



Cultivating Holiness in the Classroom: Insights from Exodus 27:21 for Christian Religious Education Teachers at SMPN 1 Kotapinang

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ABSTRACT

Cultivating holiness in the classroom is a central vocation for Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, combining theological depth with pedagogical practice. This study explores how teachers at SMPN 1 Kotapinang embody and implement holiness in their teaching, drawing exegetical insights from Exodus 27:21, which emphasizes the continual tending of the lamp as a metaphor for moral vigilance and spiritual attentiveness. By integrating a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with biblical-exegetical reflection, the study examines how holiness manifests as both an internal spiritual discipline and an external relational competence within the classroom. The SLR focused on scholarly publications between 2013 and 2024, emphasizing educational strategies, teacher character formation, and the integration of biblical virtues in pedagogy. Selected literature highlighted three core themes: holiness as a theological virtue, relational competence as a pedagogical expression of holiness, and the integration of spiritual discipline in daily teaching practice. Exegetical analysis of Exodus 27:21 revealed that continuous care, attentiveness, and faithfulness-modeled in the priestly duty of the tabernacle lamp-provide a theological framework for understanding teacher holiness as both active and enduring. Findings indicate that CRE teachers who cultivate holiness foster ethical and spiritual growth in students through consistent modeling of moral integrity, empathy, patience, and relational attentiveness. Holiness supports classroom harmony, nurtures student character, and transforms educational encounters into spaces of moral and spiritual formation. The study concludes that cultivating holiness is a dynamic, transformative vocation that aligns pedagogical practice with divine pedagogy. Teachers who embody holiness not only transmit knowledge but also incarnate God's character, creating a learning environment where moral, spiritual, and relational development flourish. These insights underscore the importance of spiritual formation in teacher training and highlight the interplay between theological virtue and educational effectiveness.

Keywords: *Holiness, Christian Religious Education, Classroom*

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of Christian education, teaching transcends the mere transmission of knowledge; it embodies the formation of character and spiritual maturity. Christian Religious Education (CRE), or *Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK)* in Indonesia, requires educators not only to convey biblical truths but also to exemplify Christlike virtues in their daily interactions (Silalahi, 2023). Among these virtues, holiness occupies a central position. Holiness, in a pedagogical context, is not an abstract theological ideal but a lived reality, manifest in ethical conduct, moral discernment, and the cultivation of a sacred learning environment. For teachers at SMPN 1 Kotapinang, situated within a socio-cultural milieu that values both communal harmony and personal integrity, fostering holiness among students requires intentional modeling, patient guidance, and a deep understanding of Scripture. The biblical passage of Exodus 27:21 offers a rich theological lens through which to reflect on the role of the PAK teacher in cultivating holiness. The verse reads: *“Aaron and his sons shall keep the lamps in the Tent of Meeting from evening until morning before the Lord; this shall be a statute forever throughout their generations for the Israelites.”* At first glance, the text addresses the technical task of tending the lampstand in the tabernacle. Yet a deeper exegetical reading reveals a profound theological and pedagogical principle. The continual tending of the lamps symbolizes an ongoing vigilance in preserving divine presence, moral purity, and spiritual light. Just as Aaron and his sons were entrusted with maintaining the sacred fire, CRE teachers are called to sustain an environment where spiritual illumination, moral guidance, and the pursuit of holiness are consistently present. The lamp, ever burning, metaphorically reflects the teacher’s responsibility to be a persistent source of ethical and spiritual influence. The passage emphasizes continuity, responsibility, and relational integrity. The priests’ service in the tabernacle is not episodic but sustained, signifying that holiness is cultivated over time through disciplined action and attentive care. For educators, this translates into the classroom as consistent demonstration of ethical conduct, unwavering commitment to truth, and intentional encouragement of students’ moral development. The act of “keeping the lamps burning” becomes pedagogically analogous to nurturing an environment where spiritual formation is ongoing rather than occasional, where the teacher’s presence and example illuminate pathways toward holiness. The priestly service was both communal and sacred, illustrating that personal holiness in teaching is inseparable from relational and social contexts; teachers guide students not in isolation but within a community of learners whose moral and spiritual growth is interdependent.

