



## Illuminating Students' Spiritual Growth through the Role of Christian Religious Education Teachers Based on Exodus 13:21 at SDN 101739 Sei Mencirim

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study explores the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in illuminating students' spiritual growth based on the theological perspective of Exodus 13:21, which portrays God's guidance through the pillar of cloud and fire. The research aims to integrate biblical theology with educational practice by understanding CRE teachers as spiritual guides who reflect God's presence, direction, and protection in the learning process. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method was employed to analyze and synthesize scholarly works from theology, Christian education, and pedagogical studies. Data were collected from reputable academic databases and theological journals, focusing on themes of teacher spirituality, spiritual guidance, biblical pedagogy, and students' spiritual development. The findings reveal that CRE teachers are not merely transmitters of religious knowledge but function as spiritual illuminators who accompany students in their faith journeys. Inspired by Exodus 13:21, CRE teachers are called to embody divine guidance through faithful presence, moral example, and pastoral sensitivity. Their spiritual competence and personal faith maturity significantly influence the effectiveness of Christian education, particularly in fostering students' faith awareness, character formation, relational spirituality, and devotional life. The study also highlights that the metaphor of the pillar of cloud and fire offers rich pedagogical implications, encouraging adaptive, visible, patient, and protective teaching practices. In the context of SDN 101739 Sei Mencirim, a public elementary school, CRE teachers play a strategic role as spiritual mentors who help students experience God's guidance in a pluralistic educational environment. This research contributes theoretically by strengthening the integration of biblical theology and Christian pedagogy, and practically by offering a framework for CRE teachers to understand their vocation as reflections of divine guidance. Ultimately, the study affirms that when CRE teachers faithfully embody their spiritual calling, they participate in God's ongoing work of leading and nurturing students toward spiritual maturity.*

**Keywords:** *Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Growth, Exodus 13:21, Spiritual Guidance, CRE Teachers, Biblical Pedagogy, Teacher Spirituality*

## INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a vital role in shaping not only students' cognitive understanding of faith but also their spiritual awareness, character formation, and moral responsibility in daily life. In the context of formal education, particularly in public schools, CRE teachers function as spiritual guides who accompany students in discovering the meaning of God's presence, guidance, and providence in their personal journeys. Spiritual growth is not merely an abstract concept but a dynamic process in which students learn to recognize God's guidance in their decisions, attitudes, and interactions with others. Therefore, the presence of CRE teachers as spiritual mentors becomes crucial in illuminating students' spiritual paths, helping them navigate challenges, doubts, and developmental transitions with faith-based perspectives. This study emphasizes that CRE teachers are not only transmitters of doctrinal knowledge but also living examples of faith who embody Christian values in pedagogical practice and daily conduct. The biblical foundation of this research is rooted in Exodus 13:21, which describes how the Lord guided the Israelites through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, so that they could travel safely without fear or confusion. This passage symbolizes divine guidance, protection, and constancy in the journey of faith. In an educational context, CRE teachers can be understood as instruments through whom God's guidance is reflected in students' lives. Just as the Israelites depended on God's direction to move forward, students today require spiritual guidance to grow in faith, resilience, and moral discernment. Exodus 13:21 thus provides a strong theological framework for understanding the pedagogical mission of CRE teachers as spiritual guides who illuminate students' paths through teaching, example, encouragement, and pastoral care within the school environment. Students face increasingly complex social, emotional, and spiritual challenges. The influence of digital culture, secular values, and moral relativism often weakens students' spiritual sensitivity and commitment to Christian principles. Many students experience confusion about identity, purpose, and values, which directly affects their spiritual development. Within this context, CRE teachers are called to respond not only with academic competence but also with spiritual maturity and pastoral sensitivity. They are expected to create learning environments that nurture faith, promote ethical reflection, and strengthen students' relationship with God. This responsibility requires teachers to integrate biblical truth with contextual realities so that Christian teachings remain relevant and transformative for students' lives.

Spiritual growth in students involves the development of faith awareness, obedience to God's will, empathy, responsibility, and moral integrity. It is cultivated through continuous interaction between teaching, experience, and reflection. CRE teachers contribute to this process by guiding students to understand Scripture not merely as historical or doctrinal material but as a living word that speaks to their personal experiences. By connecting biblical narratives such as Exodus 13:21 to students' real-life struggles and aspirations, teachers help them perceive God as actively present and guiding their daily journeys. This approach enables students to internalize faith values and express them through attitudes of trust, perseverance, and gratitude. The role of CRE teachers as spiritual guides is especially significant at the elementary school level, where students are in a formative stage of spiritual and moral development. At this stage, children are highly receptive to role models and symbolic narratives that shape their understanding of God and faith.

