Character Formation of Generation Z in Christian Religious Education Through Spiritual Formation

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Abstract

Generation Z, often characterised as digital natives, has grown up in an environment where technology particularly smartphones—is a constant presence. This pervasive exposure to digital devices has significantly shaped their daily lives, cognitive development, and moral reasoning. The omnipresence of technology presents both opportunities and challenges in the formation of their character and social behaviours. Empirical studies indicate that approximately 95% of individuals within this generation possess access to a smartphone, employing it for a variety of functions including communication, education, and entertainment. Notably, around 77% report using these devices for at least three hours per day, frequently engaging in multitasking across multiple digital platforms. Such continual connectivity has not only become a defining characteristic of their lifestyle but also exerts a considerable influence on their worldview, identity construction, and interpersonal dynamics.

Keywords: building character, generation Z, Christian Religious Education, spiritual formation

Introduction

Character is a reflection of moral values that regulate human behaviour in a social context, while character formation is the process of cultivating moral values that are the core of human values.[1] Character is linked to ethical behaviour. Fleeson mentions that ethical behaviour is a primary goal in society, and unethical behaviour is a major source of social problems. If society can enhance ethical behaviour, it can also improve human relationships, create a stable foundation for investment and growth, and propel human advancement.[2] Interpersonal relationships are a necessity for human survival. Humans are created not only to relate to God but also to fellow humans. Therefore, in building relationships with others, humans are required to behave ethically.

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1   Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley, 'Teaching Moral Character: Two Alternatives for Teacher Education,' *The Teacher Educator* 43, no. 2 (2008): 156–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730701838983.

2   William Fleeson et al., 'Personality Science and the Foundations of Character,' *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, Oxford University Press New York, 2015, 41–71.

Character plays a role in bringing out the best in individuals. Character provides positive benefits in life such as self-acceptance, autonomy, physical health, and resilience. One way to achieve this is through spiritual formation. Alex Tang explains that spiritual formation is a process based on theological concepts of restoration, relationship, and shalom.[3] These fundamental concepts can be explained as follows: first, restoring the imago Dei. The concept of imago Dei is an epistemological dimension of spiritual formation. This concept expands understanding of spiritual formation, including its processes and means. God created a perfect world which He declared good (Genesis 1:1–2:1). He made man and woman in His own image (*imago Dei*) as stated in Genesis 1:26-27. Alvin approaches the concept of imago Dei from an epistemological perspective, that imago Dei is the basis of theological epistemology, namely that human knowledge of God comes from participation in His image. Thus, knowledge of God is rooted in the imago Dei as the epistemological structure of humankind, which originates from a relationship with God through the divine image within humans.[4] Second, according to Hoekema, the imago Dei also has a functional aspect, involving humanity in its relationships with God, others, and nature. The image of God (imago Dei) is ultimately renewed in His redemptive work through the death of Christ. Hoekema mentions from a functional perspective that humans are created to relate to God (cf. Genesis 3:8-9). However, humans failed to obey God and distorted His perfect creation by falling into sin. From a structural perspective, God sent His Son to redeem fallen humanity through the death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection. Those who accept Jesus are restored in unity and justified. God sends the Holy Spirit to empower them to be restored to the image of Christ as His special people. God the Father desires to work in partnership with restored humanity to redeem His entire creation. The ultimate result is the 'perfect image' of God in human beings. Hoekema summarises the goal of redemption as restoring the image of God in humanity. Restoring the image of God means restoring the entire personal potential. The process of restoring the fallen imago Dei in every individual results in them becoming more like God. Hoekema notes that because Jesus is the perfect image of the Father, becoming like the Father also means becoming like Jesus.[5]

Prawiromaruto and Stevanus said that spiritual formation focuses on personal knowledge of Jesus Christ and obedience to His word as the core of the process towards Christlikeness.[6] Knowing and obeying Jesus as the inspirer of Christians, besides experiencing relational healing with God, humans also discover themselves and see themselves from the true perspective as the image of God.[7] In other words, the essence of Christian spiritual formation is the restoration of the image of God, which is the restoration of human relations with God. This will change the paradigm of human understanding of their true selves. The restoration of imago Dei provides a theological foundation for Christian spiritual formation.

