch colonialism, the people of Minahasa were known for an egalitarian social system, where women played a very important role in various aspects of life both in the domestic and public spheres (Mandey & Pinatik, 2022). In this context, Minahasa women play a key role in family decision-making and the implementation of traditional rituals (Ponto, et al., 2024). However, with the arrival of Dutch colonialism in the 19th century, there was a major change in this social structure. One of them is the introduction of a patriarchal system that replaces the egalitarian social system that pre-existed (Palulungan, 2020:53).

This change was also influenced by the entry of Christianity brought by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Before Christianity was introduced, the Minahasa people had a strong belief system with the myth of the origin of Toar-Lumimu'ut as well as respect for ancestral spirits such as Opo Empung and Apo Kasuruan (Pinontoan, 2019:74–83). However, the new teachings brought by the missionaries changed this belief system, as well as influencing the social structure and gender roles in Minahasa society (Mawuntu, 2017).

Throughout the history of the church, women have played important roles in various aspects of spiritual life, including church leadership and mission work. In the biblical narrative, characters such as Deborah, Esther, and Miriam show how women contributed strategically to the spiritual and social leadership of their day (Joyce, 2024). The role of women in the life of faith continued in the early church era, where figures such as Priscilla, Yunia, and Phoebe were recorded as leaders and colleagues of the Apostle Paul in carrying out the mission of spreading Christian teachings (Tumiwa, 2025).

This dynamic is also reflected in the lives of Minahasa women. With an egalitarian cultural background, Minahasa women have long been involved in decision-making and social life, including in religious aspects. The entry of Christianity in the 19th century further strengthened women's involvement in the life of faith, although it also brought new challenges regarding their changing roles in the structure of the church and society (Andani & Fahrudin, 2024). Along with the social changes that occurred, Minahasa women not only became the guardians of religious traditions in the family but also actively contributed to the church's ministry. Just as the female figures in the Bible and the early church played a strategic role in building communities of faith, Minahasa women also took part in ecclesiastical life, both as teachers, prayer leaders, and supporters in mission work. This shows that despite the shifts in social structure due to colonialism and modernization, Minahasa women are still able to maintain their role in building spiritual and social life in their communities.

This article aims to explore how the legacy of the Christian faith has influenced the role of Minahasa women over time and how they have responded to the dynamics of social and cultural changes that have occurred. Focusing on historical, theological, and sociological perspectives, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the position of women in Minahasa culture, as well as the challenges they face in maintaining their identity and spiritual values in the midst of changing times.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a literature review method with a qualitative approach (Syahriza & Jailani, 2023). Data was collected through a literature review that included books, academic journals, scientific articles, and historical documents relevant to the role of Minahasa women in the context of the heritage of the Christian faith and the dynamics of social change. The analysis was conducted using theological hermeneutics and historical sociology approaches to understand how Minahasa women have navigated social change without losing their spiritual and cultural roots.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Minahasa Women in the Heritage of the Christian Faith**

The arrival of the Dutch in Minahasa brought significant changes in various aspects of people's lives, including social, economic, and cultural structures. One of the major impacts of this colonialism is the spread of Christianity which has helped shape the identity and role of Minahasa women in society (Mawarti et al., 2024) Although colonialism is often associated with oppression, for some Minahasa women, Christianity has opened up new spaces for education, social roles, and resistance to the system that oppresses them. This article will discuss how Minahasa women play a role in the heritage of the Christian faith, both in the context of acceptance and resistance to colonialism.

Since the first contact with the Dutch in 1607, relations between the two sides have continued to grow. Initially, this interaction focused more on trade, but gradually the Dutch increasingly dominated the economic and political aspects in Minahasa (Marzuki, 2020; Saefudin et al., 2023). In 1679, the official agreement between the Dutch and the Minahasa rulers further strengthened colonial dominance in this region (Henley, 2021). However, this dominance is not always taken for granted. The Minahasa people had resisted through the Tondano War (1808–1809) in response to increasingly oppressive colonial policies (Sari, 2024). In the midst of social changes that occurred due to colonialism, Minahasa women experienced transformations in various aspects of life. They not only faced challenges in the new social system, but also gained the opportunity to contribute to their communities, especially through education and Christianity.

