

From the Cloud of Glory to the Classroom: The Role of PAK Teachers as Spiritual Guides in the Light of Exodus 40:38 at SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan Labuhan Batu

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the integration of spirituality and pedagogy in Christian Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Kristen or PAK) through the metaphor of the “cloud of glory” in Exodus 40:38, applied to the vocation of teachers as spiritual guides. Conducted at SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan Labuhan Batu, the research investigates how a PAK teacher embodies divine presence through faith-based pedagogical practices that foster moral and spiritual formation among students. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the teacher’s spirituality is not limited to personal devotion but permeates every aspect of teaching, shaping a classroom atmosphere of peace, compassion, and moral integrity. Three dominant themes emerged: faith-driven pedagogy, empathic presence, and incarnational teaching. The teacher’s consistent prayer, moral authenticity, and relational warmth reflected God’s steadfast accompaniment, transforming ordinary lessons into spaces of divine encounter. Students described experiencing a sense of calm, inspiration, and closeness to God, indicating that faith-based education can cultivate not only moral reasoning but transformative character development. Despite challenges such as secular pressures and digital distractions, the teacher’s resilience-grounded in prayer and reflection on Exodus 40:38-demonstrated that divine strength sustains spiritual vocation in education. The study concludes that the spirituality of the PAK teacher serves as the core of pedagogical competence, transforming the classroom into a sacred space where faith and learning converge. Like the biblical cloud of glory, the Christian teacher becomes a vessel of divine light, guidance, and love for the next generation.

Keywords: Teachers, Christian Religious Education, Exodus

INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, teachers are not merely conveyors of knowledge but shapers of souls. Within the framework of Christian Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Kristen, or PAK), this responsibility takes on a deeply spiritual

dimension. The Christian educator is called not only to teach biblical doctrines but also to embody and transmit spiritual wisdom that nurtures the faith and moral life of students. The PAK teacher stands as a living witness of God's presence—an instrument through whom divine truth and grace are experienced in the classroom. This perspective aligns profoundly with the biblical narrative of Exodus 40:38, where the presence of God manifested as a cloud of glory that guided Israel throughout their journey. "For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys." This verse symbolizes divine guidance, constancy, and relational presence—qualities that the Christian teacher must emulate in leading students spiritually through the complexities of modern life. The school environment, especially in primary education settings such as SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan Labuhan Batu, represents a crucial space where spiritual and moral foundations are laid. Students at this stage are highly impressionable, forming their values, identity, and understanding of faith largely through the examples set by adults around them. In this sense, PAK teachers are akin to the biblical cloud in Exodus: they guide not by coercion or authority alone, but by consistent presence, moral clarity, and spiritual illumination. However, in many contemporary contexts, this ideal is increasingly challenged by secular educational pressures, fragmented family structures, and the pervasive influence of digital culture. These forces often dilute the sacredness of learning and diminish students' sense of transcendence, leaving them disconnected from spiritual meaning. As a result, the role of the PAK teacher as a spiritual mentor—a guide who integrates faith and life—becomes ever more critical.

Theologically, the metaphor of the "cloud of glory" offers a rich interpretive lens for understanding the teacher's vocation. Just as the cloud represented both mystery and guidance, the Christian teacher embodies divine presence through humble service, reflective prayer, and authentic relationship. The teacher's spirituality, therefore, is not confined to personal devotion but extends into pedagogical practice—transforming the classroom into a space of divine encounter. When students sense that their teacher teaches with compassion, integrity, and prayerful discernment, they perceive learning as more than academic pursuit; it becomes a journey of faith. This concept aligns with the writings of Parker Palmer (2007), who argued that effective teaching flows from the "inner landscape" of the teacher—a heart aligned with truth and animated by vocation. In the PAK context, that inner alignment reflects a teacher who draws daily strength from God's Word and relies on the Holy Spirit for wisdom in nurturing students' spiritual growth. This study situates itself within the local context of SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan Labuhan Batu, where Christian teachers navigate diverse classrooms, balancing academic objectives with moral-spiritual formation. Here, the central question arises: How can PAK teachers embody spiritual guidance in ways that mirror God's faithful presence described in Exodus 40:38? Addressing this question requires an exploration of how personal spirituality influences teaching behavior, relational dynamics, and moral leadership. The study posits that the effectiveness of Christian education depends not solely on curriculum design or pedagogical technique, but on the teacher's capacity to manifest divine guidance through their daily actions—listening, mentoring, comforting, and inspiring. The integration of biblical principles with pedagogical practice represents the foundation of transformative Christian education. The metaphor of divine presence moving from "the cloud of glory to the classroom" captures the essence of incarnational