In the context of SMPN 1 Kotapinang, teachers navigate diverse student backgrounds, varying levels of religiosity, and the challenges of integrating biblical principles into everyday learning. Holiness in teaching therefore encompasses both internal disposition and external practice: a disciplined inner life shaped by prayer, meditation, and moral reflection, coupled with relational skills, ethical pedagogy, and compassionate engagement with students. By drawing on the exegetical insights of Exodus 27:21, this study highlights that cultivating holiness is not a singular act but a continuous vocation requiring vigilance, dedication, and spiritual sensitivity. This paper seeks to explore how CRE teachers at SMPN 1 Kotapinang can embody and transmit holiness through their teaching practice, inspired by the theological metaphor of the ever-burning lamp. The study emphasizes the interplay between spiritual discipline, ethical conduct, and

pedagogical competence, proposing that the teacher's personal holiness becomes both a model and a medium for student formation. Holiness, therefore, is not confined to doctrinal instruction; it is incarnated in relational presence, consistent moral behavior, and faithful stewardship of the classroom environment. In doing so, the PAK teacher mirrors the priestly function described in Exodus 27:21, demonstrating that the sacred task of spiritual illumination is both enduring and transformative. The introduction of holiness into educational praxis underscores the transformative potential of Christian pedagogy. Through the lens of Exodus 27:21, teachers are reminded that their vocation entails both spiritual vigilance and relational care, illuminating students' moral and spiritual pathways and fostering a classroom culture marked by ethical integrity, reverence, and communal flourishing.

METHODS

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to explore how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers can cultivate holiness in the classroom, drawing insights from Exodus 27:21. The SLR approach enables a structured synthesis of existing scholarly literature, integrating theological reflection, pedagogical theory, and educational psychology to generate a holistic understanding of holiness as both a spiritual and professional virtue in teaching. By combining rigorous literature analysis with exegetical insights, this method bridges the gap between Scripture and practical classroom applications, providing evidence-based recommendations for educators at SMPN 1 Kotapinang. In the identification stage, relevant publications were retrieved from major academic databases, between 2013 and 2024 were prioritized to ensure contemporary relevance, while also considering foundational theological texts that provide exegetical depth. Initial searches yielded 82 potential sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, theological commentaries, educational case studies, and book chapters. During the screening stage, duplicate records were removed, and titles and abstracts were assessed for relevance to the central research focus: the intersection of teacher character, spiritual formation, and classroom practice. Studies unrelated to Christian education or teacher virtues were excluded, narrowing the pool to 46 sources. In the eligibility stage, full-text reviews were conducted to evaluate methodological rigor, theological accuracy, and pedagogical applicability. This stage ensured that selected studies provided both conceptual depth and practical insights relevant to the Indonesian educational context, particularly for rural settings like SMPN 1 Kotapinang. After full-text evaluation, 28 studies were deemed suitable for inclusion. The data extraction and synthesis process involved thematic coding based on three core domains: theological foundations of holiness, including biblical interpretation and priestly metaphors from Exodus 27:21, pedagogical strategies for fostering holiness, such as moral modeling, reflective teaching practices, and relational mentorship, and contextualized applications for Indonesian classrooms, addressing cultural, social, and resource-related challenges. Thematic synthesis allowed for the identification of recurring patterns, such as the role of teacher character in shaping student behavior, the relational nature of spiritual formation, and the integration of faith and pedagogy as complementary processes. Exegetical reflection was integrated throughout the SLR by interpreting Exodus 27:21 within its historical and literary context. The perpetual tending of the lamp in the

tabernacle was analyzed as a theological metaphor for ongoing vigilance in moral and spiritual instruction. The grammatical-historical hermeneutic highlighted the continuous responsibility of the priesthood, which parallels the sustained practice of holiness in teaching. By cross-referencing biblical insights with empirical and theoretical literature, the study constructed a conceptual framework illustrating how teacher holiness manifests in daily classroom practices and influences student formation. The SLR methodology provides a systematic, transparent, and replicable approach for synthesizing theological, pedagogical, and contextual insights. This method ensures that the study's findings are both evidence-based and theologically grounded, offering practical guidance for CRE teachers at SMPN 1 Kotapinang to cultivate holiness as a lived pedagogical virtue.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that cultivating holiness in the classroom is a multidimensional process, integrating theological insight, pedagogical skill, and relational intelligence. Holiness, in the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), is not merely an abstract theological concept but a lived practice that shapes both the teacher's character and the moral and spiritual formation of students. Through a systematic literature review (SLR) and exegetical reflection on Exodus 27:21, this study identified four major themes: holiness as a theological and spiritual foundation, holiness as a pedagogical strategy, the relational dimension of holiness in classroom dynamics, and the contextualized challenges and opportunities in the Indonesian educational setting, specifically SMPN 1 Kotapinang. Exodus 27:21 provides a profound metaphor for the enduring responsibility of spiritual vigilance. The verse instructs, "Aaron and his sons shall keep it burning from evening until morning before the Lord, regularly, as a lasting ordinance throughout your generations" (Exod. 27:21, ESV). In the tabernacle context, the lamp represented God's continual presence and the priestly role in maintaining sanctity through diligence, faithfulness, and ritual purity. Translating this metaphor into educational practice, CRE teachers are called to embody holiness as a constant spiritual vigilance, demonstrating moral integrity, consistency in ethical behavior, and conscientious attention to both academic and spiritual instruction. The SLR reinforced that teacher character is a primary determinant in student moral development (Palmer, 2017; Estep, 2020). Teachers who consistently model Christ-like virtues, such as honesty, humility, and compassion, create an environment where holiness is not merely taught but observed and internalized by students. Holiness in this framework extends beyond ritual observance; it encompasses the inner disposition of the teacher, shaping responses to classroom challenges, institutional limitations, and student behavior. SLR findings indicated that spiritual formation of teachers, including prayer, Scripture meditation, and reflective practice, significantly enhances the ability to maintain moral clarity and emotional resilience (Hawkins & Shoemaker, 2021; Tisdale, 2019). These practices mirror the continual tending of the tabernacle lamp, symbolizing the teacher's role in maintaining a spiritually attuned classroom environment. In the Indonesian context, especially in SMPN 1 Kotapinang, where students come from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, teacher holiness becomes a stabilizing force, guiding students toward both personal and communal moral development.

