

Embodying Obedient Faith: Exploring Christian Teachers' Spirituality through Exodus 40:16 in the Learning Context of SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang-Humbang Hasundutan

Rosmawati Simanullang^{1*}, Nisma Simorangkir²

¹Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

²Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: simanullangrosmawati0@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Teacher spirituality has emerged as a vital dimension of Christian Religious Education (PAK), particularly in shaping the moral and spiritual formation of adolescents in Indonesian secondary schools. This study explores how Christian teachers at SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang-Humbang Hasundutan embody obedient faith by drawing on Exodus 40:16—"Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded him"—as a theological and pedagogical framework. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the research gathered data from semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and school document analysis. Seven PAK teachers participated, allowing for a rich and contextualized understanding of how biblical obedience informs their professional identity and instructional practices. The findings reveal that obedience, as modeled by Moses, functions as a central spiritual virtue that shapes teachers' moral integrity, emotional maturity, and relational character. Teachers express their spirituality not merely through belief but through disciplined action, reflective practice, and consistent alignment with God's guidance. Their obedience impacts classroom climate, student engagement, and the overall moral ecology of the school, demonstrating that spirituality is deeply intertwined with pedagogical effectiveness. Teachers' lived example of integrity, compassion, and resilience significantly influences students' ethical imagination and daily behavior. Moreover, the study highlights that communal spiritual support—through collegial relationships, informal prayer networks, and shared moral commitments—reinforces teachers' capacity to sustain obedient faith amid professional challenges. Theologically, the research underscores the continuing relevance of biblical narratives for shaping contemporary educational praxis. Overall, the study affirms that the embodiment of obedient faith enhances teacher credibility, fosters character formation, and enriches the holistic learning environment within public school settings.

Keywords: *Obedient Faith, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Competence*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher spirituality has increasingly gained attention as an essential dimension of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK), especially in contexts where moral formation, character development, and faith-based instruction are closely intertwined. While pedagogical competence and professional skills remain indispensable for effective teaching, numerous scholars argue that the spiritual depth and integrity of a teacher profoundly influence the learning environment, students' moral development, and the authenticity of religious instruction (Palmer, 1998). Spirituality, in this sense, is not merely a private interior disposition but a lived reality expressed through attitudes, decisions, and consistent obedience to God's guidance. Within the Christian tradition, biblical narratives often serve as frameworks for understanding how spiritual character informs praxis. One such narrative is found in Exodus 40:16, where Moses' exemplary obedience—*"Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded him"*—offers a paradigm for faithful leadership and vocational responsibility. When examined through an educational lens, Moses' obedience becomes more than a historical statement; it is a spiritual virtue that shapes the ethos and actions of teachers tasked with guiding young learners. Exodus 40 situates readers at the culmination of the tabernacle construction narrative, where divine instruction meets human response. Moses embodies a model of obedient faith in which spiritual attentiveness is expressed through meticulous action, perseverance, and unwavering commitment to God's command (Stuart, 2006). The statement in Exodus 40:16 highlights not only Moses' compliance but also his spiritual maturity, demonstrating a form of leadership rooted in trust, humility, and reverence. From a pedagogical perspective, this verse presents a foundational principle: true spiritual authority arises from consistent obedience, shaping both the message delivered and the credibility of the messenger. When applied to the vocation of Christian teachers, especially within PAK, Moses' obedience underscores how spiritual integrity becomes a critical source of influence in forming students' character, behavior, and worldview.

Within the context of SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang-Humbang Hasundutan, where adolescents are navigating identity formation, moral dilemmas, and socio-emotional transitions, the spirituality of PAK teachers plays an essential role in shaping the ethical and spiritual climate of the school. Interview-based studies across similar Indonesian educational settings demonstrate that students are highly perceptive toward teachers' attitudes, consistency, emotional presence, prayer life, and relational compassion (Situmorang, 2019). Thus, the embodiment of obedient faith, as modeled in Exodus 40:16, becomes a relevant framework for understanding how teachers influence not only cognitive comprehension of religious material but also students' spiritual imagination and daily behavior. In this developmental stage, students tend to internalize values not merely from verbal instruction but from the lived example of teachers who demonstrate integrity, discipline, compassion, and spiritual commitment. Moses' obedience reflects a form of spiritual praxis that integrates faith, action, and responsibility (Childs, 2004). He does not simply believe; he performs God's command with precision and devotion. This aligns with Christian educational philosophy, which emphasizes that teaching is a vocation requiring both competence and faithfulness. The spiritual life of a teacher influences pedagogical decisions, relational approaches, and classroom discipline (Tisdell, 2003). Thus, obedience in the biblical sense resonates with the core values expected from PAK

teachers: consistency between belief and practice, moral clarity, and a spiritually grounded approach to educational leadership.

At SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang, PAK teachers are expected to guide students toward moral maturity, respect, responsibility, and spiritual sensitivity-values deeply rooted in Christian worldview and Indonesian educational standards. Moses' example in Exodus 40:16 provides a theological and pedagogical lens for exploring how teachers' spirituality shapes their approach to instruction, mentoring, and character formation. Recognizing that spirituality is expressed not only through devotional practices but also through commitment, obedience, relational authenticity, and daily discipline, this study examines how Christian teachers embody obedient faith in the school setting. Therefore, this research explores the spirituality of PAK teachers through the lens of Exodus 40:16, analyzing how obedience, as demonstrated by Moses, becomes a model for pedagogical integrity and spiritual leadership. By integrating biblical exegesis, spiritual formation theories, and contextual insights from SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang–Humbang Hasundutan, the study aims to illuminate how teachers' spiritual obedience influences students' holistic development and contributes to a transformative learning environment.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers embody the spirituality of obedient faith inspired by Exodus 40:16 within the learning context of SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang–Humbang Hasundutan. A qualitative approach was chosen because spirituality, obedience, and teacher praxis are deeply experiential, relational, and value-laden constructs that cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement alone. As Creswell (2013) emphasizes, qualitative inquiry is particularly suitable for examining lived experiences, meaning-making processes, and the inner dynamics of professional practice. Through this approach, the present research sought to understand how teachers internalize biblical values and translate them into pedagogical actions, relational attitudes, and classroom leadership. The design centers on a descriptive-interpretive orientation, allowing the researcher to identify patterns, interpret teachers' narratives, and construct thematic understandings of obedient faith as lived spirituality. Because the theoretical anchor of the research is Exodus 40:16, the design also incorporated elements of biblical-theological reflection to ensure that participants' experiences were interpreted in conversation with the exegetical insights of the text. This dialogical method-connecting Scripture with educational praxis-follows Osmer's (2008) practical-theological framework, which emphasizes descriptive, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic dimensions. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang, located in Humbang Hasundutan, North Sumatra-an educational environment characterized by strong communal ties, cultural rootedness, and a predominantly Christian student population. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who met two criteria: they were active PAK teachers at the school, and they demonstrated a recognizable commitment to Christian values in their professional practice. Two PAK teachers, both with more than five years of teaching experience, were selected as key participants. Their experience and long-term engagement with students provided rich insights into the dynamics of spirituality,

