

## Transformative Teaching through Spiritual Empowerment: An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:20 at SMAN 1 Parenggean

Yulia Pratama

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\*correspondence: [yuliapratama17@guru.smk.belajar.id](mailto:yuliapratama17@guru.smk.belajar.id)

### ABSTRACT

*This study explores transformative teaching through spiritual empowerment based on an exegetical analysis of Matthew 28:20 within the context of SMAN 1 Parenggean. The research is grounded in the conviction that Christian teaching is not merely a professional activity but a spiritual vocation sustained by Christ's abiding presence. Employing a qualitative case study design integrated with a historical-grammatical exegetical approach, this study involved 12 Christian teachers and Christian students drawn from a total population of 94 Christian learners. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that spiritual empowerment functions as the core driving force of transformative teaching. Teachers who consciously depend on Christ's presence demonstrate strong vocational resilience, ethical consistency, and a relational approach to pedagogy. Transformative teaching is expressed through continuous character formation, value integration across subjects, and embodied moral example. Students experience measurable transformation in learning motivation, moral sensitivity, interpersonal responsibility, and spiritual awareness. The exegetical analysis of Matthew 28:20 highlights three foundational pillars, continuous teaching, obedience to Christ's commands, and the assurance of divine presence, which are clearly reflected in the lived educational practices observed in the school. This study concludes that spiritually empowered teaching enables holistic transformation of students and strengthens the missionary-pedagogical identity of Christian teachers in a pluralistic public school environment. The integration of biblical theology and empirical educational practice affirms the enduring relevance of Scripture for contemporary Christian education.*

**Keywords:** *Transformative Teaching, Christian Education, Spiritual Empowerment*

### INTRODUCTION

Transformative teaching has increasingly become a central concern in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in relation to the formation of students' character, worldview, and moral responsibility. Education is no longer understood merely as a process of knowledge transmission but as a holistic transformation that shapes attitudes,

values, identity, and life orientation. In the context of Christian education, transformation is inseparable from spiritual empowerment, because genuine change in human life is believed to flow from the work of God through faith, obedience, and spiritual growth. Teaching, therefore, is not only a technical profession but also a spiritual ministry that participates in God's transformative work in the lives of students. This theological vision of transformative teaching finds a strong biblical foundation in Matthew 28:20, where Jesus commands His disciples to teach others "to observe all that I have commanded you," accompanied by the promise of His continual presence: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." This verse highlights two inseparable dimensions of Christian pedagogy: the mandate to teach obedience to Christ's commands and the assurance of divine empowerment through His abiding presence. Teaching, in this sense, is not carried out merely by human capacity but is empowered by God's ongoing companionship and authority. The Great Commission thus provides a missional, pedagogical, and spiritual framework for transformative teaching.

In public-school contexts, however, Christian teachers often navigate complex tensions between spiritual identity and institutional regulations. While schools operate within secular administrative systems and pluralistic environments, Christian educators are still called to embody their faith through integrity, compassion, responsibility, and consistency. This tension raises a critical question: How does spiritual empowerment based on Matthew 28:20 shape transformative teaching within a public educational institution? This question becomes particularly relevant in settings where Christian teachers and students exist as a community within a broader religiously diverse ecosystem. The context of SMAN 1 Parenggean offers a meaningful site for examining this issue. With 94 Christian students and 12 Christian teachers, including a Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher, the school represents a significant Christian presence within a state senior high school. These teachers are entrusted not only with academic instruction but also with the moral and spiritual accompaniment of students who are navigating adolescence, a critical developmental phase marked by identity struggles, moral vulnerability, peer pressure, and exposure to digital culture. In such a context, the role of spiritually empowered teaching becomes increasingly decisive for shaping students' resilience, moral discernment, and faith orientation. Previous studies on transformative learning and Christian pedagogy often emphasize innovative teaching strategies, reflective learning, and student-centered approaches. While these pedagogical elements are important, they frequently overlook the deeper spiritual source of transformation, namely the empowering presence of Christ promised in Matthew 28:20. Without this spiritual empowerment, transformation risks being reduced to behavioral adjustment rather than inner renewal. From a biblical perspective, true transformation involves not only the mind and behavior but also the heart and spiritual orientation of the learner. An exegetical reading of Matthew 28:20 reveals that the Greek verb *didaskontes* (teaching) is participial and integrally connected to the broader mission of disciple-making. Teaching, therefore, is not a detached instructional activity but a formative process within the larger work of spiritual formation. Furthermore, the promise "I am with you always" (*egō meth' hymōn eimi pasas tas hēmeras*) signifies continuous divine presence as the source of authority, courage, perseverance, and spiritual power. This presence constitutes the essence of spiritual empowerment, enabling teachers to engage in transformative