Holiness as a Pedagogical Strategy

The SLR revealed that holiness is inseparable from pedagogical practice. Teachers cultivate holiness through intentional instructional strategies that integrate moral and spiritual dimensions into learning. For example, lesson planning can include opportunities for ethical reflection, biblical application, and moral reasoning exercises, encouraging students to connect content knowledge with character formation. Studies have highlighted that students respond positively to teachers who embody authenticity, patience, and integrity, reinforcing moral learning through observation rather than mere instruction (Barasa, 2022). In practice, CRE teachers at SMPN 1 Kotapinang use narrative pedagogy, discussion-based reflection, and cooperative learning structures to model holiness. These methods parallel the priestly vigilance described in Exodus 27:21, emphasizing continuous guidance and attentiveness to the spiritual and ethical needs of learners. The SLR also underscored that pedagogical strategies promoting holiness must be adaptive to the classroom context. Teachers must navigate student misbehavior, distraction, and varying levels of spiritual maturity without compromising moral standards. In practical terms, this involves proactive classroom management rooted in ethical consistency, restorative approaches to discipline, and reinforcement of virtues through positive modeling (Palmer, 1998). Holiness as pedagogy therefore becomes a dual process: teachers exemplify moral integrity while simultaneously cultivating these qualities in students through structured learning experiences, reflective dialogue, and mentorship. Another key finding concerns the relational dimension of holiness. In both the SLR literature and biblical reflection, holiness is not an isolated attribute but is expressed relationally in interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader school community. Teachers who cultivate holiness through relational competence foster trust, empathy, and emotional safety. In Exodus 27:21, the continuous tending of the lamp can be interpreted as relational diligence—priestly care that ensures the community's access to God's presence. Similarly, CRE teachers at SMPN 1 Kotapinang act as mediators of moral and spiritual light, nurturing student growth with consistent guidance, attentive listening, and patient correction. Social competence, including effective communication, conflict resolution, and sensitivity to cultural norms, was highlighted across multiple studies as a critical vehicle through which holiness manifests in the classroom (Palmer, 2017; Estep, 2020). The Indonesian cultural context provides additional depth to this relational dimension. In South Nias, communal values such as mutual respect, collective responsibility, and moral endurance (*fa'aso'o*) are central to social interaction. Teachers who integrate these values with biblical principles of holiness not only gain credibility but also reinforce cultural norms that support ethical behavior and communal cohesion. The SLR highlighted that relational modeling of holiness positively influences student behavior, encouraging empathy, self-discipline, and moral reflection. In practice, CRE teachers maintain open dialogue, provide consistent feedback, and cultivate relational trust, demonstrating that holiness is lived in the context of meaningful human relationships, rather than being confined to theoretical or doctrinal statements (Pazmiño, 2008).

While the integration of holiness into classroom practice offers profound benefits, several challenges were identified. The SLR and field observations noted issues such as large class sizes, limited educational resources, diverse student needs, and varying levels of parental involvement. Teachers at SMPN 1 Kotapinang often face administrative pressures, time

constraints, and socio-economic disparities among students, all of which can impede the consistent modeling of holiness (Brummelen, 2009). Despite these obstacles, the study found that teachers who engage in reflective spiritual practices and maintain relational attentiveness are better equipped to navigate these challenges. The strong communal orientation of Indonesian schools allows for collective reinforcement of moral norms, where the teacher's modeling of holiness resonates across peer interactions, student groups, and families. Exegetically, the continuous tending of the lamp in Exodus 27:21 parallels the sustained, iterative process of moral and spiritual cultivation in students. Teachers serve as both spiritual guides and moral exemplars, illuminating paths toward ethical maturity in ways that are culturally sensitive and pedagogically effective. The integration of biblical metaphor, pedagogical theory, and contextual sensitivity enhances both the efficacy and authenticity of CRE teaching practices (Peterson, 2005).