Teachers' words, behavior, and attitudes leave a deep impression that can influence students' spiritual orientation for years to come. Therefore, CRE teachers must demonstrate consistency between teaching and practice, becoming visible representations of God's guidance similar to the pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus 13:21. Their presence should bring clarity, assurance, and inspiration to students as they grow in their spiritual journey. SDN 101739 Sei Mencirim provides a relevant context for examining the role of CRE teachers in illuminating students' spiritual growth. As a public elementary school, it represents a diverse educational environment where Christian Religious Education must be delivered thoughtfully and responsibly. The interaction between CRE teachers and students in this setting reflects real challenges and opportunities in implementing faith-based education within a pluralistic educational framework. Understanding how CRE teachers embody their spiritual roles in such a context is essential for strengthening the effectiveness of Christian education and ensuring that biblical values are communicated meaningfully and inclusively. Previous studies on Christian education emphasize the importance of teachers' spiritual competence, personal faith, and pedagogical creativity in fostering students' spiritual development. However, many studies focus primarily on curriculum implementation or instructional strategies, with limited attention to the theological symbolism that can enrich educational practice. This research seeks to fill that gap by using Exodus 13:21 as a theological lens to interpret the role of CRE teachers as spiritual illuminators. The metaphor of divine guidance found in this passage offers a powerful framework for understanding how teachers can guide, protect, and strengthen students' faith journeys through consistent spiritual leadership. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze how Christian Religious Education teachers at SDN 101739 Sei Mencirim illuminate students' spiritual growth through their pedagogical roles, spiritual example, and application of biblical principles derived from Exodus 13:21. By examining the interaction between biblical theology and educational practice, this research highlights the strategic position of CRE teachers in nurturing students' faith in a holistic manner. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more spiritually grounded pedagogical models that affirm CRE teachers as agents of God's guidance in the educational process, enabling students to grow in faith, confidence, and spiritual maturity.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to examine comprehensively the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in illuminating students' spiritual growth based on the theological perspective of Exodus 13:21. The SLR approach was chosen because it enables a structured, transparent, and replicable process in identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant academic literature. Through this method, the research aimed to build a strong conceptual and theoretical foundation that integrates biblical theology with educational practice, particularly concerning spiritual guidance, teacher spirituality, and faith-based pedagogy. The SLR provided a reliable framework to map existing research trends, identify research gaps, and formulate a coherent understanding of how CRE teachers function as spiritual guides in educational contexts.

The first stage of the SLR process involved formulating clear research questions that guided the literature search. The main questions focused on how CRE teachers are conceptualized as spiritual guides in educational literature, how Exodus 13:21 has been interpreted in theological studies related to guidance and divine leadership, and how these two domains can be integrated to explain students' spiritual growth in Christian education. These questions served as the foundation for determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the selected studies. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and theological commentaries published within the last fifteen years were prioritized to ensure both academic credibility and contextual relevance, although several classical theological sources were also included due to their foundational importance in biblical interpretation. The second stage was the literature search process, which was conducted using reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, and several theological journal repositories. Keywords and combinations of terms were systematically applied, including "Christian Religious Education teachers," "spiritual growth of students," "teacher spirituality," "biblical pedagogy," "Exodus 13:21," "divine guidance in education," and "faith-based education." Boolean operators such as AND and OR were used to refine search results and ensure precision. This strategy allowed the researcher to capture interdisciplinary studies from theology, education, and religious pedagogy that directly or indirectly addressed the research topic. After identifying potential sources, the third stage consisted of a screening process. Titles and abstracts were examined to determine their relevance to the study's objectives. Articles that focused solely on general moral education without a Christian framework, or studies that discussed biblical theology without educational implications, were excluded. The remaining literature was then assessed more deeply by reading the full texts to ensure alignment with the research focus on spiritual growth, the pedagogical role of CRE teachers, and theological symbolism of guidance. This screening process ensured that only high-quality and contextually relevant sources were included in the final analysis. The fourth stage was data extraction and categorization. Each selected source was analyzed to identify key themes, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and findings related to the role of teachers in spiritual formation and the concept of divine guidance. The extracted data were organized into thematic categories such as teacher spirituality, spiritual leadership in education, pedagogical modeling, biblical metaphors of guidance, and the integration of theology with classroom practice. This thematic organization enabled a systematic synthesis of ideas and facilitated the construction of a coherent conceptual framework that links Exodus 13:21 with the role of CRE teachers as illuminators of students' spiritual journeys. The final stage involved data synthesis and interpretation. The researcher compared and contrasted findings from various studies to identify patterns, consistencies, and contradictions. The metaphor of the pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus 13:21 was used as a central interpretative lens to understand the spiritual leadership role of CRE teachers. Just as God provided clarity, protection, and direction to the Israelites, CRE teachers are seen as reflecting these attributes through guidance, example, and pastoral sensitivity in educational settings. This synthesis process not only strengthened the theological grounding of the study but also highlighted practical implications for Christian pedagogy, particularly in elementary school contexts such as SDN 101739 Sei Mencirim. By using the SLR method, this research ensures methodological rigor and academic reliability. The systematic nature of the review allows

