



Reflecting Divine Light through Personal Exemplarity: A Study of Christian Religious Education Teachers Based on Exodus 34:29 at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa

Suardin Zendrato

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: suardinzendrato2008@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the personal exemplarity of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers as bearers of divine light, inspired by the theological reflection of Exodus 34:29, within the context of SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa. Christian Religious Education is not solely concerned with the transmission of biblical knowledge but also with the formation of students' spiritual character through lived examples. In this regard, teachers' personal integrity and spiritual maturity play a crucial role in shaping students' understanding and internalization of Christian values. This research aims to explore how CRE teachers reflect divine light through their personal character and daily practices, and how such exemplarity influences students' spiritual awareness and moral behavior. The study employed a qualitative research design involving two CRE teachers and sixty-seven Christian students. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and documentation analysis. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to personal exemplarity, spiritual authenticity, and the integration of faith and teaching practice. To ensure data credibility, triangulation of methods and sources, member checking, and prolonged engagement were applied. The findings reveal that the personal exemplarity of CRE teachers is perceived by students as a concrete reflection of divine light manifested through moral consistency, humility, compassion, and spiritual discipline. Students reported that teachers' lived faith significantly influenced their spiritual sensitivity, ethical attitudes, and engagement in religious activities. Despite challenges posed by contemporary educational and cultural contexts, sustained personal integrity enables teachers to function as credible witnesses of Christian faith. This study concludes that strengthening teachers' personal exemplarity is essential for fostering transformative Christian education that integrates biblical theology with educational practice.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, Personal Exemplarity, Divine Light, Exodus 34:29, Teacher Character*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) occupies a strategic position in shaping students' spiritual, moral, and character development, particularly within public school contexts where diverse values and influences intersect. Beyond the transmission of doctrinal knowledge, CRE is fundamentally concerned with the formation of faith lived out through attitudes, behavior, and daily practices. In this regard, the role of the Christian Religious Education teacher extends far beyond instructional competence; it encompasses personal integrity, spiritual maturity, and moral exemplarity. Students often learn not only from what teachers say, but more profoundly from how teachers live, interact, and respond to real-life situations. Consequently, the personal example of CRE teachers becomes a powerful medium through which Christian values are internalized and reflected in students' lives. The concept of teachers as "bearers of light" finds a strong theological foundation in Exodus 34:29, which describes Moses descending from Mount Sinai with his face radiating divine glory after encountering God. This biblical narrative symbolizes the transformative effect of an authentic relationship with God, where divine presence is not merely experienced inwardly but becomes visibly manifested outwardly. In the context of Christian education, this passage provides a meaningful metaphor for teachers whose lives reflect God's light through character, attitudes, and conduct. CRE teachers are called not only to teach about God but also to embody His values, allowing their personal lives to become testimonies that illuminate students' spiritual journeys. In contemporary educational settings, especially at the junior high school level, students are in a critical phase of identity formation. They are highly observant of adult behavior and tend to evaluate the credibility of moral and religious instruction based on the consistency between words and actions. When CRE teachers demonstrate honesty, humility, compassion, discipline, and responsibility in their personal and professional lives, they create a learning environment where Christian teachings are perceived as authentic and relevant. Conversely, inconsistencies between teaching and practice may weaken students' trust and diminish the transformative potential of Christian education. Therefore, personal exemplarity is not an optional attribute but an essential dimension of effective CRE teaching.

SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa, as a public educational institution, represents a context where Christian Religious Education must engage constructively with pluralistic realities while maintaining its distinctive spiritual mission. Within such a setting, CRE teachers face complex challenges, including moral degradation, declining spiritual sensitivity among students, and the influence of digital culture that often contradicts Christian values. These challenges require teachers who are not only pedagogically competent but also spiritually grounded and morally exemplary. Their personal lives, both inside and outside the classroom, serve as living curricula that either reinforce or undermine the values they seek to instill. Despite the recognized importance of teacher exemplarity, many educational studies tend to focus predominantly on pedagogical strategies, learning media, or cognitive outcomes, while giving limited attention to the personal and spiritual dimensions of teachers. This gap is particularly evident in studies of Christian Religious Education, where theological reflection and educational practice are not always integrated. There is a need for research that explores how biblical principles, such as the reflection of divine light in Exodus 34:29, can inform and enrich the personal and

