



Spiritual Competence and Holy Living: Insights from Genesis 26:25 for Christian Religious Education Teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGS Pakpak Bharat

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the theological symbolism contained in Genesis 26:25 can inform and strengthen the spiritual competence and holy living of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, with a specific focus on SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGS Pakpak Bharat. The verse-describing Isaac's actions of building an altar, pitching his tent, and digging a well-offers a holistic biblical model for understanding teacher spirituality amid contemporary educational challenges. Through a mixed qualitative methodology integrating a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews, the research examines how these three symbolic actions correspond to the essential dimensions of spiritual formation for CRE teachers: devotional fidelity, ethical embodiment, and communal impact. The SLR synthesizes 32 relevant scholarly sources addressing biblical spirituality, pedagogical theology, and the exegesis of patriarchal narratives. Findings reveal that the "altar" symbolizes disciplined devotion and communion with God, forming the foundation of spiritual identity and vocational authenticity. The "tent" signifies ethical integrity and holy living, highlighting the importance of character consistency in shaping students' moral imagination. The "well" represents relational ministry and transformative engagement, reflecting the CRE teacher's role in providing emotional, spiritual, and communal support within the school environment. Interview data confirm that teachers perceive these three dimensions as interconnected and essential for navigating cultural diversity, adolescent challenges, and institutional pressures. The triadic pattern of altar-tent-well provides a practical framework for integrating spirituality into teaching practice. Overall, the study concludes that Genesis 26:25 offers a biblically rooted, contextually relevant model for cultivating spiritually competent CRE teachers who embody faith, character, and transformative presence in public-school settings.

Keywords: *Spiritual Competence, Christian Religious Education, Holy Living*

INTRODUCTION

The formation of spiritual competence and the cultivation of a holy life are central to the identity and vocation of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, particularly those serving in public schools where religious, cultural, and social diversities interact intensely. In such contexts, CRE teachers are not only transmitters of biblical knowledge but also spiritual mentors who embody the values they teach. Their life witness becomes a pedagogical instrument, influencing how students perceive the Christian faith and its relevance to daily life. Amidst contemporary educational challenges ranging from moral degradation, digital distractions, and diminishing spiritual enthusiasm among youth—the grounding of spiritual competence in biblical foundations becomes increasingly urgent. One of the profound biblical narratives that offers rich theological and pedagogical insights for CRE teachers is found in Genesis 26:25, a concise yet theologically dense verse that describes Isaac’s response to God’s presence: *“Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.”* This verse encapsulates three symbolic actions—building an altar, pitching a tent, and digging a well—each carrying spiritual significance for Christian formation. An exegetical reading reveals that Isaac’s actions were not mere cultural routines of ancient Near Eastern life, but deliberate responses to the covenantal presence of God. The altar signifies worship and communion; the tent symbolizes identity, humility, and pilgrimage; and the well signifies sustainability, blessing, and transformative presence in the community. These three markers of Isaac’s spiritual life mirror the holistic dimensions of spiritual competence needed by CRE teachers today: devotional fidelity, ethical embodiment, and transformational engagement. In the context of SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGS Pakpak Bharat, a school located within a region marked by unique cultural traditions, communal ties, and educational challenges, the role of the CRE teacher becomes even more critical. Teachers are expected not only to deliver curriculum-based instruction but also to foster character formation, spiritual resilience, and critical biblical reflection among students. The diverse influences that shape adolescent behavior in rural-urban transitional communities—peer influence, media exposure, socio-economic pressures, and identity formation—require CRE teachers to possess strong spiritual grounding. Genesis 26:25 provides a framework through which teachers can reflect on how to root their vocational identity in a biblical model of holy living. Exegetically, the structure of Genesis 26:25 is significant. The verse begins with worship (“built an altar”), continues with lifestyle orientation (“pitched his tent”), and ends with community impact (“dug a well”). Isaac’s sequence reflects a movement from relationship with God, to ordering personal life, and finally to participation in communal flourishing. This tripartite pattern challenges contemporary CRE teachers to evaluate the foundations of their ministry. Spiritual competence cannot be separated from consistent devotional practice; holy living cannot be detached from daily ethical choices; and teaching cannot be divorced from relational engagement with students and the wider school community. CRE teachers, therefore, are invited to see themselves in Isaac’s narrative: as individuals called to worship faithfully, live humbly, and contribute meaningfully to their educational environment. Educational literature also increasingly emphasizes the need for teachers to integrate spirituality into moral formation, especially in faith-based educational settings. While public schools in Indonesia uphold religious neutrality, they nonetheless allow the development of each

student's religious identity according to their faith tradition. Hence, CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGs Pakpak Bharat must navigate a dual responsibility: remaining faithful to Christian spiritual values while contributing positively to the school's multicultural ethos. Isaac's model of altar, tent, and well provides practical theological principles for fulfilling this responsibility with authenticity and integrity. This study seeks to explore how insights from Genesis 26:25 can inform the spiritual competence and holy living of Christian Religious Education teachers. Through biblical exegesis and contextual reflection, the article aims to contribute to the discourse on teacher spirituality, biblical pedagogy, and character formation within Christian education in public-school settings.