ministry beyond their natural limitations. In the daily reality of SMAN 1 Parenggean, Christian teachers face diverse challenges, including academic performance demands, administrative workload, student discipline issues, and the moral complexities of contemporary youth culture. At the same time, they are expected to serve as role models of faith, integrity, and responsibility for Christian students. This dual responsibility requires not only professional competence but also spiritual strength and empowerment that sustain transformative influence over time. Without such empowerment, teachers risk experiencing burnout, moral fatigue, and the gradual erosion of vocational meaning. Therefore, this study aims to examine transformative teaching through spiritual empowerment by integrating an exegetical study of Matthew 28:20 with an empirical case study at SMAN 1 Parenggean. The research seeks to answer two main questions: What is the theological meaning of spiritual empowerment in Matthew 28:20 as the foundation of transformative teaching? and how is this spiritual empowerment embodied in the professional practice of Christian teachers in a public senior high school context? By addressing these questions, the study is expected to contribute both to the theoretical development of Christian educational theology and to the practical strengthening of Christian teachers serving in pluralistic educational environments.

## METHODS

The qualitative paradigm integrated with a biblical exegetical approach was chosen because the research sought to explore meanings, experiences, and spiritual practices that cannot be adequately captured through numerical data. The case study approach allowed for an in-depth examination of how spiritual empowerment is understood and embodied in a specific educational context with its own social, institutional, and religious dynamics. Meanwhile, the exegetical method was used to establish a solid theological foundation for interpreting transformative teaching as rooted in Scripture, ensuring that the pedagogical analysis remained faithful to biblical theology. The research subjects consisted of 12 Christian teachers, including Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, and selected Christian students representing the total population of 94 Christian learners at the school. Teachers were selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in teaching, mentoring, and student guidance. Student participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate and their length of experience in receiving instruction from Christian teachers. This sampling strategy enabled the researcher to obtain rich, relevant, and contextually grounded data related to spiritually empowered teaching practices. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with Christian teachers to explore their understanding of spiritual empowerment, their interpretation of Matthew 28:20, their teaching philosophy, and their lived experiences in practicing transformative teaching. Interviews with students focused on their perceptions of teachers' spiritual influence, character formation, learning motivation, and faith development. Observations were conducted during classroom sessions, school worship activities, and informal student-teacher interactions to capture behavioral expressions of spiritually empowered teaching such as compassion, patience, moral guidance, and consistency of Christian testimony. The exegetical analysis of Matthew 28:20 followed a historical-grammatical method, examining the text in its literary, historical, linguistic, and theological contexts. The analysis focused on key terms related to teaching (*didaskō*),

obedience (*tērein*), and divine presence (*egō meth' hymōn eimi*). This exegetical foundation served as the theological lens through which the empirical findings were interpreted. Rather than treating exegesis and field data as separate domains, this study integrated them dialogically so that biblical insights directly informed the interpretation of educational practices. Constant comparison was applied to ensure consistency across data sources and to refine emerging interpretations, to produce a comprehensive and theologically grounded understanding of how spiritual empowerment rooted in Matthew 28:20 shapes transformative teaching practices within a public senior high school context.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the 12 Christian teachers at SMAN 1 Parenggean possess a shared understanding of spiritual empowerment as the inner strength derived from a personal relationship with Christ that shapes their identity, motivation, and pedagogical attitude. For these teachers, spiritual empowerment is not perceived as a mystical experience detached from daily teaching, but as a daily dependence on God expressed through prayer, Scripture meditation, and ethical consistency. Several teachers emphasized that teaching without spiritual empowerment leads to routine instruction that lacks redemptive impact, while spiritually empowered teaching transforms the classroom into a space of moral and spiritual formation. This understanding aligns strongly with Matthew 28:20, particularly the promise, “*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” The teachers interpreted this assurance of Christ’s presence as a source of courage, endurance, and responsibility in fulfilling their professional calling. From an exegetical perspective, the phrase *egō meth' hymōn eimi* reflects the continuity of divine presence that accompanies the community of disciples as they teach. The teachers’ lived theology demonstrates a practical reception of this promise: Christ’s presence is not merely confessed but functionally relied upon in moments of pedagogical challenge. In the Indonesian public school context, often characterized by religious plurality and moral complexity, this theological awareness becomes a form of spiritual capital that sustains ethical commitment. Thus, spiritual empowerment is not merely a doctrinal belief but a formative force that shapes professional identity and resilience.

