

Teacher Personality Exemplarity and the Theology of Humility: A Case Study of Christian Religious Education Based on Philippians 2:1-11 at SDN 3 Sebabi

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the personality exemplarity of a Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher through the theological lens of humility grounded in Philippians 2:1-11 within a minority Christian context at SDN 3 Sebabi. The research is situated in a unique setting where only one CRE teacher serves two Christian students, making teacher exemplarity a decisive factor in sustaining Christian formation. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research integrates exegetical analysis of the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:1-11 with field data collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The exegetical findings reveal humility as a kenotic pattern of life characterized by self-emptying, obedience, and self-giving love, which functions as the ethical foundation of Christian existence. Empirical findings demonstrate that the CRE teacher embodies this theology of humility through relational sensitivity, dialogical teaching, restorative discipline, and consistent moral modeling. The teacher's humble posture shapes classroom authority as service rather than domination and fosters a climate of trust, emotional safety, and spiritual openness. The impact on students is evident in their affective security, growing moral awareness, and strengthened Christian identity despite their minority status. This study concludes that in marginalized educational contexts, the lived humility of the teacher becomes the primary medium of Christian formation. The theology of humility in Philippians 2:1-11 is thus affirmed not only as a Christological confession but also as a lived pedagogical ethic. The findings underscore the importance of sustained spiritual formation for CRE teachers as the foundation for authentic and transformative Christian education.

Keywords: *Teacher Personality, Christian Religious Education, Theology of Humility*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher personality exemplarity occupies a central position in Christian Religious Education (CRE), particularly because character formation in students is shaped not only by instructional content but also, and more profoundly, by the life example of the teacher. In elementary education, where students are in a formative stage of moral and spiritual

development, the presence of a teacher who embodies Christian virtues becomes a living curriculum. This principle is increasingly significant in public schools where Christian students often exist as a minority, and where CRE teachers must serve simultaneously as educators, spiritual mentors, and moral exemplars. Such a context is clearly reflected in SDN 3 Sebabi, where only two Christian students are served by a single Christian teacher. This unique condition makes the teacher's personality and lived spirituality a decisive factor in sustaining students' Christian identity and moral formation. Among the many virtues emphasized in Christian theology, humility stands as a foundational disposition that shapes all other forms of ethical behavior. Humility is not merely low self-esteem or passive submission, but a Christ-centered orientation of life characterized by self-giving love, obedience to God, and concern for others (Bonhoeffer, 2015). The most profound biblical articulation of this virtue is found in Philippians 2:1-11, which presents the Christological hymn describing the self-emptying (*kenōsis*) of Christ, who, though equal with God, humbled Himself by becoming obedient unto death. This passage has long been recognized as a theological foundation for Christian ethics, particularly regarding relational attitudes, servant leadership, and exemplary conduct (Fee, 2019; O'Brien, 1991). In the context of education, Philippians 2:1-11 functions not merely as a doctrinal text but as a paradigm for how teachers are called to model humility in concrete relationships with students. Previous studies in character and Christian education consistently affirm that teacher exemplarity is the most influential medium of moral transmission (Lickona, 2012; Groome, 2011). Students often imitate what they observe more readily than what they are verbally instructed to do. In Christian pedagogy, this imitative dynamic is theologically grounded in the concept of discipleship, where life example precedes and authenticates verbal teaching (Stassen & Gushee, 2003). Humility, as modeled by the teacher, shapes classroom climate, communication style, conflict resolution, discipline practices, and the overall quality of teacher-student relationships. When humility is absent, even well-formulated moral instruction risks degenerating into moralism or authoritarianism. The challenge becomes even more pronounced when CRE is conducted in a setting of religious minority. In such contexts, Christian teachers not only teach biblical values but also represent the visible face of Christianity within the school environment. Their personality, attitudes, and relational approach become a silent testimony to the credibility of Christian faith (Hays, 1996). The teacher at SDN 3 Sebabi occupies precisely this position. With only two Christian students and a dominant non-Christian environment, the sustainability of Christian character formation depends largely on how the teacher embodies Christ-like humility in daily interactions-with students, colleagues, and school leadership alike. The theology of humility thus moves beyond abstract doctrine and becomes an existential and pedagogical necessity. Empirical studies that integrate exegetical analysis of Philippians 2:1-11 with concrete classroom practice, especially in minority Christian contexts, remain limited. Many studies focus either on general teacher personality, character education, or biblical ethics in isolation, without exploring how a specific Christological text functions as a living theological framework for teacher exemplarity in real school settings (Hill, 2020). This gap indicates the need for a study that not only interprets the theology of humility but also traces its manifestation in the lived personality and pedagogical practice of CRE teachers.