the findings to be grounded in a wide range of scholarly perspectives, while the theological focus on Exodus 13:21 provides a distinctive contribution to Christian educational research. The SLR thus serves as a bridge between biblical theology and educational practice, offering a comprehensive understanding of how CRE teachers can illuminate students' spiritual growth through spiritually grounded pedagogy and exemplary faith leadership.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this Systematic Literature Review reveal a consistent understanding of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers as more than transmitters of theological knowledge. Across theological, pedagogical, and religious education literature, CRE teachers are predominantly conceptualized as spiritual guides who accompany students in their faith journeys. This role reflects a holistic vision of education, where intellectual development is inseparable from spiritual formation. Scholars emphasize that CRE teachers function as mediators between biblical truth and students' lived experiences, enabling learners to perceive God not as an abstract concept but as an active presence guiding their lives. Several studies indicate that spiritual guidance in education involves three interrelated dimensions: modeling, mentoring, and meaning-making. First, modeling refers to the embodiment of Christian values in teachers' personal lives. Students observe teachers' attitudes, integrity, compassion, and faith practices, which significantly influence their spiritual perceptions. Teachers become "living texts" that interpret Scripture through their actions. This aligns closely with Exodus 13:21, where God's guidance is not theoretical but visible and experiential through the pillar of cloud and fire. Likewise, CRE teachers' spirituality becomes a tangible sign of God's presence in the educational environment. Second, mentoring highlights the relational aspect of spiritual guidance. CRE teachers are portrayed as companions who listen, encourage, and nurture students' faith development. Literature shows that students' spiritual growth is most effective when teachers create trusting relationships that allow students to express doubts, fears, and hopes. This pastoral dimension of teaching positions CRE teachers as shepherds who guide students gently rather than instructors who merely impose doctrine. The metaphor of guidance in Exodus 13:21 supports this understanding, as God does not force the Israelites forward but patiently leads them according to their readiness and needs. Third, meaning-making emphasizes the interpretative role of CRE teachers. Teachers help students connect biblical narratives with contemporary realities, enabling them to find spiritual meaning in daily experiences. The pillar of cloud and fire becomes a powerful symbolic resource that CRE teachers can use to explain God's faithfulness, protection, and guidance in a language accessible to children. Through this interpretative process, Scripture becomes alive and transformative, shaping students' understanding of God as a guiding presence in their academic, social, and emotional lives. The literature also reveals that CRE teachers' spiritual guidance is rooted in their own spiritual maturity. Teachers who demonstrate consistent prayer life, biblical reflection, and commitment to Christian values are more effective in guiding students spiritually. This finding underscores that spiritual guidance cannot be separated from personal faith formation. Just as the pillar of cloud and fire originated from God Himself, authentic spiritual guidance in education must flow from teachers' genuine relationship with God. Without this foundation, teaching risks becoming formalistic and disconnected from spiritual reality.