professional identity of CRE teachers in concrete educational contexts. Based on this background, the present study seeks to examine the personal exemplarity of Christian Religious Education teachers as bearers of divine light, inspired by Exodus 34:29, at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa. By integrating biblical theology with educational perspectives, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how teachers' personal character and spiritual integrity function as transformative forces in Christian education. Ultimately, the findings are expected to provide theoretical and practical insights for strengthening the role of CRE teachers as authentic witnesses of faith who reflect God's light in the educational community.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the personal exemplarity of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers as bearers of divine light, inspired by Exodus 34:29, within the educational context of SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the focus of the study was not on measuring variables quantitatively, but on understanding meanings, experiences, perceptions, and lived practices related to teachers' personal character and spiritual embodiment in the learning process. Through this approach, the study sought to capture the depth and complexity of personal exemplarity as perceived and experienced by both teachers and students. The participants of this study consisted of two Christian Religious Education teachers and sixty-seven Christian students enrolled at SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa. The CRE teachers were selected purposively based on their active involvement in teaching Christian Religious Education and their direct interaction with students in both instructional and extracurricular contexts. The students were drawn from different grade levels to provide diverse perspectives on how teachers' personal exemplarity is observed and internalized in daily school life. All participants were selected with consideration of their willingness to participate and their relevance to the research objectives. Data were collected using three primary qualitative techniques: in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two CRE teachers to explore their understanding of personal exemplarity, their interpretation of Exodus 34:29, and how they consciously integrate spiritual values into their personal and professional lives. In addition, focus group discussions and guided interviews were carried out with selected students to gather insights into their perceptions of teachers' character, consistency, and influence on their spiritual and moral development. Classroom and school-environment observations were conducted to examine how teachers' attitudes, interactions, and behavior reflected Christian values in real educational settings. Relevant documents, such as lesson plans, reflective notes, and school activity records, were also analyzed to support and triangulate the findings. Data analysis was carried out through thematic analysis, following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts and observation notes were coded to identify recurring themes related to personal exemplarity, reflection of divine light, and the integration of faith and teaching practice. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation of sources and methods, member checking with teacher participants, and prolonged engagement in the research setting. Ethical considerations were carefully

observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' rights. Through this methodological framework, the study aimed to produce credible and meaningful insights into the role of CRE teachers' personal exemplarity in reflecting divine light within the school community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the dominant themes emerging from the data is the perception that authentic personal exemplarity originates from a deep and consistent spiritual relationship with God. Both CRE teachers articulated that their understanding of Exodus 34:29 centers on the idea that spiritual intimacy with God inevitably manifests in outward behavior. One teacher emphasized that "teaching Christian values without living them is empty," suggesting that divine light cannot be artificially produced but must flow naturally from an authentic spiritual life. This understanding aligns with the biblical narrative of Moses, whose radiant face was not the result of deliberate effort but the consequence of prolonged communion with God. Students consistently confirmed this perception. Many students observed that the teachers' calmness, patience, and integrity were most evident not during formal teaching moments, but in spontaneous interactions such as resolving conflicts, responding to students' mistakes, and engaging in school activities outside the classroom. These observations suggest that students interpret teachers' daily conduct as evidence of a genuine spiritual encounter. In this sense, divine light is not conveyed through verbal explanation alone but is embodied in attitudes that students can see, feel, and emulate. This finding supports educational theories emphasizing that moral and spiritual learning is largely acquired through modeling. When teachers demonstrate consistency between belief and behavior, students are more likely to internalize Christian values as meaningful and attainable. The reflection of divine light, therefore, becomes a pedagogical reality rather than a theological abstraction.