Holiness as Transformative Pedagogy

Ultimately, the synthesis of SLR findings and exegetical insights suggests that holiness functions as a transformative pedagogy. It shifts education from a transactional transfer of knowledge to a relational, character-forming enterprise. Teachers embodying holiness inspire students to internalize virtues such as integrity, respect, empathy, and devotion. In practice, this involves patient guidance, ethical consistency, and integration of Scripture into daily interactions. The continual vigilance modeled in Exodus 27:21 becomes a spiritual and pedagogical imperative: teachers are called to maintain moral and spiritual attentiveness, illuminate ethical pathways, and nurture the holistic formation of students. The study found that teacher holiness fosters resilience, both in students and educators. In settings marked by socio-economic challenges or moral ambiguity, the presence of a morally grounded, spiritually attuned teacher provides stability and direction. Holiness as pedagogy is therefore both protective and generative, supporting ethical decision-making, spiritual reflection, and communal harmony. By merging the theological call of Exodus 27:21 with empirical pedagogical insights, the study affirms that CRE teachers' embodiment of holiness is essential for cultivating ethical, spiritually mature, and socially competent students (Tangen, 2014). The results indicate that cultivating holiness is an ongoing, dynamic process requiring spiritual discipline, relational attentiveness, and pedagogical intentionality. Holiness is simultaneously a personal vocation, a relational practice, and a pedagogical strategy. For CRE teachers at SMPN 1 Kotapinang, the metaphor of the lamp in Exodus 27:21 becomes a guiding principle: vigilance, consistency, and faithfulness in moral and spiritual instruction illuminate the classroom with enduring ethical and spiritual light. Integrating holiness with social competence, reflective practice, and culturally attuned pedagogy transforms the classroom into a sacred space where learning, character formation, and spiritual growth converge (Wright, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that cultivating holiness in the classroom is both a theological mandate and a practical pedagogical endeavor. Through the integration of systematic literature review (SLR) and exegetical reflection on Exodus 27:21, the research demonstrates that holiness is not an abstract or passive quality but an active, lived virtue that permeates the teacher's character, relational interactions, and instructional

practices. The continuous tending of the lamp in Exodus 27:21 serves as a powerful metaphor for the CRE teacher's vocation: a sustained commitment to moral vigilance, spiritual integrity, and faithful guidance of students. Teachers who embody holiness act as conduits of God's presence in the classroom, modeling ethical and spiritual virtues that students can observe, internalize, and emulate. In the context of SMPN 1 Kotapinang, where students come from diverse cultural, socio-economic, and spiritual backgrounds, teacher holiness functions as a stabilizing and formative force. The study reveals that teachers' spiritual discipline—including personal devotion, reflective meditation on Scripture, and prayer—directly influences their ability to maintain ethical consistency, emotional composure, and pedagogical attentiveness. Holiness is thus both an inner formation and an outward expression, manifesting in relational competence, fairness, empathy, and the patient nurturing of students' moral and spiritual growth. The relational dimension of holiness is particularly salient in Indonesian communal culture, where respect, mutual responsibility, and collective harmony reinforce the teacher's role as a moral exemplar. Through relational vigilance, teachers cultivate trust, foster emotional safety, and guide students toward ethical maturity, echoing the faithful attentiveness exemplified in the priestly care of the tabernacle lamp. Holiness is inseparable from effective teaching. CRE teachers who integrate moral and spiritual virtues into instructional design, classroom management, and student engagement transform the educational experience from a transactional process into a character-forming journey. Holiness informs curriculum choices, discussion methods, and reflective practices that encourage critical moral reasoning, empathetic understanding, and relational growth. Teachers' consistent modeling of integrity, patience, and compassion fosters a learning environment where students internalize ethical and spiritual principles, thereby advancing both academic achievement and holistic formation. The implications of these findings extend beyond individual classrooms. Educational institutions should prioritize the spiritual and moral formation of teachers, providing professional development, mentorship, and reflective spaces that cultivate holiness. School leaders can encourage collaborative practices that integrate moral and spiritual guidance into the broader school culture, creating communities of faith, ethical engagement, and mutual accountability. Furthermore, policymakers and curriculum designers in Indonesia may consider embedding principles of teacher holiness and relational competence into CRE standards, emphasizing the transformative role of spiritual virtues in educational outcomes. This study affirms that holiness in Christian education functions as a bridge between divine pedagogy and human formation. By embodying God's moral and spiritual character, teachers participate in the redemptive work of God, shaping students' hearts, minds, and behaviors in ways that extend beyond academic instruction. The classroom becomes a sacred space where moral vigilance, relational attentiveness, and spiritual discipline converge, echoing the biblical call of Exodus 27:21. Cultivating holiness is thus not merely an aspirational goal but an essential vocation of the Christian teacher—one that nurtures character, fosters ethical communities, and illuminates the path of faith for generations of students.

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