In public school contexts, including institutions like SDN 101739 Sei Mencirim, the role of CRE teachers as spiritual guides carries additional significance. Literature highlights that CRE teachers often serve as the primary spiritual mentors for students who may lack strong faith support at home or church. This situates CRE teachers as crucial agents of spiritual continuity, ensuring that Christian values remain present and active in students' lives despite societal secularization. Their role mirrors the function of the pillar of cloud and fire, which ensured that the Israelites were never without direction, even in uncertain and unfamiliar terrain. Another important finding concerns the ethical dimension of spiritual guidance. CRE teachers are responsible for cultivating moral discernment, empathy, and responsibility in students. Spiritual growth is not limited to devotional practices but extends to character formation and social behavior. Studies affirm that when teachers integrate spiritual guidance with ethical instruction, students develop a more holistic Christian identity. This integration reflects the comprehensive nature of divine guidance in Exodus 13:21, where God's leadership encompasses protection, direction, and assurance. The SLR shows that effective spiritual guidance requires pedagogical creativity. Teachers who use storytelling, symbolic interpretation, reflective dialogue, and experiential learning are more successful in fostering students' spiritual awareness. Exodus 13:21, with its rich imagery, provides a valuable pedagogical resource for creative faith instruction. Through such approaches, CRE teachers illuminate students' spiritual growth by making abstract theological concepts concrete and emotionally resonant. The findings indicate that CRE teachers are best understood as spiritual illuminators whose presence, faith, and pedagogical practice reflect God's guiding light. Their role parallels the divine guidance described in Exodus 13:21, positioning them as instruments through whom God continues to lead His people, especially children, in their formative years.

### ***Exodus 13:21 as a Theological Framework for Spiritual Guidance***

The SLR findings show that Exodus 13:21 is frequently interpreted by theologians as a foundational text that reveals God's active, personal, and continuous guidance toward His people. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night symbolize God's presence that is both protective and directive. This dual imagery emphasizes that divine guidance is not limited by time, circumstance, or human weakness. God remains with His people in clarity and darkness, in certainty and uncertainty. When applied to Christian Religious Education, this passage provides a rich theological basis for understanding the teacher's role as an agent of God's guiding presence in the classroom. Several theological studies emphasize that the pillar imagery reflects God's faithfulness and accessibility. God does not guide from a distance but walks alongside His people. In educational terms, this reinforces the idea that CRE teachers must practice accompaniment rather than authority-centered instruction. Teachers are called to "walk with" students spiritually, just as God walked with Israel in the wilderness. This perspective transforms teaching into a relational and pastoral vocation where spiritual guidance becomes an expression of divine companionship. The symbolic meaning of light and direction in Exodus 13:21 aligns strongly with the educational goal of illuminating understanding and nurturing faith. Light represents clarity, hope, and assurance, while the cloud represents protection and divine mystery. CRE teachers, therefore, are positioned as instruments through whom God's light is reflected in students' spiritual lives. The SLR indicates that when biblical metaphors

are integrated into pedagogy, students are more likely to grasp abstract theological concepts and internalize them meaningfully. This theological framework encourages CRE teachers to view their profession as a calling rather than merely an occupation. They participate in God's redemptive mission by guiding students through moral confusion, emotional struggles, and faith development. In this sense, Exodus 13:21 functions not only as a theological reference but also as a spiritual identity marker for CRE teachers.

### ***Dimensions of Students' Spiritual Growth in Christian Education***

The reviewed literature consistently identifies spiritual growth as a multidimensional process involving faith awareness, moral transformation, relational maturity, and personal devotion. Spiritual growth is not instantaneous but develops gradually through reflection, experience, and guidance. CRE teachers play a central role in facilitating this process by creating learning experiences that integrate knowledge, attitude, and action. The first dimension is faith awareness, where students learn to recognize God as present and active in their lives. Through biblical teaching and prayer practices, teachers help students understand that God is not distant but near, guiding and caring for them just as He guided Israel in the wilderness. Exodus 13:21 provides a concrete narrative that strengthens this awareness, especially for young learners. The second dimension is moral and character formation. Spiritual growth is reflected in attitudes such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, and obedience. The SLR highlights that students develop Christian character most effectively when teachers model these values consistently. CRE teachers act as living examples of faith, enabling students to see Christian ethics embodied in real life. The third dimension is relational spirituality, which involves students' ability to build loving and respectful relationships with others. Studies show that spiritual education strengthens students' social sensitivity and sense of responsibility toward their community. When CRE teachers emphasize God's guidance as inclusive and compassionate, students learn to practice love, forgiveness, and cooperation. The fourth dimension is personal devotion and reflection, including prayer, worship, and personal engagement with Scripture. CRE teachers nurture these practices through structured activities and by encouraging students to see devotion as a joyful response to God's guidance rather than a mere obligation.