Character Integrity and Moral Consistency in Teaching Practice

Another significant finding concerns the importance of moral consistency as a core dimension of personal exemplarity. Students frequently highlighted honesty, fairness, and responsibility as the most influential traits exhibited by CRE teachers. These characteristics were particularly noticeable in assessment practices, classroom discipline, and interpersonal relationships. Students expressed appreciation when teachers applied rules consistently and avoided favoritism, perceiving such actions as expressions of Christian justice and love. This consistency reflects the holiness and faithfulness of God, which Moses encountered on Mount Sinai. The divine light reflected on Moses' face symbolized not only glory but also covenantal faithfulness. In the same way, the teachers' commitment to ethical consistency reinforces the credibility of Christian teachings about truth and righteousness. Students reported that when teachers acted fairly, Christian values were no longer perceived as idealistic concepts but as practical principles relevant to everyday life. Observational data further confirmed this theme. During classroom observations, teachers demonstrated respectful communication, avoided harsh language, and addressed disciplinary issues with a restorative rather than punitive approach. Such practices reflected a conscious effort to embody Christian compassion while maintaining authority. This balance between firmness and empathy was repeatedly mentioned by students as a distinguishing feature of CRE teachers compared to other

subject teachers. The findings suggest that moral consistency strengthens the transformative potential of Christian education. When students encounter teachers whose actions align with biblical teachings, the message of faith gains moral authority and pedagogical effectiveness.

Teachers as Moral and Spiritual Role Models

The study also reveals that CRE teachers are perceived by students as primary moral and spiritual role models within the school environment. Students acknowledged that they often evaluate Christian teachings based on the teachers' personal example rather than doctrinal explanations. Several students stated that their understanding of forgiveness, humility, and patience was shaped more by observing teachers' responses to conflict than by textbook material. This perception underscores the centrality of role modeling in religious education. In Exodus 34:29, Moses' radiant face served as a visible sign of divine presence, prompting the Israelites to recognize God's authority and holiness. Similarly, the personal example of CRE teachers functions as a visible sign of God's values within the school. Teachers become living symbols of Christian faith, making abstract theological concepts accessible to students. Importantly, students noted that teachers' willingness to admit mistakes and apologize had a profound impact on their understanding of humility. Such behavior challenged common perceptions of authority figures and demonstrated that Christian leadership is grounded in servanthood. This aligns with Christ-centered educational principles, where leadership is expressed through self-giving love rather than domination. These findings affirm that personal exemplarity is not merely about moral perfection but about authenticity and spiritual humility. Teachers who acknowledge their limitations while striving to live faithfully provide students with realistic models of Christian discipleship.

Influence on Students' Spiritual Awareness and Behavior

A key outcome identified in this study is the influence of teachers' personal exemplarity on students' spiritual awareness and behavior. Many students reported increased motivation to pray, participate in worship, and reflect on their personal conduct after observing the teachers' consistent faith practices. Teachers' habits of beginning classes with prayer, demonstrating reverence during worship, and expressing gratitude in daily conversations were frequently cited as influential. From an educational standpoint, these practices contribute to the creation of a spiritually formative learning environment. The reflection of divine light is not limited to individual teacher-student interactions but extends to the broader school climate. Students indicated that they felt more comfortable expressing their faith and discussing moral issues when teachers modeled openness and respect. This reflects the communal impact of divine light as portrayed in Exodus 34:29. Moses' radiance affected not only his personal identity but also the collective consciousness of the Israelite community. Likewise, the teachers' exemplarity influenced peer interactions among students, encouraging empathy, mutual respect, and ethical awareness. The findings also reveal that the influence of exemplarity is gradual and requires consistency. Students emphasized that long-term observation strengthened their trust in teachers' integrity. This highlights the importance of sustained personal commitment rather than momentary displays of religiosity. Teachers acknowledged pressures arising from administrative responsibilities, limited instructional time, and the

influence of digital culture on students' values. Maintaining spiritual focus amid these challenges requires intentional discipline and personal resilience. Teachers expressed concern that students are increasingly exposed to contradictory moral narratives through social media, which can diminish the perceived relevance of Christian values. In response, teachers emphasized the importance of personal consistency as a counter-narrative to digital influences. Rather than competing with technology through information alone, teachers sought to demonstrate alternative ways of living rooted in faith. This challenge reinforces the relevance of Exodus 34:29, where Moses repeatedly returned to God to renew his spiritual strength. The narrative suggests that reflecting divine light requires continual renewal rather than a one-time spiritual experience. For CRE teachers, this implies the need for ongoing spiritual formation to sustain personal exemplarity.