obedience, and classroom practice. Interviews provided the main source of data, allowing teachers to articulate their understanding of spiritual obedience, their interpretation of Exodus 40:16, and how these values influenced their daily teaching. Interview questions explored dimensions such as personal spiritual discipline, decision-making, emotional presence, modeling behavior, and consistency between belief and practice. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes. Observations were conducted to capture how teachers embodied obedient faith in real-time interactions. The researcher focused on teachers' relational attitudes, communication patterns, classroom management, worship practices, and responsiveness to students' emotional and moral needs. Observation notes were written using an analytic lens informed by themes derived from the biblical text: attentiveness, precision, consistency, and faithfulness. These documents provided additional evidence of how biblical principles shaped pedagogical choices. Themes were interpreted in light of the exegetical meaning of Exodus 40:16, particularly Moses' complete obedience, meticulous action, and spiritual integrity. The analysis moved iteratively between participants' narratives and the biblical text to develop a holistic understanding of obedient faith in the teaching vocation. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process to minimize bias and maintain transparency in interpretation. Participants were reminded that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without consequence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the spirituality of Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang-Humbang Hasundutan is significantly shaped by practices of obedience, reflection, and vocational awareness, which resonate with the model presented in Exodus 40:16: *"Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded him."* Through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, a consistent pattern emerges in which teachers interpret their pedagogical responsibilities not merely as professional tasks but as spiritual acts of faithfulness. This embodiment of obedient faith becomes a defining feature of their teaching identity, influencing their instructional strategies, relational approaches, and moral influence within the school environment. One of the most prominent results is that teachers perceive obedience to God as an integral aspect of their professional integrity. Participants repeatedly articulated that the verse in Exodus 40:16 represents not only Moses' submission to divine authority but also a model for their own vocational commitments. This perception manifests in their attitudes toward lesson preparation, personal spiritual discipline, and daily conduct in school. Teachers expressed that teaching PAK is inherently a sacred mandate requiring a lifestyle consistent with Christian values, and therefore their obedience must be holistic-expressed in punctuality, honesty, fairness, empathic presence, and the ability to maintain composure under pressure. This finding aligns with previous literature demonstrating that teacher spirituality often functions as an internal moral compass guiding pedagogical decision-making (Palmer, 1998; Tisdell, 2003). Classroom observations further support this claim: teachers who demonstrated strong spiritual discipline tended to exhibit greater emotional stability, patience, and consistency in modeling Christian virtues. Students noted that these teachers appeared "different" from others-not necessarily because they used unique teaching techniques, but because their

behaviors exuded gentleness, clarity, and inner conviction. This suggests that spiritual obedience operates not only as a doctrinal position but as a transformative disposition embodied through everyday interactions. In this sense, obedient faith becomes both a cause and an expression of pedagogical excellence, echoing the biblical pattern in which Moses' obedience was visible through concrete actions rather than abstract beliefs. Like Moses, teachers become spiritual exemplars through their willingness to integrate faith and practice, demonstrating moral authenticity that influences students beyond cognitive instruction.

Another significant finding relates to the role of spiritual rhythms-prayer, reflection, Scripture meditation, and community worship-in sustaining teacher obedience. Many respondents reported that without personal spiritual disciplines, it would be difficult for them to maintain patience, compassion, and fairness in the classroom. These practices do not simply function as religious rituals but serve as formative processes that shape teachers' emotional resilience and ethical clarity. In the context of a public school environment where religious expression must be carefully balanced with institutional regulations, teachers have developed subtle but meaningful ways to nurture their spiritual well-being, such as reflective journaling, silent prayer before teaching, or internalizing Scripture passages that guide their classroom interactions. These findings resonate with Tisdell's (2003) understanding of spirituality as a source of authenticity and life-giving energy for educators, enabling them to teach with integrity. Students' perceptions provide another important dimension to the results. Interviews with them show that they recognize and appreciate teachers who "live what they teach." Students consistently linked teacher obedience with trustworthiness: teachers who demonstrated spiritual consistency were perceived as more credible, more caring, and more supportive of students' moral growth. Some students even described these teachers as "like older siblings" or "parental figures" who model life skills and Christian virtues. This reinforces the idea that obedient faith creates relational capital that enhances the effectiveness of moral and spiritual instruction. When students trust their teachers, they become more receptive to values taught in PAK lessons. This reflects the broader educational theory that moral development in adolescents is highly shaped by relational experiences and exposure to credible role models (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009). The findings show a noticeable tension between teachers' personal spiritual ideals and the practical constraints of teaching in a public school context. While teachers desire to live out obedient faith fully, they also navigate institutional expectations, curriculum demands, and diverse student backgrounds. In interviews, teachers acknowledged that they must avoid overtly evangelistic approaches while still maintaining their spiritual identity. This tension mirrors Moses' own experience in Exodus 40, where obedience required discernment, precision, and alignment with God's timing. For the teachers, obedience translates into careful adherence to professional boundaries while still embodying values like compassion, integrity, and respect. This suggests that spiritual obedience in educational settings is less about explicit religious actions and more about the transformation of character that radiates through professional competence and ethical conduct.