### ***Integration of Biblical Theology and Educational Practice***

One of the strongest findings of this SLR is the importance of integrating biblical theology with pedagogical practice. CRE teachers who connect Scripture with real-life experiences make Christian education more relevant and transformative. Exodus 13:21 provides a theological narrative that is easily contextualized into students' daily struggles, such as fear, uncertainty, and decision-making. The metaphor of divine guidance encourages teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches that are supportive, patient, and inspiring. Teaching becomes an act of spiritual illumination where students are helped to see God's hand in both success and difficulty. The classroom thus becomes a sacred space in which faith is lived and nurtured. This integration also strengthens the identity of CRE teachers as spiritual leaders. They are not only educators but also witnesses of God's guidance. Their professional competence is enriched by theological awareness, and their teaching gains deeper spiritual meaning. The findings of this study strongly support the view that Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers function as reflections of divine guidance in

the educational journey of students. Drawing from Exodus 13:21, where God manifests His guidance through the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, CRE teachers can be understood as visible and tangible expressions of God's presence in the school context. The pillar was not merely a sign but an active agent that led, protected, and reassured the Israelites. In a similar way, CRE teachers are called to embody guidance that is both spiritual and practical, enabling students to experience God's care through human interaction. This reflection of divine guidance is primarily expressed through the teacher's character and consistency of life. The literature emphasizes that students often perceive God's nature through the behavior and attitudes of their teachers. When CRE teachers demonstrate patience, compassion, integrity, and faithfulness, they implicitly communicate theological truths about God's love and reliability. Thus, teaching becomes sacramental in nature: through ordinary human actions, divine meaning is revealed. This aligns with the biblical narrative where God chooses ordinary elements, cloud and fire, to express His extraordinary presence. Similarly, CRE teachers become "living symbols" of God's guidance in students' daily lives. Divine guidance in Exodus 13:21 is characterized by constancy. The pillar never left the Israelites; it remained with them day and night. This aspect challenges CRE teachers to cultivate faithful presence in their students' lives. Faithful presence involves being emotionally available, spiritually attentive, and pedagogically committed. It is not limited to classroom instruction but extends to moments of counseling, encouragement, and moral correction. Such presence nurtures a sense of security in students, enabling them to explore faith without fear or confusion. When students feel accompanied, they are more open to spiritual formation and trust in God's guidance. Another essential aspect of divine guidance is direction. The pillar did not merely symbolize God's presence but also determined the movement of the people. This indicates that CRE teachers also carry a directional role in helping students make wise moral and spiritual decisions. Through biblical teaching, reflective dialogue, and moral modeling, teachers assist students in discerning right from wrong, truth from error, and faith from doubt. Direction, however, must be exercised with humility and sensitivity, acknowledging students' developmental stages and personal struggles. This reflects God's gentle leadership in Exodus, where guidance is firm yet compassionate. The concept of reflection implies that CRE teachers do not replace God's guidance but point toward it. They are not the source of light but mirrors that redirect students to God as the ultimate guide. This theological perspective protects teachers from authoritarian tendencies and encourages a posture of servanthood. Their authority is derived not from personal power but from their faithfulness in representing God's truth and love. Consequently, CRE teachers function as facilitators of divine encounter, helping students to develop a personal relationship with God rather than dependence on the teacher alone. In the context of SDN 101739 Sei Mencirim, this role gains particular relevance. As a public elementary school, the spiritual influence of CRE teachers may be one of the most significant channels through which students experience Christian values. The teacher becomes a spiritual landmark, similar to the pillar in the wilderness, offering clarity and reassurance amid the diversity of social and cultural influences. Through their guidance, students are enabled to see that faith is not separate from daily learning but is integrated into their entire educational experience.