This research therefore aims to explore the teacher's personality exemplarity through the lens of the theology of humility in Philippians 2:1-11 within the specific context of SDN 3 Sebabi. The objectives of the study are threefold: to examine the theological meaning of humility in Philippians 2:1-11 through exegetical analysis; to analyze how this theology of humility is embodied in the personality and daily pedagogical practices of the CRE teacher; and to explore how such exemplarity influences the spiritual and moral formation of Christian students in a minority context. By employing a case study approach, this research seeks to demonstrate that humility is not merely a personal virtue but a pedagogical and ecclesial force that shapes the entire educational encounter. The study argues that when the teacher lives out the kenotic pattern of Christ, CRE becomes not only an academic subject but a transformative space where Christian faith is encountered as a lived reality. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader discourse of Christian education by affirming that teacher personality exemplarity grounded in the theology of humility remains essential for authentic Christian formation, particularly in contexts of limitation, marginality, and social vulnerability.

METHODS

The case study approach was chosen because the research focuses on a unique and bounded context involving only one CRE teacher and two Christian students in SDN 3 Sebabi. This design allows for a rich, holistic, and contextualized understanding of how humility as a Christological virtue is embodied in the lived personality and pedagogical practice of the teacher within a minority Christian setting. The research was conducted over a period of intensive field engagement to capture the natural dynamics of teaching, learning, and interpersonal interaction. The primary participants consisted of one CRE teacher as the main subject and two Christian students as supporting informants. Additional contextual information was obtained from informal interactions with school leaders and non-Christian teachers to understand how the CRE teacher's humility was perceived within the broader school environment. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CRE teacher to explore personal spiritual formation, understanding of Philippians 2:1-11, experiences of teaching in a minority context, and reflections on humility in daily educational practice. Supplementary interviews with the two Christian students were carried out to capture their perceptions of the teacher's personality exemplarity and its influence on their attitudes and faith development. Non-participant classroom observations were conducted during CRE lessons and selected school activities to document how humility was embodied through teaching style, communication patterns, disciplinary approaches, and teacher-student relationships. Then, document analysis was used to examine student reflection tasks and relevant school policy documents related to character education. In addition to field data, an exegetical analysis of Philippians 2:1-11 was conducted using a historical-grammatical approach. This analysis involved examination of the literary structure, key Greek terms related to humility (*tapeinophrosynē*), obedience, and self-emptying (*kenōsis*), as well as the theological emphasis of the Christ hymn. The exegetical findings served as the theoretical and analytical framework for interpreting the empirical data. These themes were then interpreted deductively in light of the theological framework derived from Philippians 2:1-11. The integration of exegetical and empirical data enabled a dialogical interpretation between biblical theology and educational practice. Through this

methodological framework, the study sought to generate a deep and credible understanding of how the theology of humility in Philippians 2:1–11 is concretely embodied in the personality exemplarity and pedagogical practice of a CRE teacher within a marginalized Christian educational context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this case study reveal that the theology of humility in Philippians 2:1-11 is not merely understood theoretically by the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher at SDN 3 Sebabi, but is deeply embodied in personal disposition, interpersonal relationships, and pedagogical practice. The integration between *kenotic theology* (self-emptying) and everyday teaching behavior becomes the central axis through which teacher personality exemplarity is formed and experienced by students. From the exegetical analysis, Philippians 2:1-11 presents humility as a Christological pattern that flows from communion with Christ (vv. 1-2), expressed in relational attitudes of lowliness and self-giving (vv. 3-4), and embodied supremely in the kenosis of Christ (vv. 6-8), which is then vindicated by divine exaltation (vv. 9-11). This theological movement, from self-emptying to glorification, forms the ethical grammar of Christian life (Fee, 2019; O'Brien, 1991). The CRE teacher explicitly interpreted humility not as weakness but as “the courage to lower oneself in order to raise others,” indicating a mature theological understanding that aligns with Pauline ethics. This internalization of biblical humility becomes the spiritual foundation of teacher identity, shaping how authority, power, and service are perceived and exercised in the classroom. Empirical data demonstrate that the teacher’s personality is consistently marked by relational humility. In daily interactions, the teacher avoids authoritarian postures and instead adopts a dialogical and participatory stance. Observations show that the teacher patiently listens to students, affirms their opinions, and corrects mistakes without humiliation. When students fail to complete assignments or make behavioral mistakes, disciplinary responses are given in a restorative rather than punitive manner. This reflects the Pauline exhortation to consider others “*better than yourselves*” (Phil. 2:3), which the teacher translates into an ethic of respect and compassion. Such behavior confirms Lickona’s (2012) assertion that character is most effectively transmitted through personal modeling rather than verbal instruction.