Transformative teaching at SMAN 1 Parenggean manifests in pedagogical practices that go beyond knowledge transmission toward holistic student formation. Classroom observations indicate that spiritually empowered teachers exhibit consistency in moral modeling, patience in dealing with student difficulties, and openness to dialogue. These traits are repeatedly mentioned by students as significant factors that influence their personal growth. Teachers practice transformative teaching by integrating values such as honesty, responsibility, compassion, and perseverance into lesson content, regardless of the subject matter. For example, in science and social studies classes, ethical reflections are often introduced in discussions on environmental care, social justice, and national responsibility. In Christian Religious Education classes, Matthew 28:20 is used not only as a doctrinal statement about the Great Commission, but as a pedagogical mandate to teach with relational depth and moral seriousness. The verb *didaskontes* (“teaching”) in Matthew 28:20 is a present participle that indicates continuous action. This grammatical form underlines that teaching in the biblical sense is not limited to verbal instruction but entails an ongoing formative process. The empirical data show that teachers intuitively

embody this continuous dimension of teaching through long-term mentoring, counseling, and character guidance. Transformative teaching thus appears as the educational expression of spiritual empowerment. Another central finding concerns the emphasis on obedience (*tērein*) as a core component of transformative teaching. Teachers consistently stress that the goal of Christian education is not merely cognitive comprehension of Christian doctrine but the formation of obedient character. In interviews, teachers expressed concern that many educational failures occur when teaching remains at the level of theory without ethical application. Obedience is cultivated through daily routines such as honesty during examinations, discipline in attendance, respect for authority, and compassion toward peers. Students reported that the personal example of teachers had a stronger impact on them than formal moral instruction. This observation confirms that obedience in Christian education is predominantly transmitted through embodied pedagogy rather than through abstract moralization. Matthew 28:20 connects teaching directly to obedience: “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” The integration of teaching and obedience affirms that authentic Christian pedagogy must always be ethical and transformative. The findings at SMAN 1 Parenggean show that when teachers internalize this biblical mandate, their teaching naturally moves toward character education and spiritual formation. Among the 94 Christian students, a significant pattern of spiritual and moral transformation emerges. Students describe noticeable changes in their attitudes toward learning, interpersonal relationships, and personal discipline. Many students testify that they have become more reflective, patient, and responsible due to the influence of their teachers’ example and mentoring. These outcomes confirm that spiritually empowered teaching produces effects that extend beyond academic achievement into the deeper layers of student identity. From the perspective of Christian transformational pedagogy, this aligns with the holistic mission of education that seeks the renewal of mind, heart, and behavior. Matthew 28:20’s emphasis on continuous teaching supported by Christ’s abiding presence provides a theological explanation for this transformation. The spiritual growth observed in students reflects the fruit of a pedagogical process sustained not merely by human effort but by divine accompaniment.

A recurring theme in both teacher interviews and observation data is the experience of divine presence as a sustaining force in times of professional fatigue, moral conflict, and institutional pressure. Teachers articulate that their sense of authority in teaching does not primarily stem from institutional status but from their awareness of Christ’s presence in their vocation. This theological consciousness mitigates burnout and strengthens vocational commitment. Some teachers describe moments of discouragement due to administrative burdens or student behavioral problems; yet, prayer and reflection on Matthew 28:20 become sources of renewed strength. This indicates that the promise of Christ’s presence functions not only as a missional assurance but also as a pastoral and pedagogical resource. The promise “I am with you always” (*pasas tas hēmeras*) underscores a temporal universality that includes every teaching moment. This supports the empirical conclusion that spiritual empowerment is not episodic but continuous, sustaining teachers throughout the entire educational process. Conducting Christian education in a public school setting such as SMAN 1 Parenggean presents unique challenges. Teachers navigate religious diversity, institutional regulations, and social

sensitivities. However, this context also sharpens the transformative nature of spiritually empowered teaching, because the Christian message must be embodied more than verbalized. Teachers report that they are careful to express Christian values in ways that are inclusive and dialogical without compromising theological integrity. This approach strengthens interreligious respect while maintaining Christian witness. Students affirm that the teachers' attitudes of humility and respect make Christian faith appear authentic rather than dogmatic. From a missiological perspective, this reflects the dynamic of Matthew 28:20 applied in a pluralistic environment: teaching all that Christ commanded does not necessarily entail explicit proselytization but the faithful embodiment of Christlike character. Thus, the Great Commission is realized through ethical presence and transformative influence in daily school life.