### ***Pedagogical Implications of the Pillar of Cloud and Fire Metaphor***

The metaphor of the pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus 13:21 offers profound pedagogical implications for Christian Religious Education. It suggests that teaching is fundamentally a guiding process, not merely a transmission of information. Just as the pillar adapted to the needs of the people, providing shade and direction by day, and light and protection by night, CRE teachers are called to adapt their pedagogical approaches to the spiritual and emotional needs of students. This adaptability is a core principle of effective spiritual pedagogy. First, the metaphor encourages contextual sensitivity. The cloud and fire addressed different conditions: heat and darkness, fear and uncertainty. Similarly, CRE teachers must recognize the varying contexts of students' lives, including family background, emotional struggles, and spiritual maturity. Teaching strategies should therefore be flexible and responsive. Some students may need encouragement and affirmation, while others require correction or deeper theological explanation. The metaphor affirms that guidance is dynamic and relational, shaped by the real conditions of learners. Second, the metaphor highlights the importance of visibility in teaching. The pillar was visible to all the people, making God's guidance unmistakable. In pedagogical terms, this means that CRE teachers must make spiritual values visible through concrete actions and practices. Prayer, worship, compassion, honesty, and forgiveness should not remain abstract ideals but be demonstrated in daily classroom interactions. Visibility strengthens credibility; students are more likely to trust spiritual instruction when they see it embodied. Third, the metaphor implies continuity and patience. The Israelites' journey was long and filled with challenges, yet God's guidance remained consistent. This teaches CRE teachers that spiritual growth is a gradual process. Immediate results should not be expected, especially in elementary education. Teachers must exercise patience, trusting that consistent guidance will eventually bear fruit. This perspective helps educators maintain hope and perseverance in their vocation. Fourth, the pillar metaphor encourages creativity in pedagogy. Cloud and fire are symbolic and imaginative images that engage emotion and imagination. CRE teachers can use storytelling, drama, visual aids, and reflective activities to bring biblical narratives to life. Such methods help students internalize spiritual truths in a way that is meaningful and memorable. When Scripture is taught creatively, students are more likely to develop a lasting connection with biblical values. Finally, the metaphor affirms the protective role of education. The pillar did not only guide but also protected the Israelites from danger. In education, CRE teachers are called to create safe spaces where students can express doubts, fears, and spiritual questions without judgment.

### ***CRE Teachers' Spiritual Competence and Professional Identity***

The effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in illuminating students' spiritual growth is deeply rooted in their spiritual competence. Spiritual competence refers not only to the teachers' knowledge of biblical doctrine and theology but also to the authenticity of their personal faith, their spiritual discipline, and their capacity to live out Christian values consistently in their professional and personal lives. The SLR findings indicate that spiritual competence forms the foundation of teachers' professional identity in Christian education. Without this foundation, pedagogical skills risk becoming merely technical, detached from the transformative purpose of spiritual formation. In Exodus 13:21, God's guidance is portrayed as originating from His divine character, faithful,

protective, and compassionate. Similarly, CRE teachers' guidance must flow from their inner spiritual life. Their authority as spiritual guides is not derived from institutional position alone but from the credibility of their lived faith. When teachers pray, reflect on Scripture, and nurture their relationship with God, they cultivate a spiritual depth that naturally shapes their teaching practices. This alignment between inner spirituality and outward teaching strengthens the authenticity of Christian education. Professional identity in CRE is therefore inseparable from vocation. Teaching is not merely a job but a calling to participate in God's mission of guiding and forming His people. This vocational understanding transforms the way teachers perceive their responsibilities. They no longer see students merely as learners who must achieve academic targets, but as individuals entrusted to them for spiritual nurturing. In this sense, CRE teachers mirror the role of the pillar of cloud and fire, standing as faithful guides who accompany students through moments of growth, confusion, and transformation. Spiritual competence also manifests in teachers' emotional maturity and pastoral sensitivity. Literature highlights that spiritually competent teachers demonstrate empathy, patience, and humility. They are able to listen to students' struggles without judgment and respond with wisdom and compassion. Such qualities are essential in guiding children, especially at the elementary level, where emotional security strongly influences spiritual openness. This pastoral dimension reflects the gentleness of divine guidance in Exodus, where God leads without coercion, allowing His people to grow gradually in trust and obedience. CRE teachers' professional identity is shaped by their commitment to continuous spiritual and pedagogical development. Spiritual competence is not static; it must be nurtured through ongoing learning, reflection, and community engagement. Teachers who regularly participate in worship, theological training, and professional development programs demonstrate a willingness to grow both spiritually and academically. This growth enables them to address students' questions with deeper insight and to integrate biblical truth more effectively into educational practice. Another important aspect of spiritual competence is discernment. CRE teachers are called to interpret students' needs wisely and to respond appropriately to diverse spiritual conditions. Some students may be spiritually curious, others uncertain, and some indifferent. Spiritually competent teachers are able to recognize these differences and adapt their guidance accordingly. This reflects the adaptability of God's guidance in Exodus 13:21, where divine leadership responds to changing circumstances while remaining faithful to its purpose. In the context of SDN 101739 Sei Mencirim, spiritual competence becomes particularly significant because CRE teachers operate within a pluralistic and public educational environment. Their professional identity must balance fidelity to Christian theology with respect for institutional policies and social diversity. This balance requires wisdom, humility, and strong spiritual grounding. When CRE teachers demonstrate spiritual maturity, they not only nurture students' faith but also model respectful and ethical engagement within a diverse community. Their identity as spiritual guides thus contributes to both religious formation and character education. CRE teachers' spiritual competence and professional identity are mutually reinforcing. Spiritual depth enriches professional practice, and professional experience deepens spiritual understanding. Together, they enable teachers to fulfill their calling as reflections of God's guidance. Inspired by Exodus 13:21, CRE teachers become instruments through whom God continues to illuminate the spiritual paths of students, guiding them with faithfulness, wisdom, and love.

