



Journal of Christian Pedagogy and Theology



Teaching with a Pure Heart: Pedagogical Implications of Matthew 5:8 in Christian Education (A Case Study at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi)

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ABSTRACT

*This study examines the pedagogical implications of teaching with a pure heart as grounded in Matthew 5:8 within the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi. In the midst of contemporary moral challenges affecting adolescents, the inner spiritual disposition of teachers plays a decisive role in the formation of students' faith and character. Using a qualitative approach that integrates a Simple Literature Review (SLR) with semi-structured interviews, this study explores how the principle of purity of heart is understood, embodied, and transmitted by two Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher, among 120 Christian students. The SLR provided a biblical-theological and pedagogical framework on the concept of *katharoi tē kardia* (pure in heart) and character-based teaching, while the empirical data were collected through interviews with teachers and selected students and supported by classroom observations. The findings reveal that purity of heart significantly influences teachers' integrity, emotional self-control, relational sensitivity, and pedagogical authenticity. Students perceive their teachers' sincere faith, fairness, patience, and moral consistency as powerful catalysts for their own spiritual growth and moral awareness. Teaching with a pure heart fosters a learning environment characterized by trust, emotional safety, and spiritual openness, enabling biblical values to be internalized not merely as cognitive knowledge but as lived convictions. The study concludes that inner spiritual formation is inseparable from pedagogical effectiveness in Christian education. It recommends that teacher formation programs and school leadership prioritize not only professional competence but also sustained spiritual and moral development as essential foundations for transformative Christian pedagogy.*

Keywords: *Pure Heart, Christian Religious Education, Teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Christian education is fundamentally concerned not only with the transmission of religious knowledge but with the formation of inner character that reflects Christ-like virtues. In the context of contemporary schooling, where students are increasingly exposed to moral relativism, digital temptation, and social fragmentation, the inner life

of both teachers and students becomes a critical pedagogical concern. One of the most essential virtues emphasized in Christian teaching is purity of heart, a concept that directly touches the moral, emotional, and spiritual core of human life. This value is profoundly articulated in Matthew 5:8: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* This beatitude offers not only a theological promise but also a pedagogical vision for Christian educators who seek to form students’ inner integrity rather than merely regulate external behavior (Groome, 2011; Palmer, 2007). In junior high school settings, students enter a crucial developmental phase marked by identity formation, emotional volatility, and heightened sensitivity to peer influence. At this stage, moral instruction that focuses solely on rules often proves insufficient. Students require living examples of integrity, authenticity, and spiritual sincerity embodied by their teachers. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), the teacher’s inner disposition becomes an implicit curriculum that shapes how biblical values are perceived and internalized. Therefore, teaching “with a pure heart” is not merely a spiritual ideal but a foundational pedagogical principle that determines the credibility and transformative power of Christian education (Knight, 2006).

The context of SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi in West Nias provides a unique setting for examining this issue. With 120 Christian students guided by only two Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher, the dynamics of faith formation depend heavily on the consistency, moral integrity, and spiritual authenticity of a very limited number of role models. In such a context, the teacher’s heart posture becomes highly visible and pedagogically influential. Students do not only listen to what the teacher says about God; they carefully observe how the teacher lives, responds to conflict, treats students, and navigates institutional challenges. Matthew 5:8 stands at the heart of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, a foundational charter of the Kingdom of God. The phrase “pure in heart” (*katharoi tē kardia*) refers not merely to ritual cleanliness but to inner moral integrity, undivided loyalty, and sincerity before God. In biblical theology, the “heart” represents the center of will, desire, intention, and moral discernment. Thus, purity of heart denotes a life oriented wholly toward God without hypocrisy, double-mindedness, or hidden corruption (Osborne, 2010; Wright, 2012). The promise “they shall see God” conveys both eschatological hope and present spiritual vision: those who live with inner integrity are granted spiritual clarity to recognize God’s presence in daily life. This beatitude implies that effective Christian teaching flows from the inner life of the teacher. Teaching with a pure heart means that pedagogical actions—planning lessons, disciplining students, offering encouragement, and handling conflict—are driven by sincere love for God and students rather than by mere professional obligation or institutional pressure. It also demands congruence between what is taught and how it is lived. Without this congruence, Christian instruction risks becoming moralistic rhetoric detached from spiritual reality (Palmer, 2007). Empirical studies in Christian education and moral psychology consistently confirm that students internalize values primarily through relational modeling rather than through verbal instruction alone (Bandura, 1986; Slavin, 2018). When teachers demonstrate honesty, humility, patience, and fairness in everyday interactions, students interpret these behaviors as authentic expressions of faith. Conversely, when teachers display inconsistency or moral compromise, students often develop cynicism toward religious teaching. This reality underscores the pedagogical