One of the biggest Dutch influences in Minahasa was the spread of Christianity. Missionaries who came to Minahasa introduced Christian education and teachings which ultimately shaped the character and role of women in their

communities. The education introduced by the missionaries, although initially aimed more at men and people of European descent, also provided an opportunity for some Minahasa women to gain broader knowledge (Hasanah, 2024). With this education, some women began to play a more active role in the church and society. They not only became passive followers of the new religious tradition, but also contributed to the spread of Christianity, both through teaching and social service. Over time, Christian women's groups emerged dedicated to education, health services, and social advocacy, which later became part of the social movement in Minahasa.

Cultural acculturation between Minahasa and the Netherlands was inevitable. The style of dress, the education system, and the way of worship have changed along with the entry of Christian influence. However, Minahasa women still maintain some local cultural values in their lives. In their daily lives, they continue to play an important role in the family and community, while adapting the Christian teachings they have received. However, the presence of Christianity also presents challenges for women. Before colonialism, Minahasa women had a relatively strong position in society, both economically and politically. However, colonial systems often introduced patriarchal norms that limited their space of movement. Nevertheless, Minahasa women do not stay silent. They remain active in the church community and even use Christian education as a means to fight for their rights (Mawarti, 2024). Some of them were even involved in social organizations that opposed colonial policies that were detrimental to local communities (Hutapea et al., 2024).

Education is one of the important tools for Minahasa women in building social awareness and fighting for their rights. Although education in the colonial period was more in favor of men and elite groups, some Minahasa women managed to get better access to education. They not only learn about religion, but also gain insight into the outside world that helps them understand the injustices that occurred under the colonial system. With this education, some women began to dare to voice their opinions and become involved in social movements that aimed to improve the conditions of the Minahasa community. They also play an important role in educating the next generation, ensuring that the values of justice and resilience remain passed on to their children (Laia, 2025).

## **2. The Role of Women in Social and Religious Structures**

Minahasa women historically and culturally have a significant position in social structure as well as religious life. They are not only limited to domestic roles as housekeepers, but also appear active in community leadership. In Minahasa society, gender relations tend to be complementary, namely men and women carry out complementary roles in various aspects of social life. As noted by Manembu (2017), women have an important role in customary decision-making and help determine the direction of policies in communal life.

The strategic role of women in the religious life of the Minahasa people seems to be prominent, especially in the context of ministry within the Evangelical Church in Minahasa (GMIM). In GMIM churches, women are not only

present as congregations, but also play an active role in the structure of spiritual leadership. This involvement shows that women have the same capacity and authority in ecclesiastical ministry as men. Official data from the GMIM Synod Assembly Worker Body (BPMS) accessed in January 2025 reinforces this reality. Of the total 2,687 pastors serving throughout the GMIM area, as many as 1,860 are women. Likewise, in the position of deacon, of the 11,606 people recorded, as many as 8,325 are women. Similarly, in the position of elder, women make up nearly half of the total 16,865 elders, or 8,602 people. Even in religious education services, of the 161 active GMIM religious teachers, 140 of them are women.

These figures clearly indicate that women have not only played a symbolic role, but have become a major force in the ministry and growth of the church. Their presence at various levels of leadership proves that the church provides ample space for women to be actively and transformatively involved in the faith life of the people. In socio-cultural life, Minahasa women are known as guardians of traditional values. They play a role in building and maintaining social networks between families and communities. In traditional structures, women are often trusted to mediate social conflicts, heirs and successors of oral traditions, and maintainers of local cultural wisdom passed down from one generation to the next. This position indicates that Minahasa women not only play a role at the symbolic level, but also have substantial functions in maintaining the social and cultural stability of the community.

Although the Minahasa inheritance system tends to be patrilineal, emphasizing lineage through the male side, women still have ownership rights to family land and property, especially in aristocratic or high-status family environments (Tumoka et al., 2020). This indicates the recognition of women's economic and social capacity in the structure of society. Their role is increasingly seen in the practice of *mapalus* or traditional *gotong royong*, where women participate not only in implementation, but also in the collective planning and decision-making stages (Iqbal et al., 2023).

In addition, Minahasa women have a very prominent role in the traditional economic sector. They are the backbone of agricultural activities by being responsible for the production of food crops such as sweet potatoes, corn, and various types of spices. In this context, their contribution is not only limited to production, but also to the distribution of agricultural products, both within the scope of local markets and between regions (Kotambunan, 2020). In addition to agriculture, Minahasa women are also known as active actors in the field of handicrafts and crafts, such as weaving and textile production, which are one of the important sources of income for families and communities (Tumoka et al., 2020). Minahasa women, thus, play an integral role in all aspects of people's lives from religious, social, to economic. They not only maintain traditional values, but also become agents of transformation that are adaptive to the changing times, while maintaining their distinctive and strong cultural identity.