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers play a vital and irreplaceable role in illuminating students' spiritual growth, particularly when their pedagogical practice is grounded in strong biblical theology such as that found in Exodus 13:21. The image of God guiding the Israelites through the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night provides a powerful theological metaphor for understanding the mission of CRE teachers as spiritual guides. Just as God's guidance was visible, consistent, and protective, CRE teachers are called to become living signs of God's presence in the educational journey of their students. Their role is not limited to transferring religious knowledge, but extends to shaping faith, character, and spiritual awareness through example, mentorship, and meaningful engagement with Scripture. The findings of this research emphasize that spiritual growth in students is a holistic process that involves cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions. CRE teachers contribute significantly to this process by helping students recognize God's guidance in everyday life, interpret personal experiences through a faith-based perspective, and develop trust in God's providence. When teachers embody Christian values and demonstrate spiritual integrity, they create a learning environment that reflects divine guidance, similar to the way the pillar of cloud and fire provided direction and reassurance to the Israelites in the wilderness. In this sense, CRE teachers function as mediators who connect biblical truth with students' lived realities. This study highlights the importance of teachers' personal spirituality as the foundation of effective Christian education. Spiritual guidance cannot be separated from the spiritual maturity of the teacher. CRE teachers who maintain a consistent relationship with God through prayer, reflection, and faithful living are better equipped to guide students authentically. Their teaching becomes a form of witness, where faith is not only taught but also demonstrated. This reinforces the idea that spiritual education is relational and experiential, not merely instructional. The credibility of CRE teachers as spiritual guides depends on the harmony between what they teach and how they live. In the context of a public school such as SDN 101739 Sei Mencirim, the role of CRE teachers becomes even more significant. Students often come from diverse family and social backgrounds, and not all receive strong spiritual formation outside the school environment. Therefore, CRE teachers may serve as the primary spiritual mentors who introduce students to a deeper understanding of God's guidance and love. This study affirms that Christian education in public schools is not only possible but also meaningful when it is approached with sensitivity, professionalism, and theological depth. CRE teachers become instruments through which God's guidance continues to be experienced by students in a pluralistic educational setting. This research also contributes theoretically by integrating biblical theology and educational practice through the lens of Exodus 13:21. The metaphor of divine guidance enriches the understanding of teacher identity, redefining CRE teachers as spiritual illuminators rather than mere instructors. Methodologically, the use of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) has provided a strong academic foundation for synthesizing insights from theology, pedagogy, and Christian education. This approach ensures that the conclusions drawn are grounded in credible scholarly perspectives and offer a comprehensive view of the spiritual mission of CRE teachers. Illuminating students' spiritual growth through Christian Religious Education is a sacred and strategic responsibility. CRE teachers are called to reflect God's guidance by

becoming sources of clarity, encouragement, and spiritual direction in students' lives. Inspired by Exodus 13:21, they are invited to lead students with faithfulness, patience, and love, so that learners may grow not only in knowledge but also in trust, hope, and commitment to God. This study ultimately affirms that when CRE teachers faithfully embody their role as spiritual guides, they participate in God's ongoing work of leading His people, shaping a generation of students who walk confidently in the light of His guidance.

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