urgency of cultivating purity of heart in educators themselves as the foundation of effective faith formation. Many contemporary studies on teacher competence tend to emphasize pedagogical skill, professional mastery, and technological adaptation, while the inner spiritual disposition of the teacher remains underexplored, especially within public school contexts where Christian education operates amid religious diversity. In minority-Christian settings such as West Nias, this issue becomes even more critical because students face both internal moral struggles and external social pressures that can challenge their faith identity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study, therefore, seeks to explore the pedagogical implications of Matthew 5:8 for Christian education through a qualitative case study at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi. Specifically, it examines how the principle of teaching with a pure heart is understood, embodied, and transmitted by the CRE teacher, and how this inner disposition shapes students' moral and spiritual development. By integrating biblical exegesis with empirical classroom realities, this research aims to contribute to the development of a more holistic model of Christian pedagogy that places the inner life of the teacher at the center of authentic educational transformation.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design integrating a Simple Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews to investigate the pedagogical implications of Matthew 5:8 for Christian Religious Education (CRE) teaching practice at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi, West Nias. The methodological integration was selected to ensure strong conceptual grounding in biblical scholarship while capturing authentic classroom realities from the lived experiences of Christian teachers and students. The SLR component systematically reviewed theological, pedagogical, and psychological literature published between 2000 and 2024 in peer-reviewed journals, books, and credible academic databases, focusing on three thematic clusters: biblical exegesis and theological interpretation of Matthew 5:8, particularly the concept of purity of heart (*katharoi tē kardia*) in the Sermon on the Mount; the role of teacher character, moral integrity, and inner disposition in shaping learning outcomes in Christian education; and models of value formation, moral development, and virtue pedagogy relevant to adolescent learners. Sources were selected through inclusion criteria emphasizing relevance to Christian pedagogy, methodological rigor, and explicit engagement with spiritual or moral formation. This review provided the conceptual framework for identifying key indicators of "teaching with a pure heart," which then informed the structure of interview questions. The empirical component comprised semi-structured interviews conducted with the two Christian teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi, including the CRE teacher, and a purposive sample of eight Christian students (four males and four females) representing different grade levels to ensure age and gender variation. Each interview lasted approximately 25-40 minutes and was carried out in a quiet room within the school compound to maintain confidentiality and minimize external distractions. Interview questions explored how teachers understood and interpreted Matthew 5:8, how they perceived the relationship between personal purity of heart and teaching practice, how students experienced and evaluated their teachers' character and spiritual integrity, and how classroom interactions supported or hindered the embodiment of biblical values. Data were coded through thematic analysis using an inductive-deductive hybrid strategy: deductive categories