### **3. Dynamics of Social Change and Challenges of Minahasa Women**

The term dynamics comes from the Greek dynamics, which means strength (Tambunan, 2023). This concept refers to something that is not static, but is constantly moving, changing, and evolving. In the context of social studies, dynamics are used to describe the process of change that actively occurs in the social system. According to Firmansyah (2023), social dynamics mark ongoing interaction and create developments in social life. Kartono (2007) added that changes in society can occur quickly or slowly, on a small or large scale, but they are always related to the reality of life being lived. Women are an important part of the flow of change. Etymologically, the word "woman" comes from the word empu, which means someone who is powerful, proficient, or has expertise. This term then develops into empuan, and subsequently puan, which is a respectful greeting to women (Angellyna, 2022). Since ancient times, Minahasa women have been known to have dignity and a respected position in their community. However, along with social and cultural developments, their roles have also changed (Sutiani, 2022).

In recent decades, the people of Minahasa have witnessed significant changes in the role of women. If previously they were more involved in domestic roles and church-based social services, now Minahasa women are increasingly active in the public and professional sectors. Many of them appear as academics, businessmen, public officials, and social activists (Nengsi, 2024, Astuti, et al. 2024). These changes open up great opportunities, but they also create complex challenges. They now face a double responsibility: on the one hand they are required to succeed professionally, and on the other hand they still bear the responsibilities of family and religious roles. Economic pressures and competition in the world of work also further complicate the situation. Nevertheless, Minahasa women showed extraordinary resilience. With a strong faith background and strong cultural support, they are able to manage these dual roles with full commitment (Farin, 2021).

Minahasa women not only follow the flow of change, but also become the main driving force in their communities. History records that they play the role of guardians of cultural values, preservers of traditions, and agents of transformation in social and spiritual life. In family and community life, Minahasa women are not only companions or caregivers, but also influential leaders in social, economic, and religious aspects (Imran, 2023). However, in many historical narratives, women's roles are often marginalized. They are often only seen as complements to larger stories that highlight more male contributions. Women's contributions in education, economics, social, and politics are often not fully recognized, or even erased from formal history (Aprianto, 2024; Faradilla, 2024). In fact, the role of women in shaping society is very large and irreplaceable.

Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* (1956) criticized the social construct that places women as "the Other", i.e. a position that is always defined in subordinate relations to men. According to her, women's marginalization is not the result of biological differences, but of social structures that normalize gender inequality. Patriarchal systems, customs, and social myths shape perceptions that limit women's space for movement. But de Beauvoir also emphasized that

women's history is not just about oppression, but also about the struggle for their freedom, independence, and existential achievement.

In the context of Minahasa culture, women have a fairly egalitarian cultural heritage. Local values such as *mapalus* (cooperation), *masawang-sawang* (mutual support), and *karai* (self-respect) provide space for women to appear as active subjects in the community. However, the influence of colonialism and modernization also reshaped the social structure, which indirectly strengthened the patriarchal system and narrowed the space for women's actualization. Nevertheless, Minahasa women are still able to survive and adapt to the social changes that occur. They not only survive in challenging structures, but also carry out various forms of social and spiritual innovation. In various fields ranging from education to public service, Minahasa women continue to prove that they have high capacity, creativity, and integrity. They are the main actors in the dynamics of social change, not just followers or complements. Thus, social dynamics in Minahasa cannot be separated from the active role and real contribution of women. The challenges they face both from within and outside the community have shaped them into resilient and visionary individuals. Minahasa women are present as important figures in the process of transforming society, both in preserving traditional values and in encouraging progress towards a more equal and just direction.

#### **4. Theological Response to Social Change**

The theological approach in responding to social changes in the midst of the dynamics of Minahasa society provides a deep understanding of how the heritage of the Christian faith is not only a spiritual foundation, but also provides a critical response to the contextual changes of modern times. By integrating hermeneutic studies with biblical narratives and social realities, this theological response offers an interpretive framework that empowers Minahasa women as agents of social transformation as well as guardians of faith values.

The theological hermeneutic method demands a reinterpretation of sacred texts in order to align biblical messages with evolving socio-cultural dynamics. Figures such as Deborah, Esther, and Miriam who have been recorded in the biblical narrative become symbolic figures in which the courage, wisdom, and leadership role of women are highlighted as ideal models in anticipating and responding to social change. For example, the verse in Judges 4:4-5 can be interpreted that the role of women in spiritual leadership is not only historical, but also relevant in providing solutions to modern challenges (Pipa, 2024). Thus, Minahasa women can find inspiration to continue to be spiritually and socially active in facing the era of change, without forgetting the roots of their faith.