Generation Z is growing up amidst advanced technological developments and rapidly evolving environments. In this digital era, they exhibit high proficiency in utilising technology, especially social media, earning them the label 'digital natives'. Most members of this generation are constantly connected to the internet.[8] However, alongside these technological advantages,

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3   Alex Tang, Till We Are Fully Formed: Christian Spiritual Formation Paradigms in the English-Speaking Presbyterian Churches in Malaysia (Malaysia Bible Seminary: Kluang, 2014), 1.

4   Alvin Plantinga and The Society of Christian Philosophers, 'Advice to Christian Philosophers,' *Faith and Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1984): 253–71, https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19841317.

5   Anthony A. Hoekema, *Manusia: Ciptaan Menurut Gambar Allah* (Momentum, 2010), 27.

6   Imanuel Herman Prawiromaruto and Kalis Stevanus, 'Pendidikan Karakter Kristen Melalui Pengutamaan Formasi Rohani,' *Dunamis: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 7, no. 2 (2022): 543–56, https://sttintheos.ac.id/e-journal/index.php/dunamis/article/view/926.

7   K Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation,* (Zondervan, 2001),.19-20.

8   Qingqing Hu et al., 'One Social Media, Distinct Habitus: Generation Z's Social Media Uses and Gratifications and the Moderation Effect

Generation Z also grapples with significant challenges, including a tendency to focus excessively on contemporary issues while neglecting their mental and spiritual growth. There is a noticeable disinterest in spiritual matters among many of them.

Given these issues, it is evident that a contextual and relevant approach is needed to address the character development of Generation Z in light of ongoing technological advancements. This paper proposes a spiritual formation model through Christian Religious Education (CRE) as a strategy to shape Christian character in Generation Z by integrating Christian values with the realities of the digital world. The study aims to explore how CRE can serve as an effective instrument in cultivating Christian character among Generation Z students.

Generation Z represents a crucial asset for the future of both the nation and the church. Developing a generation with resilient minds and noble character requires approaches that are both appropriate and contextually relevant. The current reality shows that Generation Z is strongly influenced by moral and cultural shifts, leading to mental degradation and weakened character. This concern is supported by various findings and observations, including among Christian youth who increasingly deviate from Christian values. As noted by Malau, these trends indicate a widespread moral decline and spiritual crisis among today's youth, underscoring the low level of spiritual vitality within Generation Z.[9]

Spiritual formation through CRE, implemented in both public and private educational institutions, must commit to fostering Christian character in every student. It should empower students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to become future leaders of both the nation and the church. The central calling of CRE is to produce individuals with Christian character who can contribute meaningfully to societal transformation. This mission undergirds the motivation to nurture Christian identity through spiritual formation, with the ultimate goal of internalising Christian values that are reflected in students' behaviour as children of light.

Moreover, spiritual formation through CRE responds not only to the rapid technological shifts but also to the divine mandate found in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), which commands discipleship. As Herman observes, God's original design for humanity was to reflect His likeness.[10] God, being perfect, created humans in His own perfect image: 'So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27). This imago Dei endows humans with moral and spiritual capacities, enabling communion with God. The human likeness to God includes intellect (for reasoning), emotions (for love and empathy), and will (for making ethical choices). Furthermore, humans are created with an eternal purpose and moral nature designed to emulate the character of Christ.

The church today faces profound challenges amid the disruptions of the digital age, particularly in addressing the moral degradation and spiritual vulnerability of Generation Z. The spiritual damage brought by the digital culture demands immediate and effective solutions.[11] Christian Religious Education presents itself as a vital instrument to nurture holistic development in Generation Z, aiming to cultivate individuals of integrity—strong in intellect, emotional maturity, and especially in spirituality. Building spiritual capacity is essential for shaping a generation that

of Economic Capital,' *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022): 939128, https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.939128/full.