emerged from the SLR framework (e.g., integrity, sincerity, emotional purity, pedagogical authenticity), while inductive codes emerged from participants' narratives (e.g., teacher fairness, emotional consistency, conflict management, relational transparency). Triangulation was achieved through comparing teacher and student perspectives, correlating interview findings with SLR insights, and cross-checking emergent themes with field observations of classroom interactions conducted during two CRE sessions. Ethical considerations were upheld by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity through pseudonyms, and securing institutional permission from the school administration. The integrated methodology enabled a holistic understanding of how purity of heart is conceptualized, practiced, and perceived within the educational context, allowing the study to connect biblical exegesis with practical pedagogical implications in a real-world Christian learning environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the concept of "purity of heart" as articulated in Matthew 5:8 is not merely understood as an abstract spiritual ideal but is deeply embedded in the daily pedagogical practices of Christian teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi. Through the integration of Simple Literature Review (SLR), semi-structured interviews with two Christian teachers, and interviews with eight Christian students, several central themes emerged that collectively illustrate how purity of heart shapes teaching identity, classroom interaction, spiritual formation, and the overall learning climate. These themes include purity of heart as moral-spiritual integrity, purity of heart as sincerity in teaching vocation, purity of heart in relational pedagogy, purity of heart as emotional self-control and conflict management, and purity of heart as a foundation for spiritual modeling and student character formation. The first dominant theme emerging from both teacher and student narratives is the understanding of purity of heart as moral and spiritual integrity. Both Christian teachers interpreted Matthew 5:8 as a divine call to live a life that is internally consistent with outward behavior. One teacher stated that *"purity of heart means teaching without hypocrisy-what I say in class must reflect the way I live outside the class."* This aligns closely with biblical scholarship that interprets *katharoi tē kardia* as inner moral clarity and undivided devotion to God rather than mere ritual cleanliness. From a pedagogical standpoint, this integrity becomes the moral foundation of the teacher's authority in the classroom. Students consistently recognized this integrity as a defining feature of their teachers. Several students described their CRE teacher as "fair," "honest," and "not pretending to be holy only in class." This perception of integrity strengthens teacher credibility, which literature indicates as a critical factor in value-based education. When students perceive congruence between personal life and teaching message, moral instruction is received as authentic rather than imposed. In this sense, purity of heart becomes not only a spiritual virtue but also a pedagogical asset that enhances trust and openness in the learning process. The findings also correspond with character education theories emphasizing that moral instruction is most effective when transmitted through consistent moral exemplarity. The teacher is not only a transmitter of doctrinal knowledge but a living text that students continuously interpret. At SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi, the small number of Christian teachers and students intensifies this dynamic because relational proximity amplifies both positive and negative moral signals.

The next theme highlights purity of heart as sincere devotion to the teaching vocation. Teachers described their work not merely as a professional responsibility but as a divine calling. One teacher explicitly linked Matthew 5:8 with teaching motivation, stating that *"if my heart is not pure, my teaching becomes only routine work, not ministry."* This vocational sincerity is reflected in consistent preparation, patience in instruction, and willingness to serve students beyond formal teaching hours. Students confirmed this perception of sincerity by noting teachers' availability for personal consultation, prayer, and moral guidance outside scheduled lessons. Some students reported that teachers regularly encouraged them during personal struggles, offering both academic and spiritual support. This practice reflects a form of pastoral pedagogy in which teaching is understood as both educational and spiritual accompaniment. From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports the literature on spiritual leadership in education, which argues that teachers with intrinsic spiritual motivation demonstrate higher levels of commitment, resilience, and compassion. The purity of heart functions as the internal wellspring that sustains this vocational endurance. In the context of SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi, located in a remote region with limited educational resources, such sincerity becomes particularly significant as teachers face structural challenges such as limited facilities, geographic isolation, and modest material support. This sincerity also challenges utilitarian views of education that reduce teaching to technical competence alone. Instead, the study confirms that in Christian education, pedagogical effectiveness is inseparable from the moral and spiritual orientation of the teacher's heart.

Another prominent finding concerns the relational dimension of purity of heart. Teachers consistently emphasized that a pure heart fosters healthy, compassionate, and respectful relationships with students. Purity was described not as moral perfection but as a continual effort to approach students without prejudice, manipulation, or hidden agendas. One teacher explained that *"a pure heart allows me to see students not as problems but as individuals created by God."* Students' testimonies strongly corroborated this relational orientation. Many students expressed feeling "safe," "respected," and "not judged" in CRE classes. Importantly, students indicated that they were more willing to ask questions, express doubts, and share personal struggles because they trusted their teachers' intentions. This relational trust forms the psychological and spiritual environment necessary for genuine learning, especially in faith-based education where personal beliefs and moral struggles are often discussed. The findings align with pedagogical theories emphasizing the ethical and relational nature of teaching. Relational pedagogy asserts that learning is not merely a cognitive transaction but a moral and interpersonal encounter. Within Christian education, this encounter is deeply theological because it reflects the relational nature of God's engagement with humanity. Teaching with a pure heart thus becomes an embodiment of divine compassion within the classroom. In such a relational framework, authority is not exercised through domination but through moral credibility and empathetic presence. This model appears especially effective in adolescent education, where emotional sensitivity, identity formation, and moral questioning are prominent developmental tasks.