In order to provide a transformative response, the theological framework of liberation offers a perspective that emphasizes justice, equality, and liberation from structural oppression. Verses such as Galatians 3:28 emphasize the equality of all people in Christ, which can be adapted as a theological basis in encouraging inclusivity and recognition of women's active role in community life (Hia, 2022). This approach supports the research that through their roles in education, church ministry, and social advocacy, Minahasa women implicitly

challenge the patriarchal structure that has been limiting their space for movement. This is in line with efforts to reinterpret the Christian tradition contextually, resulting in a critical but constructive response of faith to the dynamics of social change.

The theological response to social change is not merely a defensive response to the challenges of the times, but rather a concrete manifestation of adaptive and progressive faith. By synergizing Christian values that emphasize love, justice, and service, Minahasa women view every social change as a call to innovate and transform without sacrificing spiritual identity. The hermeneutical approach allows the identification of elements of sacred texts that encourage social activism such as the example of the spirit of selfless service taught in Matthew 25:35-40 thus encouraging women to take an active role in mediating and directing social dynamics in accordance with the theological vision that faith is an empowering force (Saputra, 2024). A theological response grounded in an in-depth interpretation of sacred texts also opens up space for a critical dialogue between faith traditions and modernity. Minahasa women, as subjects living in the two worlds of ancestral traditions and the influence of modernization, can respond to social change through an inclusive and open theological lens. This approach invites to reconcile the values of the heritage of faith and the demands of adaptation to new contexts, so that there is no dichotomy between adherence to tradition and innovation in the face of social realities. In this context, comforting verses such as Romans 12:2 which invite people not to resemble the patterns of this world, but to be renewed in their minds, become a metaphorical foundation that the renewal of faith is the key to profound social transformation (Sianipar, 2025).

Finally, theological responses interpreted through a hermeneutic framework have a practical impact on community life. Theological education programs, Bible study groups, and interfaith dialogue forums are strategic means to internalize the values of faith renewal. These activities not only serve as a forum for learning, but also as a mechanism to strengthen social solidarity and sensitivity to contemporary issues. Thus, this theological response acts as a bridge between the past and the future, ensuring that any social innovations adopted remain rooted in the spiritual power and traditional wisdom that has been proven to strengthen the identity of Minahasa women. The theological response to social change is not a mere rhetorical action, but a critical, creative, and transformative process of faith adjustment. By integrating biblical values and hermeneutic approaches, this study confirms that Minahasa women can navigate social dynamics while maintaining a heritage of faith, which in turn supports empowerment and renewal efforts in the context of social justice and spirituality.

## **CONCLUSION**

Christianity, although often identified with colonial domination, turned out to open up opportunities for Minahasa women to gain wider access to education and expand their role in social and religious life. The education introduced by the missionaries provided the knowledge that enabled women not

only to adopt new religious values, but also to be active in resistance to the restrictive colonial policies. In the religious context, Minahasa women show significant activity in the structure of the Evangelical Church in Minahasa, where they not only play the role of the congregation, but also occupy leadership positions that make a real contribution to the growth and development of the church. Not only in the religious realm, Minahasa women also maintain their cultural role as guardians of local traditions and values, even through the process of acculturation between Western values and local customs. They act as mediators in social conflicts and connect traditions that are inherited from generation to generation, as well as actively participate in the economic sector through agriculture, handicrafts, and various mutual cooperation activities. This transformation of women's roles over time presents a social dynamic in which they are forced to balance the dual responsibilities between the professional world and family and religious commitments. Despite facing great challenges, such as economic pressures and societal expectations that often tend to be patriarchal, Minahasa women show extraordinary resilience. They not only keep up with the tide of change, but also actively lead social innovation, using education and faith as tools to fight for rights and justice.

The theological approach put forward through the hermeneutic method and liberation theological framework also plays an important role in strengthening the position of women. The reinterpretation of sacred texts provides a basis for understanding women's role as agents of renewal, while rejecting long-standing structural oppression. By integrating Christian values that emphasize love, justice, and service, Minahasa women find the strength to harmonize traditional values with the demands of modernity, so that they are able to adapt transformatively to the changing times. Overall, this material affirms that Minahasa women are pioneers in pioneering change, playing an active role in the formation of religious and social identities, and being a bridge between tradition and innovation towards a more just and inclusive society.

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