METHODS

This study employed a mixed qualitative methodology combining Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and simple semi-structured interviews to construct a comprehensive understanding of how Genesis 26:25 can inform the spiritual competence and holy living of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGs Pakpak Bharat. The integration of these two approaches allowed the researcher to bridge biblical-theological exegesis, educational theory, and empirical insights from the lived experiences of teachers in the school. The SLR method was used to examine scholarly works related to biblical spirituality, teacher competence, Christian education, and the theological interpretation of Genesis 26:25. The review followed a structured process consisting of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. The main purpose of the SLR was to establish a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the construct of spiritual competence and its relationship with holy living in the vocation of CRE teachers. Relevant literature was identified through electronic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, ATLA Religion Database, and institutional repositories of Christian universities. To maintain relevance, the search was limited to publications from 2000-2024, although classical theological works were included when necessary for exegetical depth. The initial search produced approximately 120 academic sources. These were screened based on abstract relevance, biblical focus, and connection to educational practices. After removing duplicates, non-academic documents, and theologically irrelevant works, 52 sources were retained for further evaluation. Eligibility was determined by their contribution to three thematic domains: spirituality and Christian character formation, biblical exegesis of patriarchal narratives, teacher competence and pedagogical theology. A total of 32 sources were ultimately selected and synthesized. Literature was categorized by themes reflecting the symbolic elements of Genesis 26:25—altar (spiritual devotion), tent (ethical lifestyle), and well (community impact). The synthesis informed the analytical framework used to interpret interview data. To complement the SLR, simple semi-structured interviews were conducted with CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGs Pakpak Bharat. This empirical component allowed exploration of how teachers understand and embody spiritual competence within their educational environment. All of the participants represent diverse age groups and ministry backgrounds, enabling variation in perspectives. Interviews were conducted in an informal, conversational format lasting 20–30 minutes each. Questions focused on: personal understanding of spiritual competence, practices of spiritual discipline (e.g., prayer, devotion, reflection), ethical and behavioral expressions of holy living at school, challenges faced in embodying spiritual values, relevance of biblical narratives such as

Isaac's altar, tent, and well. The interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent, transcribed verbatim, and verified for accuracy. Thematic analysis was applied using the framework derived from the SLR. Interview transcripts were coded into the categories "altar," "tent," and "well," reflecting dimensions of worship, lifestyle, and community engagement. Recurring patterns were identified, compared across participants, and interpreted in light of biblical insights from Genesis 26:25. This combination of SLR and interview data enabled a richer and more contextually grounded understanding. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their insights were used solely for academic research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, derived from the integration of a Systematic Literature Review and semi-structured interviews, reveal that the concise narrative of Genesis 26:25 offers a profound theological and pedagogical framework for strengthening the spiritual competence and holy living of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGs Pakpak Bharat. The three symbolic actions performed by Isaac—building an altar, pitching his tent, and digging a well—are shown to be more than cultural customs of the ancient Near Eastern world; they are deeply theological responses to the covenantal presence of God. When interpreted within the context of teacher spirituality, the three symbols provide a holistic model of spiritual formation: devotional intimacy with God, ethical embodiment in daily life, and transformational engagement within the community. The results of this study demonstrate that these three dimensions—altar, tent, and well—form an integrated framework for understanding and cultivating spiritual competence among CRE teachers who work within a culturally diverse and educationally challenging public-school environment. The SLR reveals that the "altar" in Genesis 26:25 symbolizes worship, trust, and covenantal communion with God. Biblical scholars interpret the altar as a marker of divine encounter, a place where the worshipper acknowledges dependence on God and submits life to divine guidance (Brueggemann, 2001). For CRE teachers, the altar metaphor represents the foundational dimension of spiritual competence: a life rooted in disciplined devotion. The interview findings consistently show that teachers perceive personal devotions—such as prayer, Scripture reading, reflection, meditation, and spiritual journaling—as essential sources of strength in navigating the complexities of school life. One senior teacher emphasized that "without prayer, the ministry at school becomes dry and burdensome." This perspective aligns strongly with educational spirituality literature, which asserts that spiritual disciplines nourish the inner life of teachers and determine the quality of their teaching presence (Palmer, 2017). Teachers who engage regularly in devotional practices demonstrate higher levels of emotional resilience, patience, and compassion in the classroom. They are more likely to approach disruptive student behavior with empathy rather than frustration, and more capable of maintaining a sense of peace amidst administrative pressure. The study also found that maintaining devotional rhythms is a significant struggle for some teachers. Administrative tasks, curricular demands, and family responsibilities often disrupt their capacity to set aside consistent time for prayer and reflection. This tension reflects a broader global concern in contemporary education, where increasing professional pressures leave teachers with diminishing spiritual space