The study also reveals that purity of heart manifests in emotional self-regulation and ethical conflict management. Teachers acknowledged facing emotional challenges,

including student indiscipline, academic underperformance, and personal stress. However, they interpreted purity of heart as the ability to manage emotions in ways that reflect Christian virtues such as patience, forgiveness, and gentleness. Students provided concrete examples of how teachers responded calmly to misconduct, avoided humiliating students in public, and addressed conflict through dialogue rather than punishment alone. One student shared that when a misunderstanding occurred, the teacher invited the student for a private conversation rather than scolding publicly. This method not only preserved the student's dignity but also reinforced moral responsibility through reflection. This finding supports emotional intelligence theories that emphasize self-awareness, self-control, and empathy as core competencies for effective teaching. When framed theologically through Matthew 5:8, emotional self-control becomes not merely a professional skill but a spiritual discipline rooted in a purified heart. This approach to conflict management contributes to a restorative rather than retributive disciplinary culture. Instead of focusing solely on rule enforcement, teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi prioritize moral restoration, reconciliation, and personal growth. Such a climate nurtures both academic engagement and spiritual development.

A central pedagogical implication of Matthew 5:8 identified in this study is the role of teacher as a spiritual model. Teachers recognized that their personal spirituality-reflected in prayer life, speech, behavior, and ethical choices-constitutes a silent curriculum that strongly influences students. Several students reported that observing their teachers' consistent prayer practices, humility, and moral integrity inspired them to reflect on their own faith. This phenomenon supports the concept of hidden curriculum in religious education, where values and beliefs are transmitted not only through explicit instruction but also through embodied practice. Students learn how to "see God" not only through biblical texts but through lived examples of faith within their educational environment. In this sense, the promise of Matthew 5:8-"they shall see God"-is pedagogically mediated through the purified lives of teachers who make divine values visible in everyday interactions. The spiritual modeling function of teachers also strengthens students' internalization of Christian values. Instead of perceiving faith as abstract doctrine disconnected from real life, students witness its practical outworking in relationships, discipline, leadership, and service. This lived theology bridges the gap between belief and practice, which is a central challenge in contemporary Christian education.

The study further indicates that teaching with a pure heart contributes significantly to student character formation. Students reported changes in attitudes related to honesty, respect, patience, and responsibility, which they attributed to both direct teaching and indirect example from their teachers. Although moral development is influenced by multiple factors, the consistent presence of pure-hearted teaching was perceived as a meaningful contributor. Teachers also observed that students became more open to self-reflection and repentance after witnessing non-judgmental and sincere guidance. This transformation reflects the biblical pedagogical principle that moral change arises more effectively from love and example than from coercion alone. The findings thus affirm character formation as a relational and spiritual process nurtured through trust, authenticity, and moral modeling. From an educational theory perspective, this supports virtue ethics in pedagogy, which emphasizes the formation of moral character through habituation and exemplification rather than mere rule instruction. Within the Christian