The integration of biblical exegesis and empirical findings constitutes one of the central contributions of this study. The theological insights derived from Matthew 28:20—continuous teaching, obedience, and divine presence, are not abstract principles but lived realities within the educational practices of Christian teachers at SMAN 1 Parenggean. The exegetical lens illuminates the deeper spiritual structure underlying transformative teaching. Conversely, the field data give concrete expression to the biblical text, demonstrating how Scripture is incarnated in pedagogical life. This dialogical integration between text and context affirms that biblical theology remains profoundly relevant to contemporary Christian education. The findings suggest a model of Spirit-empowered transformative pedagogy characterized by: a theologically grounded teacher identity, continuous character-oriented teaching, obedience-based ethical formation, dependence on Christ's abiding presence, and context-sensitive Christian witness in a pluralistic environment. This study strengthens the discourse on Christian pedagogy by demonstrating that spiritual empowerment is the core engine of transformative teaching. It bridges biblical theology with educational praxis, offering a framework where Scripture functions as both normative guide and interpretive lens for pedagogical transformation. The findings call Christian educators to prioritize spiritual formation alongside professional competence. Teacher training institutions and Christian education programs are encouraged to cultivate inner spiritual life, theological reflection, and ethical integrity as integral components of pedagogical development. Without spiritual empowerment, transformative teaching risks being reduced to moral instruction devoid of spiritual depth. For public schools, this study also provides evidence that Christian teaching can contribute positively to holistic education without undermining pluralism. Spiritually empowered teachers become agents of moral stability and relational healing within diverse learning communities. This study is limited to a single institutional context with qualitative scope, which restricts generalization. Future research may adopt mixed-method or comparative approaches across multiple schools to test the consistency of these findings. Longitudinal studies could also examine the long-term impact of spiritually empowered teaching on graduates' life trajectories. The results demonstrate that transformative teaching through spiritual empowerment, as inspired by Matthew 28:20, is authentically embodied by Christian teachers at SMAN 1 Parenggean. Spiritual empowerment shapes teacher identity, strengthens vocational endurance, and produces tangible spiritual and moral transformation in students. The promise of Christ's abiding presence emerges as the

theological heart of transformative pedagogy, ensuring that teaching remains a sacred vocation rooted in divine companionship rather than merely a professional task.

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that transformative teaching through spiritual empowerment, as grounded in Matthew 28:20, is not merely a theological ideal but a lived pedagogical reality within the context of SMAN 1 Parenggean. The findings confirm that spiritually empowered teaching emerges from the integration of deep personal faith, a strong sense of vocation, and consistent ethical practice in the educational sphere. Christian teachers who root their professional identity in Christ's abiding presence are able to sustain resilience, moral integrity, and pedagogical commitment amid the complexities of a pluralistic public school environment. The exegetical analysis of Matthew 28:20 has revealed three theological pillars, continuous teaching, obedience to Christ's commandments, and the promise of Christ's abiding presence, which together form the spiritual foundation of transformative pedagogy. These theological insights are strongly reflected in the lived experiences of the teachers and students. Teaching is understood not as a one-time transmission of knowledge but as an ongoing formative process. Obedience is not reduced to doctrinal adherence but embodied in daily ethical conduct. Above all, Christ's presence functions as the ultimate source of pedagogical authority, endurance, and hope. The study shows that spiritually empowered teaching produces holistic transformation among students. The transformation is evident not only in improved learning motivation but also in moral sensitivity, interpersonal responsibility, and growing spiritual awareness. These outcomes affirm that Christian education, when grounded in spiritual empowerment, effectively addresses the cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions of student formation. The classroom becomes not merely a space of instruction but a community of moral and spiritual growth. This study highlights that public school settings do not diminish the transformative potential of Christian education. On the contrary, religious plurality challenges teachers to embody Christian values with greater authenticity, humility, and dialogical sensitivity. The findings suggest that transformative Christian teaching in public schools is most powerful when it is expressed through ethical consistency, relational care, and non-coercive witness. In this sense, the Great Commission is realized not through overt proselytization but through faithful embodiment of Christlike character in everyday educational practice. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in its integration of biblical exegesis and qualitative field data. By bridging Scripture with pedagogical praxis, the study reinforces the relevance of biblical theology for contemporary Christian education. Practically, it underscores the urgency for teacher education programs and church-based training institutions to prioritize spiritual formation alongside pedagogical and professional competence. Without spiritual empowerment, transformative teaching risks becoming a purely technical or moralistic enterprise detached from its theological source. Future research may expand the scope through comparative, mixed-method, or longitudinal studies to examine the sustainability and wider applicability of spiritually empowered teaching across diverse educational contexts. This study affirms that spiritual empowerment rooted in Christ's abiding presence is the heart of transformative Christian teaching. When teachers teach in conscious dependence on Christ, their vocation transcends

routine professionalism and becomes a sacred calling that shapes minds, forms character, and nurtures faith. Matthew 28:20 thus stands not only as a missional mandate for the church but also as a foundational charter for transformative pedagogy in Christian education today.

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