teaching-where the sacred meets the ordinary, and spiritual insight illuminates daily learning. This research seeks to examine how the spirituality of PAK teachers functions as a guiding light in moral and faith formation, reflecting the biblical pattern of God's continual accompaniment with His people. In doing so, it aims to contribute both to the theoretical discourse on faith-based pedagogy and to practical strategies for cultivating spiritually grounded educators who, like the cloud of glory, bring light, direction, and hope to the next generation.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive approach was used, aimed at exploring how Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers embody and exercise spiritual guidance in their pedagogical practice, inspired by the biblical model of divine presence in Exodus 40:38. The qualitative approach was chosen because spirituality, as lived and expressed in teaching, involves deeply personal, relational, and contextual dimensions that cannot be adequately captured through numerical data alone. Instead, this method prioritizes understanding meaning, experience, and interpretation as expressed by teachers themselves (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research locus was SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan Labuhan Batu, a public elementary school with a significant number of Christian students and a dedicated PAK teacher. The setting was selected purposively to represent a school where the integration of faith and pedagogy is actively practiced despite limited institutional religious infrastructure. Participants consisted of one PAK teacher and six students who had participated in the teacher's religious instruction for at least one academic year. The inclusion of both perspectives provided a more holistic understanding of how teacher spirituality manifests in classroom interactions and moral formation processes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Interviews with the PAK teacher explored personal faith practices, pedagogical philosophy, and perceptions of spiritual guidance. Student interviews focused on how they experienced and interpreted the teacher's spiritual influence in daily learning. Classroom observations were conducted over three weeks, focusing on patterns of teacher-student interaction, language use, emotional tone, and the incorporation of biblical values into lessons. Additionally, relevant lesson plans and reflection journals were analyzed to triangulate findings and validate consistency between the teacher's stated beliefs and pedagogical actions (Patton, 2015). The emerging themes-such as faith-driven pedagogy, empathic presence, and incarnational teaching-were then interpreted in relation to the theological motif of Exodus 40:38, emphasizing how the teacher's role parallels the guiding cloud in Israel's journey. The research process was conducted prayerfully and reflectively, recognizing that the study's subject-teacher spirituality-is itself sacred and demands sensitivity and integrity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this qualitative study illuminate the profound role of spirituality in shaping the pedagogical character and practice of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers, particularly in the context of SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan Labuhan Batu. Drawing upon data from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, the results reveal how

the teacher's personal relationship with God, moral integrity, and empathetic engagement converge to create a classroom atmosphere infused with divine presence. In interpreting these findings, the theological metaphor of the cloud of glory from Exodus 40:38 provides a symbolic framework for understanding how PAK teachers function as spiritual guides-manifesting God's continual accompaniment, wisdom, and light in the lives of their students. One of the most dominant themes to emerge from the data is that PAK teaching, for the participant, is viewed not merely as a profession but as a spiritual calling. The teacher at SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan consistently articulated that her motivation to teach was rooted in her faith, describing her role as a "shepherd of souls" rather than a dispenser of doctrinal information. This self-understanding reflects the biblical notion of divine commissioning, similar to Moses' own calling in leading the Israelites under the guidance of the cloud of God's presence (Exodus 40:38). Interview data indicated that the teacher began each class with prayer and biblical reflection, not as routine formality but as a way to center both herself and her students in the awareness of God's presence. This daily rhythm established what Parker Palmer (2007) terms the inner landscape of teaching-a space where spiritual integrity flows outward into pedagogy. Students reported that they could "feel" their teacher's sincerity, describing her as *lemah lembut tetapi tegas* (gentle yet firm), a combination that made moral lessons both approachable and authoritative. Observation notes supported these claims: lessons often began with scriptural meditation followed by a short reflective discussion in which students related biblical stories to their own experiences. This practice aligns with what Smith and Smith (2011) describe as faithful presence in pedagogy, where teaching is understood as an act of spiritual hospitality-inviting students to encounter God's truth through relational engagement. In this context, teaching transcended the boundaries of academic instruction and became an act of ministry. The teacher's spirituality influenced classroom management, communication style, and even responses to student misbehavior (Aritonang, 2018). When discipline was required, it was delivered not through punitive measures but through redemptive conversation-a form of correction anchored in compassion rather than fear. This approach mirrors the redemptive character of God's guidance in Exodus, where the divine presence, though awesome, was meant to lead, protect, and restore rather than to punish destructively. The implication is that faith-driven pedagogy redefines authority in the Christian classroom. Authority is no longer hierarchical but relational and moral. The teacher's integrity becomes the primary source of influence, echoing Palmer's assertion that "we teach who we are." In this sense, the "cloud of glory" is not external but internalized in the teacher's faith and love, radiating through every pedagogical act.