(Palmer, 2017). The biblical symbolism of building an altar therefore challenges CRE teachers to prioritize divine communion even within the demands of modern schooling. The SLR further shows that devotional life is not a private matter isolated from pedagogical practice; instead, it profoundly influences classroom ethos. The spirituality of a teacher becomes part of the curriculum itself. The writings of Nouwen (1989) suggest that the presence of a spiritually grounded teacher can have a silent yet transformative impact on students, shaping their attitudes, aspirations, and moral imagination. The interview data confirmed this: teachers who maintain regular devotions were perceived by students as more approachable, emotionally stable, and trustworthy. The altar symbolizes the first and most crucial dimension of spiritual competence—one that centers the identity and vocation of CRE teachers in their relationship with God. Without this spiritual grounding, ethical practices and community engagement risk becoming performative rather than authentic. The altar invites teachers to anchor every aspect of their work in worship and divine dependence.

The second symbol, the tent, represents lifestyle, identity, and ethical posture. In biblical theology, the tent embodies the life of a pilgrim—humble, flexible, and oriented toward God's guidance rather than worldly security (Hamilton, 1995). For CRE teachers, pitching a tent symbolizes the shaping of personal character, moral integrity, and relational authenticity. The interview results show that teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGs Pakpak Bharat are acutely aware that their daily conduct is constantly observed by students, colleagues, and the broader community. In a close-knit cultural environment like Pakpak Bharat, the moral reputation of a CRE teacher significantly affects how Christianity itself is perceived. One young teacher stated, "A CRE teacher is like an open book; people watch whether our lives match our teachings." This observation aligns with Tisdell's (2003) concept of embodied spirituality, which asserts that authentic teaching requires coherence between belief and behavior. Teachers commonly struggle with emotional fatigue, interpersonal conflicts among staff, and the increasing behavioral complexities of students influenced by digital media and shifting cultural values. Some express difficulty maintaining patience when confronted with disrespectful or disengaged students. Others describe pressure to conform to certain social dynamics among colleagues that may not align with Christian ethics. The symbolism of the tent challenges teachers to cultivate a spiritual identity that remains stable despite external pressures. It calls them to humility, honesty, self-discipline, and consistency—virtues that are central to holy living. The SLR reveals that ethical integrity is not supplementary but integral to spiritual competence. Palmer (2017) argues that "the identity of the teacher is the curriculum," meaning that who the teacher is has a greater formative impact than what the teacher teaches. The interview data supports this: students are more influenced by the character of the teacher than by doctrinal instruction alone. A teacher who lives ethically becomes a living curriculum. Their attitude in handling conflict, their transparency in admitting mistakes, their fairness in assessment, and their compassion for struggling students all become expressions of spirituality. In this sense, pitching a tent symbolizes living faithfully before God and others in the simplest routines of life. The second dimension of spiritual competence—ethical lifestyle or holy living—is the outward embodiment of the inward spiritual devotion represented by the altar. The tent becomes the visible expression of an invisible intimacy with God.

The third symbol, the well, carries strong communal and generational significance in ancient Near Eastern societies. Wells symbolize life, sustainability, blessing, and relational openness. People gathered at wells; agreements were made at wells; and communities flourished around wells (Walton, 2015). For CRE teachers, digging a well represents the missional and transformational aspect of their vocation-serving students, contributing to school life, and becoming channels of God's blessing. The interviews show that CRE teachers often become the emotional and spiritual support system for many students. Teachers reported that students frequently confide personal problems-family conflict, economic hardship, academic struggles, and questions of identity. Teachers serve not only as educators but as counselors, mentors, and spiritual companions. One teacher described that "students come to us not just for lessons, but for comfort." This aligns with spiritual mentoring literature, which emphasizes that teachers' relational engagement often has a deeper transformative impact than the formal curriculum (Foster, 2008). Teachers also play a significant role in shaping the school's spiritual climate. Simple acts such as offering morning encouragement, initiating short prayer moments, or providing a safe listening space become forms of "living water" for students. These practices reflect the theological idea that spiritual competence naturally overflows into service. The study identifies several obstacles. Some students are indifferent or resistant to spiritual conversations due to family influence or modern secular attitudes. Limited facilities and resource constraints also hinder creative spiritual activities. Despite these challenges, CRE teachers continue to dig "wells" of life, demonstrating persistence, compassion, and innovation. In rural-urban transitional contexts like Pakpak Bharat, where communal identity and relational ties are strong, the well metaphor becomes even more relevant. Teachers are not just educators; they are contributors to the socio-spiritual development of the community. The well symbolizes their calling to offer life-giving presence wherever God has placed them. The well represents the third dimension of spiritual competence: transformative engagement that blesses others. It is the communal fruit of the personal devotion (altar) and ethical life (tent) cultivated by the teacher.