Humility is also expressed in the teacher’s relationship with colleagues and school leadership. Although positioned as a minority teacher in a predominantly non-Christian school environment, the CRE teacher consistently demonstrates openness, cooperation, and respect toward non-Christian colleagues. Interviews with informal informants reveal that the teacher is perceived as “easy to approach,” “not demanding,” and “always willing to help,” even outside formal teaching duties. This social presence strengthens the credibility of the Christian witness in the school and illustrates how humility functions as a form of silent testimony (Hays, 1996). In this sense, the teacher’s humility becomes missional in character, embodying the incarnational logic of Christ’s self-giving described in Philippians 2:6-8. Humility is clearly reflected in teaching strategies and classroom atmosphere. CRE lessons are conducted not as one-directional moral instruction but as relational encounters. The teacher frequently begins lessons with dialogical questions, inviting students to share life experiences before introducing biblical reflection. Teaching

is marked by narrative storytelling rather than moralistic lecturing, enabling students to identify with biblical characters and ethical dilemmas. This approach resonates with Groome's (2011) shared-praxis model, where faith is constructed through reflective dialogue between life and Scripture. The humility of the teacher is evident in the willingness to learn from students' questions and to acknowledge personal limitations when answers are not immediately available. Humility also informs classroom discipline. Instead of asserting power through fear or rigid control, the teacher establishes authority through relational trust. When conflicts arise, such as misunderstandings between students or reluctance to participate in learning, the teacher responds through personal conversation, prayer, and moral reflection. This non-coercive form of authority reflects the inverted power structure of Christ in Philippians 2, where greatness is expressed through service and obedience. The data show that such a disciplinary approach fosters emotional safety and moral openness, allowing students to grow without fear of rejection or shame. The minority context of SDN 3 Sebabi significantly intensifies the importance of teacher exemplarity. With only two Christian students, formal peer-based spiritual reinforcement is minimal. As a result, the teacher becomes the primary living reference for Christian identity. Students repeatedly describe the teacher not only as "my religion teacher" but as "someone who understands me," "who prays with me," and "who never gets angry harshly." These narratives indicate that humility functions as a form of pastoral pedagogy, where teaching, mentoring, and spiritual care converge. This confirms Bonhoeffer's (2015) view that Christian ethics is ultimately lived within concrete relationships rather than abstract moral systems.

The impact of teacher humility on student formation is evident on three levels: affective, behavioral, and spiritual. Affective responses include feelings of security, trust, and acceptance. Students report that they feel "not afraid to make mistakes" and "not ashamed to ask questions" in CRE class. Behaviorally, students demonstrate increased politeness, patience, and willingness to help peers. These behaviors mirror the self-giving pattern that the teacher models daily. Spiritually, students show growing confidence in expressing Christian identity despite their minority status. They participate actively in prayer, demonstrate openness in sharing faith-related struggles, and display a stable sense of belonging within the Christian narrative. This finding strongly supports the theological principle of imitation emphasized in Pauline ethics: believers are formed not only through instruction but through embodied patterns of life (Stassen & Gushee, 2003). The teacher's humility becomes a lived curriculum, shaping students not through coercion but through attraction. The kenotic pattern of Christ thus becomes visible in micro-scale educational relationships. The study also reveals structural and contextual limitations. The teacher bears a disproportionate load of responsibility in sustaining the spiritual life of students with limited institutional support. The absence of a broader Christian learning community within the school makes continuity of spiritual formation vulnerable to personal fatigue and burnout. Furthermore, family environments do not always reinforce the same spiritual disciplines practiced at school. This tension illustrates that humility-based exemplarity, while powerful, cannot substitute for systemic support from families, churches, and educational authorities (Hill, 2020). The teacher's humility enables endurance, but sustainability requires collaborative reinforcement.