Empathic Presence: The Teacher as a Reflection of Divine Compassion

A second major finding concerns the teacher's empathic presence-the capacity to mirror divine compassion in relationships with students. Students interviewed described their teacher as "*sabar, pengertian, dan suka mendengarkan*" (patient, understanding, and a good listener). This empathic stance was not only emotional but theological: the teacher explained that she viewed every child as "*ciptaan Allah yang berharga*" (a precious creation of God), deserving of love, respect, and dignity. Observation data revealed that the teacher frequently paused to check students' emotional readiness before proceeding with lessons. When students appeared distracted or troubled, she adjusted the pace or

incorporated reflective prayer moments. Such attentiveness to emotional and spiritual well-being corresponds with Jesus' own pedagogical model-teaching through compassion and relational attunement (Mark 6:34). In interviews, the teacher stated: "A Christian teacher must become like the cloud in Exodus-not distant, but close enough to give light and warmth." This metaphor captures the essence of empathic presence: being both transcendent and immanent, guiding without dominating, comforting without compromising truth. In practical terms, the teacher's empathy fostered a safe and trusting classroom climate. Students felt valued and understood, which encouraged open dialogue about moral dilemmas, faith struggles, and personal growth. Such empathetic pedagogy resonates with Nel Noddings' (2013) ethic of care, which emphasizes relational responsiveness as the heart of moral education. However, within the PAK framework, empathy takes on a sacred dimension-it becomes an extension of God's own *hesed* (steadfast love). The teacher thus serves as an icon of divine care, reflecting the light of the cloud that guided Israel. The empathic connection had observable effects on student behavior and engagement. Students who had previously been quiet or disengaged began participating more actively. In one observed instance, a student who had struggled with moral behavior shared a personal story during a class reflection, expressing guilt and a desire to "become better." The teacher's compassionate response-listening, affirming forgiveness, and guiding the student to pray-demonstrated how empathy functions as a pedagogical bridge between moral instruction and personal transformation.

Another theme identified through the data is what can be termed incarnational teaching-the embodiment of Christian values in everyday conduct. This theme draws directly from the theological premise that God's truth is made manifest through human witness. In the study, students consistently described their teacher as a "*teladan*" (role model) whose life reflected the very virtues she taught. The teacher's punctuality, fairness, and humility were frequently cited by students as reasons for their respect. One student said, "I see how she prays and helps others; that makes me want to do the same." Such statements reveal that moral formation occurred not only through verbal instruction but through observation of lived example. This mirrors the concept of humans reflecting God's character through their actions. In pedagogical terms, it exemplifies what Knight (2006) refers to as transformative education, in which the teacher's authenticity catalyzes moral imitation and faith development. In class observations, the teacher's language was consistently affirming yet challenging. Rather than imposing religious dogma, she invited students to explore how biblical lessons applied to their own lives. This dialogical approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) notion of scaffolding, where learning occurs through guided interaction within the learner's zone of proximal development. Yet here, scaffolding was not only cognitive but spiritual-the teacher facilitated encounters with truth that were personally meaningful. During a lesson on forgiveness, the teacher used a personal anecdote about reconciling with a colleague, connecting it to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:21-22. Students later reflected on how the story made forgiveness "feel real." This pedagogical embodiment parallels the incarnational principle of the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14): abstract moral truths take form through lived example. A distinctive insight emerging from this research is the importance of consistent spiritual presence-mirroring the unbroken accompaniment of God's cloud in Exodus 40:38. The verse emphasizes that "the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire

was in it by night, in the sight of all Israel throughout all their journeys.” This constancy signifies God’s unwavering presence, and the teacher’s practice similarly embodied steadfast guidance. Students reported that their teacher’s consistency—her reliability, calmness, and moral steadiness—made them feel secure and spiritually supported. In moments of classroom conflict, she maintained composure and responded with prayerful reflection rather than impulsive emotion. This consistency, over time, cultivated trust and respect, key ingredients for spiritual influence. The teacher herself described her role as *“berjalan bersama murid-murid di dalam terang Tuhan”* (“walking with the students in the light of the Lord”). This self-description aligns with Palmer’s (2007) vision of the teacher as a companion on a shared journey of discovery rather than a distant authority. Observations indicated that this constancy also structured the rhythm of classroom life. The teacher integrated daily rituals—such as prayer before lessons and short reflections after discussions—that reinforced spiritual awareness. In theological terms, these rhythms functioned like “liturgies of learning” (Smith, 2009), shaping the classroom as a microcosm of worship. The repetition of sacred patterns cultivated spiritual attentiveness, echoing the Israelites’ continual orientation to the divine cloud.