framework, purity of heart becomes a central virtue from which other virtues flow. The study also identifies several challenges that constrain the full realization of pure-hearted pedagogy. These include limited instructional resources, high emotional demands on teachers, and the dual professional-spiritual expectations placed upon Christian educators. Teachers acknowledged the difficulty of consistently maintaining emotional purity amid personal pressures and institutional limitations. The remote context of SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi adds additional complexity. Geographic isolation limits access to professional development, theological training, and pedagogical innovation. Consequently, teachers rely heavily on personal spiritual discipline and informal peer support to sustain their teaching vocation. These challenges also highlight the resilience of faith-based pedagogy. Rather than diminishing the significance of purity of heart, adversity appears to sharpen teachers' dependence on spiritual resources. This echoes theological interpretations of Matthew 5:8 that associate purity of heart with a continual process of sanctification rather than a static moral state. The empirical findings strongly correspond with the SLR results, which emphasize that purity of heart in biblical theology encompasses sincerity, undivided devotion, moral integrity, and relational transparency. Pedagogical literature further affirms that teacher authenticity, moral consistency, and emotional integrity significantly influence student engagement and character development. The study thus synthesizes biblical exegesis and educational theory into a coherent pedagogical framework: teaching with a pure heart is both a theological mandate and a professional necessity. Matthew 5:8 is not only a spiritual promise for future beatitude but also a present pedagogical principle that shapes educational practice in Christian contexts. This synthesis reinforces the view that Christian education cannot be reduced to content transmission alone. It is intrinsically formative, relational, and spiritual. Teachers serve simultaneously as educators, moral exemplars, and spiritual companions. Several key pedagogical implications emerge from this study. Teacher formation programs in Christian education must prioritize inner spiritual formation alongside pedagogical skills. Purity of heart cannot be produced solely through technical training; it requires sustained spiritual discipline, reflective practice, and pastoral support. School leadership should create institutional cultures that nurture teacher well-being, moral integrity, and spiritual growth. Without structural support, the burden of pure-hearted teaching rests disproportionately on individual teachers. CRE curricula should integrate affective and relational dimensions of learning rather than focusing exclusively on cognitive mastery. Teaching strategies must intentionally cultivate sincerity, empathy, and moral reflection. Continuous spiritual mentoring and peer reflection among Christian teachers is essential to sustain the ethical and emotional demands of teaching with a pure heart, particularly in resource-limited contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the teaching ministry of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi, West Nias, is profoundly shaped by the principle of purity of heart as articulated in Matthew 5:8. The findings reveal that purity of heart is not merely interpreted as a personal spiritual attribute but as a foundational pedagogical virtue that governs moral integrity, sincerity in vocation, relational sensitivity, emotional self-control, and spiritual modeling in the educational process. Teaching with a pure heart

emerges as both a theological mandate and a practical educational necessity within the context of Christian education. The results show that teachers who internalize the value of purity of heart cultivate authentic moral authority in the classroom. Students respond positively to the congruence between what teachers teach and how they live. This integrity strengthens trust, fosters emotional safety, and encourages openness to moral and spiritual formation. The study confirms that students are not only shaped by explicit biblical instruction but also, and more powerfully, by the lived example of their teachers. In this way, teachers become the “visible curriculum” through which the values of the Kingdom of God are continuously communicated. The research demonstrates that purity of heart directly influences teachers’ relational pedagogy. Teachers who approach students with sincerity, compassion, and non-judgmental attitudes create a learning environment that is conducive to both cognitive growth and spiritual maturity. Emotional self-regulation rooted in a purified heart enables teachers to manage classroom conflict with patience and restorative intent rather than punitive impulse. This contributes to a school climate that reflects Christian virtues such as forgiveness, humility, and respect. From the perspective of student development, the study confirms that pure-hearted teaching significantly contributes to character formation. Students exhibit growing awareness of moral responsibility, honesty, respect, and perseverance as they observe and internalize the consistent faith and integrity modeled by their teachers. This finding reinforces the core premise of Christian pedagogy that character is formed most effectively through embodied example rather than verbal instruction alone. The study also acknowledges persistent challenges. Limited institutional resources, geographic isolation, and emotional burdens place significant pressure on teachers. Maintaining purity of heart remains an ongoing spiritual struggle rather than a static achievement. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the relevance of Matthew 5:8; instead, they highlight the necessity of sustained spiritual discipline, peer support, and institutional commitment to holistic teacher formation. This study strengthens the integration between biblical theology and educational practice by demonstrating that the Beatitudes offer a robust moral-spiritual framework for contemporary Christian pedagogy. The findings call for renewed attention to inner spiritual formation in teacher education, alongside professional competence. Teacher training institutions, school leadership, and church-based educational stakeholders are encouraged to prioritize programs that nurture not only pedagogical skills but also moral integrity and spiritual maturity. Teaching with a pure heart is not an optional spiritual ideal but a central pedagogical foundation for Christian education. Through the lived embodiment of Matthew 5:8, CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Lahomi exemplify how inner purity becomes a transformative force that shapes authentic learning, restores relationships, and forms student character in alignment with Christlike values.

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