Integration of Biblical Theology and Educational Practice

One of the most significant contributions of this study lies in its integration of biblical theology and educational practice. The findings demonstrate that Exodus 34:29 provides a meaningful theological framework for understanding teacher exemplarity. Divine light, as reflected in personal character, becomes a bridge between faith and pedagogy. Teachers who internalize biblical narratives as formative for their identity are better equipped to translate theological principles into educational practice. This integration enhances the coherence of Christian education, ensuring that teaching is not merely informational but transformational. Students, in turn, experience Christian education as a lived reality rather than a theoretical subject. The study highlights the need for CRE teacher development programs that emphasize spiritual formation alongside pedagogical skills. Without such integration, the risk remains that Christian education may lose its distinctive transformative power. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of teacher character in moral and religious education. Studies on Christian pedagogy have repeatedly shown that teacher integrity and authenticity significantly influence students' faith development. However, this study adds a distinctive contribution by grounding the discussion explicitly in Exodus 34:29, offering a biblical lens through which teacher exemplarity is interpreted. By situating empirical findings within a theological narrative, this study addresses a gap in existing literature where theological reflection and educational research are often treated separately. The integration of these perspectives enriches both fields, providing a holistic understanding of Christian Religious Education.

Implications for Christian Religious Education

The findings suggest several important implications for CRE practice. First, personal exemplarity should be recognized as a core competency of CRE teachers, equal in importance to pedagogical knowledge. Second, schools should create supportive environments that encourage teachers' spiritual growth. Third, curriculum development should incorporate reflective practices that help teachers and students connect biblical narratives with daily life. At SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa, these implications highlight the potential for strengthening Christian education through intentional emphasis on teacher character formation. By nurturing teachers as bearers of divine light, schools can foster spiritually responsive learning communities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the personal exemplarity of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a vital role in reflecting divine light within the educational context of SMP Negeri 2 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa. Inspired by Exodus 34:29, the findings demonstrate that teachers' spiritual integrity, moral consistency, and daily conduct function as visible manifestations of faith that significantly influence students' spiritual awareness and character formation. The biblical narrative of Moses' radiant face provides a powerful theological framework for understanding how an authentic encounter with God transforms personal identity and becomes a source of illumination for others. In the context of Christian education, this transformation is reflected through teachers who embody the values they teach. The research findings affirm that students are highly sensitive to the consistency between teachers' words and actions. CRE teachers who demonstrate honesty, humility, fairness, patience, and compassion are perceived as credible witnesses of Christian faith. Such personal qualities strengthen students' trust and enhance the effectiveness of religious instruction. Rather than relying solely on cognitive transmission of biblical knowledge, Christian education becomes transformative when faith is communicated through lived example. This underscores the notion that personal exemplarity is not an auxiliary aspect of teaching but a foundational dimension of CRE pedagogy. This study highlights that teachers' personal exemplarity contributes not only to individual student formation but also to the creation of a spiritually supportive school environment. The reflection of divine light extends beyond classroom instruction to influence interpersonal relationships, ethical awareness, and communal values within the school community. However, the study also recognizes that sustaining such exemplarity requires ongoing spiritual discipline and resilience, particularly in the face of contemporary challenges such as digital cultural influences and institutional demands. This reinforces the theological insight that reflecting divine light is a continuous process that requires regular renewal through spiritual engagement. In terms of theoretical contribution, this study bridges biblical theology and educational practice by positioning Exodus 34:29 as a meaningful interpretive lens for understanding teacher identity in Christian Religious Education. Empirically, it provides contextual insights into how CRE teachers' personal character shapes students' spiritual experiences in a public school setting. Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its small participant group and localized context. Future research is therefore encouraged to involve broader samples and diverse educational settings to deepen understanding of personal exemplarity in Christian education. The study emphasizes that CRE teachers are called not only to teach about divine light but to reflect it through their personal lives. When teachers live out their faith authentically, they become bearers of light who inspire students to integrate Christian values into their own lives. Strengthening personal exemplarity should thus remain a central focus in the development of Christian Religious Education, ensuring that faith is experienced as a living and transformative reality within the educational community.

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