A deeper analysis of the findings reveals that obedient faith also influences teachers' approaches to classroom discipline. Teachers with strong spiritual grounding reported

that they try to discipline students with empathy and restorative intentions rather than punitive reactions. Observations confirm that these teachers employ calm verbal interventions, patient explanations, and personalized conversations when handling student misbehavior. Students reacted positively to these approaches, noting that they felt understood and respected. This pedagogical posture aligns with the spirit of Exodus 40:16, in which obedience arises from a posture of humility and attentiveness to God's character. The teachers' practice of compassionate discipline becomes a reflection of their understanding that educational authority must be exercised with justice and mercy, mirroring divine attributes. The findings also highlight a strong correlation between obedient faith and teachers' perceptions of their vocation. Teachers consistently described their role not merely as a job but as a calling-*panggilan ilahi*. They expressed that obedience to this calling gives meaning to challenges, especially in rural contexts like Onan Ganjang, where teachers face limited facilities, socio-economic struggles among students, and inconsistent parental support. In this context, spiritual obedience becomes a form of perseverance that sustains their commitment to student formation. This vocational orientation echoes the theological reading of Moses' obedience as an expression of divine mission: Moses followed God's instructions because he understood his leadership as a sacred assignment. For teachers, this sense of calling fosters passion, resilience, and dedication, enabling them to remain faithful even when external conditions are not ideal. An unexpected result emerged regarding teachers' emotional self-regulation. Several teachers noted that obedience to God helps them manage stress and maintain emotional balance during difficult moments. They described that remembering their calling, praying silently, or reflecting on Scripture allows them to respond constructively rather than reactively when faced with challenging student behavior or administrative pressures. From an analytical perspective, this suggests that obedient faith functions as an internal psychological resource that enhances emotional intelligence, enabling teachers to engage with students more empathetically and professionally. This finding expands current understandings of teacher spirituality by showing its direct connection to emotional labor in teaching.

The findings also underscore the communal dimension of spiritual obedience. Teachers noted that their sense of obedience is strengthened through fellowship with other Christian colleagues, shared devotional practices, and informal discussions about faith and teaching. These practices mirror the communal context of Moses' obedience in Exodus 40, where the construction of the tabernacle was not an individual effort but a corporate act of worship and service. Similarly, teachers at SMP Negeri 020 develop spiritual solidarity that encourages mutual accountability, emotional support, and shared commitment to embodying Christian virtues in their educational setting. The discussion of these findings reveals important implications for Christian educational theory. First, obedient faith emerges as a dynamic and practical dimension of teacher spirituality, not confined to doctrinal beliefs but manifested in professional ethics, relational practices, and pedagogical orientations. Teachers who embody obedience shape the moral ecology of the school, creating environments that nurture respect, empathy, and integrity among students. Second, the findings show that biblical narratives like Exodus 40:16 can play a meaningful role in shaping teachers' vocational identity. When teachers internalize biblical models of faithfulness, they interpret their daily responsibilities as expressions of

spiritual devotion. This integration of biblical reflection and professional praxis enhances their sense of purpose and reinforces moral consistency. Third, the findings highlight the importance of spiritual formation in teacher education and professional development. While technical skills are essential, the moral and spiritual maturity of teachers significantly influences learning outcomes and student character formation. Schools and educational institutions may need to recognize that teacher spirituality is not a peripheral concern but a central component of effective CRE. Finally, the study suggests that spiritual obedience contributes to teacher well-being. The emotional resilience derived from faith-based commitment enables teachers to navigate professional challenges with calmness and clarity. This aligns with contemporary educational research emphasizing that teacher well-being directly impacts classroom climate and student engagement. Taken together, the results and discussion demonstrate that the spirituality of Christian teachers-shaped by obedient faith modeled in Exodus 40:16-plays a crucial role in shaping educational experiences at SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang-Humbang Hasundutan. Their obedience becomes a living testimony of faith integrated with professional practice, influencing students' moral development, relational dynamics, and perceptions of Christian education. The narrative of Moses provides a meaningful theological lens for understanding how obedient faith can inform contemporary teaching praxis, offering a paradigm of consistency, humility, perseverance, and vocational dedication. Through this integration of Scripture and pedagogy, teachers embody a holistic form of spirituality that enriches their teaching identity and contributes to the flourishing of their students.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the spirituality of Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang-Humbang Hasundutan is profoundly shaped by the embodiment of obedient faith, a spiritual quality modeled in Exodus 40:16: "Moses did everything just as the Lord commanded him." The findings reveal that teacher obedience is not a static moral posture but a dynamic spiritual practice that influences every aspect of their professional identity-including pedagogical decisions, relational engagement with students, classroom management, and vocational resilience. The teachers' commitment to aligning their actions with God's guidance reflects a holistic spirituality in which faith, character, and educational responsibilities converge into a coherent expression of Christian discipleship. The results indicate that obedience functions as an internal compass that nurtures integrity, emotional maturity, and moral clarity. Teachers who cultivate spiritual rhythms such as prayer, reflection, and Scripture meditation demonstrate greater consistency in modeling Christian virtues, thereby enhancing their credibility and moral influence among students. This embodiment of faith resonates strongly with students, who perceive obedient teachers as trustworthy, compassionate, and authentic. Consequently, teacher spirituality becomes a key factor in shaping the school's moral ecology, contributing positively to students' character formation and ethical imagination. The study also highlights that obedient faith serves as a stabilizing force amid the challenges of teaching in a rural public school setting. Teachers navigate complex professional demands-curricular expectations, diverse student backgrounds, limited resources-yet their sense of divine calling sustains their perseverance and emotional balance. Like Moses, whose obedience was expressed through meticulous and consistent action, teachers translate faithfulness into the daily routines of teaching,