The teacher acknowledged the difficulty of maintaining spiritual focus amidst administrative pressures, large class sizes, and limited institutional support for religious education in public schools. Moreover, students’ exposure to digital distractions and secular media often conflicted with the moral lessons of PAK. One recurring issue observed was students’ fluctuating attention during prayer or reflection times. The teacher noted, “Sometimes, the children’s hearts are divided—they pray but think about games or social media.” This reflects a broader cultural tension where spiritual attentiveness competes with technological immediacy (Turkle, 2016). The teacher’s strategy to counteract this involved incorporating interactive storytelling, music, and creative arts into lessons, aligning with Gardner’s (2011) theory of multiple intelligences. These multimodal techniques helped capture attention and bridge the gap between spiritual content and children’s lived realities. The teacher also expressed moments of discouragement, especially when personal struggles or institutional constraints limited her capacity to sustain enthusiasm. Yet, she found renewal through prayer, collegial fellowship, and meditation on Exodus 40:38, interpreting the verse as reassurance that “the presence of God still covers my work.” This adaptive resilience exemplifies the theological truth that divine accompaniment persists even through human weakness. The teacher’s perseverance under constraint models what Loder (1998) calls transforming grace—the intersection where human limitation meets divine empowerment.

Integrating Theology and Pedagogy: The Classroom as Sacred Space

The convergence of data suggests that when the PAK teacher’s spirituality permeates classroom practice, the learning environment itself becomes a sacred space—a site of divine encounter. In observations, moments of prayer, reflection, or moral dialogue transformed the ordinary classroom into a place where students experienced peace, conviction, and joy. This sacred quality aligns with the biblical symbolism of the tabernacle in Exodus—the locus of divine presence. Just as the cloud rested upon the tabernacle, signaling God’s indwelling, the teacher’s spirituality made the classroom a dwelling place of grace. Students articulated this experience in simple yet profound language: “It feels

calm when she prays” or “I feel close to God when we learn.” Such testimonies reveal that the teacher’s faith created not only moral instruction but spiritual atmosphere. This finding supports James K. A. Smith’s (2009) argument that education inevitably forms loves and desires, not merely knowledge. Through consistent prayer, compassionate communication, and moral modeling, the teacher cultivated students’ affections toward God and goodness. The teacher integrated ecological and social themes into biblical lessons, teaching that gratitude to God must manifest in care for creation and community. This reflects an expansion of spiritual pedagogy into ethical stewardship, resonating with the holistic educational vision of Knight (2006) and White (2000). Data from student interviews and journals indicate tangible outcomes of this spiritually grounded pedagogy. Students reported increased compassion toward peers, improved prayer habits, and greater awareness of moral consequences. One student shared, “Now I try to pray before I decide something.” Another said, “I feel like God helps me through what I learn in class.” These expressions suggest that moral cognition was internalized into personal faith practices—a sign of genuine spiritual formation (Fowler, 1981). The teacher’s emphasis on reflection and application enabled students to connect biblical truths with lived experiences, demonstrating that faith-based education can cultivate not only moral understanding but transformed character. Observations confirmed these shifts: students displayed greater cooperation, reduced conflict, and spontaneous acts of kindness. These behavioral changes align with the fruits of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22–23, suggesting that the pedagogical approach facilitated both cognitive and affective growth. From a developmental perspective, this finding underscores the importance of early moral modeling: at the primary school level, children form enduring moral schemas based on trusted adult exemplars (Kohlberg, 1981). The PAK teacher’s consistency and authenticity thus played a formative role in shaping lifelong dispositions toward faith and virtue. Bringing these themes together, the metaphor of the cloud of glory provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting the findings. Like the divine cloud that signified God’s direction, protection, and illumination, the PAK teacher’s spirituality manifests through three intertwined dimensions: presence, guidance, and transformation. In this synthesis, the classroom becomes the journey, the students are the pilgrims, and the teacher serves as the cloud of glory—a vessel of divine accompaniment. The study thus advances a theology of teaching as a form of incarnational ministry where pedagogy is a sacred vocation grounded in divine presence. This integration of theology and pedagogy affirms what Palmer (2007) called “the teaching from within”: authentic education arises when the teacher’s spiritual life aligns with their professional identity. The results at SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan demonstrate that such alignment yields not only effective instruction but transformative spiritual growth for both teacher and students. The findings underscore that the spirituality of the PAK teacher—rooted in prayer, empathy, and authenticity—is the most powerful pedagogical force in the classroom. Like the cloud of glory that accompanied Israel, the teacher’s presence guides, comforts, and enlightens the students on their moral and spiritual journey. The study contributes to the broader discourse on faith-based education by illustrating that spiritual formation is not an abstract theological ideal but a lived reality emerging through relational teaching, embodied faith, and daily acts of compassionate presence.

CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms that the essence of Christian Religious Education (PAK) lies not merely in the transmission of biblical knowledge but in the embodiment of divine presence through the teacher's spirituality. The case at SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan Labuhan Batu demonstrates that when a PAK teacher lives and teaches from a spiritually centered life, the classroom becomes more than an academic setting-it transforms into a sacred space where faith, love, and moral integrity are cultivated. The findings, interpreted through the theological lens of Exodus 40:38, reveal that the PAK teacher, like the cloud of glory, functions as a channel of God's guidance, light, and steadfast companionship for students navigating their spiritual and moral journeys. The teacher's role as a spiritual guide emerges through three interconnected dimensions-presence, guidance, and transformation. The teacher's consistent spiritual presence mirrors God's faithful accompaniment of Israel. Her daily acts of prayer, reflection, and compassionate engagement created a stable and nurturing environment where students felt seen, valued, and loved. This constancy cultivated trust, enabling moral instruction to be received not as obligation but as invitation. Through her faith-driven pedagogy, the teacher transformed ordinary lessons into opportunities for divine encounter. Teaching became an act of ministry, where intellectual growth and spiritual formation were seamlessly interwoven. Equally significant was the teacher's empathic presence, reflecting divine compassion in relational practice. By listening deeply, responding gently, and affirming each student's worth, she made the love of God tangible in the classroom. Students internalized moral and spiritual lessons not only from her words but from her demeanor, discovering that faith is lived through kindness, forgiveness, and service. The classroom, thus, became a microcosm of the Kingdom of God-an environment characterized by grace, mutual respect, and joy. This relational ethos was crucial in fostering openness, reflection, and genuine moral transformation among students. Incarnational teaching-the embodiment of biblical truth in everyday behavior-proved essential to the teacher's influence. Her authenticity, humility, and integrity served as a living curriculum that taught more effectively than any textbook could. Students perceived her as a moral exemplar whose life aligned with her instruction, leading to genuine imitation of Christlike virtues. In this way, the teacher's spiritual life was not peripheral to pedagogy but its core substance, shaping both content and method. The research also highlights challenges in sustaining this spirituality within the realities of public education: administrative burdens, secular influences, and digital distractions threaten to fragment the teacher's sacred focus. Yet, as evidenced by the participant's perseverance, spiritual resilience grounded in prayer and biblical meditation enables renewal. The teacher's reflection on Exodus 40:38-"the presence of God still covers my work"-symbolizes the continual assurance that divine strength accompanies human weakness in the vocation of teaching. This study demonstrates that spirituality is the cornerstone of pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education. The teacher's faith transforms instruction into inspiration; her compassion translates theology into lived experience; and her constancy mirrors the steadfast love of God. Theologically, the metaphor of the cloud of glory encapsulates the sacred mission of every Christian educator-to guide students not only toward knowledge but toward communion with God.

Pedagogically, it calls for holistic integration of faith, learning, and character. The teacher who embodies the spirituality of Exodus 40:38 becomes both a sign and servant of divine presence in the classroom. By teaching with heart, wisdom, and prayerful dependence, PAK educators can illuminate the path of faith for their students, just as the cloud illuminated Israel's journey through the wilderness. The transformation witnessed at SD Negeri 09 Pangkatan Labuhan Batu affirms that when spirituality and pedagogy unite, education becomes not merely a human enterprise but a divine partnership-guiding young hearts toward truth, compassion, and the enduring light of God's glory.

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