The integration of findings from the SLR and interviews reveals that the three symbols-altar, tent, and well-form a unified framework of spiritual formation rather than separate competencies. They represent a movement from inward to outward: The altar shapes the teacher's relationship with God, the tent shapes the teacher's daily life and identity, the well shapes the teacher's relational impact on the community. This sequence reflects Isaac's spiritual pattern: worship leads to lifestyle, and lifestyle leads to community transformation. The study found that when CRE teachers develop all three dimensions simultaneously, they exhibit strong spiritual competence capable of addressing contemporary educational challenges. Students perceive them as trustworthy, consistent, and life-giving. The school environment benefits from their stabilizing presence. Their teaching becomes more than the transmission of knowledge-it becomes a ministry of transformation. However, when one dimension is missing, the formation becomes unbalanced. A teacher who is strong in devotion but weak in ethical living risks losing credibility. A teacher with strong ethics but weak devotional life may lack spiritual depth. A teacher committed to service but lacking personal discipline may experience burnout. Therefore, the framework of Genesis 26:25 provides CRE teachers with a

biblically grounded, pedagogically relevant, and spiritually holistic model for their vocation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Genesis 26:25—through its three symbolic actions of building an altar, pitching a tent, and digging a well—provides a rich, holistic, and transformative framework for strengthening the spiritual competence and holy living of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, particularly those serving at SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGS Pakpak Bharat. The integration of Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews shows that Isaac's response to God's presence encapsulates essential dimensions of teacher spirituality that remain profoundly relevant for contemporary educational contexts: devotional rootedness, ethical embodiment, and community-impacting engagement. First, the study finds that the altar symbolizes the foundational dimension of spiritual competence: a life grounded in disciplined devotion, prayer, and communion with God. Both literature and interview data affirm that the inner spiritual life of the teacher profoundly influences classroom atmosphere, emotional resilience, pedagogical presence, and the ability to respond compassionately to student needs. Teachers who cultivate regular devotions exhibit stronger spiritual stability, deeper patience, and greater clarity in navigating moral and relational complexities within the school. However, the research also reveals tensions—many teachers struggle to maintain consistent devotional rhythms due to administrative burdens, family responsibilities, and emotional fatigue. The altar thus becomes both a reminder and a challenge: CRE teachers must intentionally sustain their spiritual intimacy with God to anchor their identity and vocation. Second, the tent represents ethical lifestyle, character integrity, and the everyday embodiment of holy living. The findings highlight that students, colleagues, and the local community closely observe the attitudes and behaviors of CRE teachers. In the cultural context of Pakpak Bharat, the moral credibility of a CRE teacher directly impacts the perceived credibility of Christian witness itself. Interview participants repeatedly emphasized the necessity of integrity, humility, emotional discipline, and relational authenticity. The tent metaphor calls teachers to coherence between belief and behavior, reminding them that the most powerful lessons are often taught through example rather than words. The SLR reinforces this insight: the teacher's identity and character become a living curriculum that shapes students' moral imagination and spiritual resilience. Third, the well symbolizes the outward and communal dimension of spiritual competence: service, mentorship, relational presence, and positive contribution to the broader school environment. The interviews reveal that CRE teachers often act as emotional anchors, informal counselors, and spiritual guides for students facing personal or socioeconomic challenges. Acts of kindness, listening, encouragement, and spiritual companionship become "life-giving water" for students navigating adolescence in a rural-urban transitional context. Although challenges exist—such as student apathy, resource limitations, and cultural shifts—the well metaphor urges teachers to remain channels of blessing, offering spiritual depth, hope, and stability to the school community. The integration of all findings shows that these three symbols do not function independently but form an interconnected sequence of spiritual formation. The altar (devotion) shapes the tent (holy living), and together they overflow into the well (community impact). When CRE teachers cultivate all three dimensions simultaneously,

they develop balanced and resilient spiritual competence capable of transforming both their personal lives and their educational environment. Conversely, an imbalance-strong devotion without ethical consistency, moral integrity without spiritual depth, or service without inner grounding-creates vulnerability and reduces effectiveness. Genesis 26:25 provides a biblically rooted, pedagogically relevant, and contextually meaningful model for CRE teachers in public-school settings. It invites teachers to anchor their work in worship, embody holiness in daily practice, and serve their community with life-giving presence. For SMP Negeri 2 Satu Atap PGGS Pakpak Bharat, this framework offers a pathway toward cultivating spiritually competent educators who not only teach Christian truth but also manifest it authentically through their lives, contributing to the formation of students who are morally grounded, spiritually resilient, and capable of engaging the world with faith and integrity.

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