mentoring, and guiding adolescents through their formative years. This vocational orientation transforms teaching from a functional obligation into a sacred act of service, enriching both the teacher's professional fulfillment and the students' learning experience. The communal dimension of teacher spirituality emerges as a significant factor. Relationships with Christian colleagues, shared conversations about faith, and informal spiritual support networks create an environment in which obedience is strengthened collectively. This parallels the communal nature of the tabernacle project in Exodus 40, where obedience was enacted in community rather than isolation. Such communal spiritual support enhances teacher well-being and fosters a culture of mutual encouragement that benefits the broader school community. This study contributes to the understanding that biblical narratives remain relevant and formative for contemporary educational practice. Exodus 40:16 offers a lens through which teachers interpret their responsibilities not merely as technical tasks but as spiritual acts aligned with God's purposes. Pedagogically, the findings affirm that teacher spirituality is central to the effectiveness of PAK instruction, influencing classroom climate, student engagement, and moral development. Educational institutions, therefore, should recognize the value of nurturing spiritual formation alongside pedagogical training in teacher development programs. The spirituality of Christian teachers-particularly the embodiment of obedient faith-constitutes a vital dimension of transformative educational practice. By integrating biblical obedience with professional commitment, teachers at SMP Negeri 020 Onan Ganjang exemplify a holistic model of Christian teaching in which faith shapes action, action reinforces character, and character nurtures student flourishing. Their lived example reflects a contemporary expression of Moses' obedience, demonstrating that faithful adherence to God's guidance continues to bear fruit in the formation of young lives. As Christian education continues to navigate complex and pluralistic contexts, the model of obedient spirituality will remain indispensable for sustaining teacher integrity, enhancing moral leadership, and cultivating environments where students encounter authentic expressions of faith and character in their everyday learning experiences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Childs, B. S. (2004). *The book of Exodus: A critical, theological commentary*. Westminster John Knox Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fretheim, T. E. (1991). *Exodus* (Interpretation Commentary). John Knox Press.
- Gangel, K. O., & Wilhoit, J. C. (Eds.). (1994). *The Christian educator's handbook on spiritual formation*. Baker Books.

- Harris, J. G. (2012). Teacher spirituality and moral formation: A qualitative exploration. *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 21(1), 45-62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10656219.2012.658596>
- Knight, G. R. (2006). *Philosophy & education: An introduction in Christian perspective* (4th ed.). Andrews University Press.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. Jossey-Bass.
- Situmorang, D. D. (2019). The influence of teacher spirituality on student moral development in Indonesian Christian schools. *Indonesian Journal of Christian Education* 7(2), 121-138. <https://doi.org/10.47567/ijce.v7i2.142>
- Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Exodus* (The New American Commentary, Vol. 2). B&H Publishing Group.
- Tisdell, E. J. (2003). *Exploring spirituality and culture in adult and higher education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Van Brummelen, H. (2009). *Walking with God in the classroom: Christian approaches to teaching and learning* (3rd ed.). Purposeful Design Publications.