9   Oloria Malau, 'Christian Private Ethics According To 1 Corinthians 15:33 And Its Implications For Christian Youth In Indonesia,' paper presented at Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of Global Education and Society Science, ICOGESS 2019,14 March, Medan, North Sumatera, Indonesia, EAI, (2020), https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.14-3-2019.2292024.

10   Prawiromaruto and Stevanus, '*Pendidikan Karakter Kristen Melalui Pengutamaan Formasi Rohani*.'

11   Meike Irmawati Tompira et al., 'Integration of Christian Strategy and Innovative Learning in Christian Religious Education in the Digital Age,' *International Journal of Christian Education and Philosophical Inquiry* 2, no. 3 (2025): 01–04, https://doi.org/10.61132/ijcep.v2i3.327.

reveres God. Thus, integrating spiritual formation into the CRE curriculum becomes imperative for forming Christian character.

Considering Generation Z's active engagement with social media and digital technology, this paper also emphasises the importance of incorporating such platforms into CRE. To make CRE more relevant and engaging, its methods must align with the learning habits of Generation Z. While the use of technology can enhance the learning experience, the primary goal remains the moral and spiritual formation of students, helping them resist the negative influences of digital media.

In light of this, CRE holds a strategic role in national character development. This underlines the importance of improving the professionalism of CRE teachers, as Susilo asserts, not merely as a profession for earning a livelihood but as a key pillar in the nation's human resource development.

Therefore, the central question arises: How can the CRE approach be adapted to meet the characteristics and needs of Generation Z in the digital age? Since this generation prefers technologically enriched learning environments, it is highly likely that they will respond positively to CRE approaches that incorporate digital tools. Such adaptation not only facilitates access to knowledge but also strengthens the role of CRE in moral and character formation. This study seeks to offer an alternative approach that aligns CRE with the needs of Generation Z through spiritual formation, aiming to internalise Christian values and establish a foundation for enduring, excellent character.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **literature review approach** as its primary research method. The author conducted an in-depth examination of a wide range of scholarly sources related to spiritual formation, Generation Z, character education, and Christian Religious Education. The literature review served as a means to address the research problem by systematically collecting, evaluating, and synthesising data from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and other relevant publications.

Through a critical and comprehensive analysis of the selected literature, the author aimed to identify key themes, theoretical frameworks, and empirical findings that support the study's objectives. This approach enabled the researcher to draw valid and reliable insights, offering a coherent synthesis of various scholarly perspectives. As a result, the literature review not only facilitated a deeper understanding of the topic but also provided a robust foundation for articulating the role of spiritual formation within Christian Religious Education in shaping the character of Generation Z.

The Essence of Christian Religious Education

Christian Religious Education (CRE) is a commandment from the Lord Jesus Christ, known as the Great Commission as mentioned in Matthew 28:19-20: 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'. Based on this truth, teaching is one of the important commands given by the Lord Jesus Himself. This is the essence of CRE.

In the Bible, the work of teaching can explicitly be identified from the fact that the Lord Jesus is known as a Teacher, as expressed by Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader, 'He came to Jesus at

night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God…"' (John 3:2) and the Lord Jesus Himself also referred to Himself as a Teacher, 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am' (John 13:13).

CRE can not be separated from the Supreme Teacher, Jesus Christ. Besides His role as the Redeemer, Jesus Christ is highly esteemed as the Supreme Teacher, noted for His expertise by the Jewish people, hence they referred to Him as Rabbi or Teacher.[12] As a Teacher, Jesus taught with divine authority, leaving those who heard His teachings amazed and astounded, eliciting a positive response: 'And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes' (Matthew 7:28-29).