The findings reaffirm that Philippians 2:1-11 is not only a Christological confession but an educational ethic. The self-emptying of Christ forms the moral imagination of the teacher, shaping attitudes toward power, success, and authority. In pedagogical terms, humility becomes the spiritual bridge that connects authority with compassion, discipline with grace, and instruction with relational care. The exaltation of Christ (Phil. 2:9-11) also provides eschatological hope that humble service is not in vain, even when conducted in obscurity or minority settings such as SDN 3 Sebabi. This study strengthens the argument that teacher personality exemplarity is a core medium of Christian education, particularly in marginalized contexts. It extends existing character education theory by grounding moral modeling explicitly in Christological humility rather than in generic virtue ethics. While secular character education emphasizes behavioral consistency and moral habits, Christian exemplarity adds a soteriological and spiritual depth rooted in participation in the life of Christ. This integration of doctrine and practice distinguishes Christian pedagogical humility from humanistic moralism. The findings imply that the formation of CRE teachers must prioritize not only pedagogical competence but sustained spiritual formation. The ability to live out humility under conditions of limitation, isolation, and minority pressure requires continuous spiritual nourishment, reflective practice, and ecclesial support. Teacher training institutions and church bodies, therefore, bear responsibility to cultivate not only instructional skills but also kenotic spirituality as the core of professional Christian identity. The results and discussion demonstrate that the theology of humility in Philippians 2:1-11 is concretely embodied in the personality and pedagogical practice of the CRE teacher at SDN 3 Sebabi. Humility emerges not as a passive trait but as an active spiritual force that shapes relationships, teaching strategies, classroom authority, and student formation. In a context where numerical strength is minimal, the power of exemplarity proves maximal. The living witness of a humble teacher becomes the primary locus of Christian formation, confirming that in Christian education, who the teacher is ultimately speaks louder than what the teacher says.

CONCLUSION

This case study affirms that the personality exemplarity of a Christian Religious Education teacher grounded in the theology of humility of Philippians 2:1-11 plays a decisive role in shaping both the quality of pedagogical practice and the spiritual formation of students in a minority Christian context. Within the unique setting of SDN 3 Sebabi, where only one CRE teacher serves two Christian students, humility emerges not merely as a personal virtue but as the core pedagogical force that sustains Christian education under conditions of limitation and marginality. The theology of Christ's self-emptying (*kenōsis*) is shown to function as a living ethical framework that informs how authority is exercised, how relationships are built, and how spiritual identity is nurtured. The findings reveal that humility is embodied through relational attentiveness, restorative discipline, dialogical teaching, and consistent moral modeling. Students internalize Christian values not primarily through doctrinal instruction but through sustained exposure to the teacher's lived example of Christ-like self-giving, patience, and servanthood. In this way, the classroom becomes a transformative spiritual space where biblical theology is translated into embodied practice. The study confirms that in minority contexts, where institutional religious support is limited, teacher exemplarity becomes the primary medium through

which Christian formation is preserved and transmitted. This research strengthens the understanding of Philippians 2:1-11 as not only a Christological confession but also a pedagogical ethic that redefines power, success, and authority within educational relationships. It contributes to the discourse on character and Christian education by demonstrating that authentic moral formation flows from kenotic spirituality rather than from moralistic instruction or disciplinary coercion. Humility proves to be a formative virtue that shapes conscience, relationships, and identity through imitation rather than compulsion. While the exemplarity of the teacher exerts a profound formative influence, the study also acknowledges the limitations of relying solely on personal virtue without broader systemic support. Sustainable Christian formation requires the collaborative involvement of families, churches, and educational institutions to reinforce what is modeled in the classroom. Therefore, the development of CRE teachers should include continuous spiritual formation, reflective practice, and communal support structures that enable them to sustain kenotic living in demanding minority contexts. This study demonstrates that the theology of humility in Philippians 2:1-11 is not an abstract doctrine but a lived pedagogical reality that powerfully shapes teacher identity and student formation. In settings of numerical fragility and social vulnerability, the humble life of a teacher becomes the most credible and enduring curriculum of Christian faith.

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