God Jesus is a Great Teacher for us. Every educator who wants to succeed in teaching the truth of God's word must always learn from Him. He does not invite anyone to follow Him without a clear purpose. The ultimate goal of His teaching is repentance (attitude change) and renewal of life (behaviour) and being able to practise it in daily life. Iovan's opinion that the highest goal of Christian education is to produce religious individuals,[13] centred on values and faith in Christ. The goal of teaching Christian Religious Education becomes the direction of learning activities and the main benchmark in determining the success of learning. The objectives or goals in CRE learning are a very influential and most important factor in lesson planning. Without clear objectives, a teacher will not be able to teach effectively.[14] The purpose of CRE learning is specifically prioritising not only to point to changes in terms of a student's knowledge and understanding, but to changes in attitudes, emotions, and desires of a student that impact behaviour according to the word of God as the basis of Christian faith and life. Itulua and Abumere assert that the purpose of CRE learning is not only to develop knowledge and understanding of the Christian religion, but to produce mature individuals personally and socially in the midst of secular society.[15] Therefore, the Lord Jesus is a good choice as an ideal role model for CRE teachers.

Given the importance of CRE learning for students, CRE teachers should diligently prepare the material they will teach before class and choose the method to be used in its delivery to achieve the learning objectives.[16] One crucial aspect of lesson preparation is to plan the ultimate goal to be achieved for the students, which is how a student can come to know God as revealed in Jesus Christ, 'And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (John 17:3). Therefore, it can be concluded that the ultimate goal and primary objective of every CRE teaching and learning activity should lead students to learn more about God.

The recognition of God through the work of the Holy Spirit will renew attitudes. Therefore, CRE learning objectives should be directed towards this end. Macarau and Stevanus state that the ultimate target or highest goal of every CRE teaching and learning activity should encourage or lead learners to learn more about God. Knowing God involves having a personal, deep, and dynamic relationship with God in Jesus Christ.[17] Certainly, this recognition is not only cognitive but also

12 Swandriyani Hudianto et al., 'Mengajar Secara Profesional Disertai Otoritas Ilahi Dengan Bercermin Pada Yesus Dan Implementasinya Bagi Guru PAK Masa Kini,' *BONAFIDE: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristen* 4, no. 2 (2023): 275–94, http://jurnal.sttissiau.ac.id/index.php/jbs/article/view/139.

13 Martian Iovan, 'Characteristics Of The Ideal Of Christian Education,' *European Journal of Science and Theology* 6, no. 4 (2010): 5–10.

14 Ian Griffin Prawiromaruto and Kalis Stevanus, 'Pengembangan Perangkat Pembelajaran Dosen Berbasis TPACK Terhadap Kinerja Dosen PAK,' *Jurnal Teologi Berita Hidup* 6, no. 1 (2023): 66–78, https://www.e-journal.sttberitahidup.ac.id/index.php/jbh/article/view/523.

15 Flourish Itulua-Abumere, 'The Significance of Religious Education in Local Primary Schools (Specific Reference to Christianity),' *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 6, no. 6 (2013): 69–94, https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-0666994.

16 Ruthnawaty Setiawan et al., 'Christian Religious Education Strategies for Early Childhood in Fostering Knowledge of God in Schools,' *Journal of Religious and Socio-Cultural* 4, no. 2 (2023): 146–60, https://doi.org/10.46362/jrsc.v4i2.209.

17 Kalis Stevanus and Vivilia Vivone Vriska Macarau, 'Peran Pendidikan Agama Kristen Dalam Keluarga Terhadap Pembentukan Karakter

emphasises the affective aspect, namely, a change in life attitude. This is the essence of CRE.

The CRE has a calling to guide students to have a correct, deep, and personal understanding and relationship with Jesus Christ. This is the mandate given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20. In other words, CRE is part of the effort to disciple.[18] Keener states that there is a close relationship between the Great Commission and CRE (Matthew 28:19-20). The task of discipling is done by going, baptising, and teaching.[19] Added by Vos, actually CRE is continuing the work mandated by Jesus Himself, which is to command His disciples to go to all nations and make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). This ministry should receive attention and top priority from all Christian ministries, which is to make disciples and grow disciples of Jesus.[20]

So, it is clear that the focus of CRE is not only to convey Christian doctrines, but also includes the task of shaping the character of Christian students, one of the approaches is through spiritual formation activities, as part of discipling Christian students towards likeness with Christ. Discipling tasks should be upheld as a divine calling that should also be accompanied by professionalism and integrity to be an example and witness for Christ who has called them. CRE has the responsibility to impart Christian character to their students, and one of the approaches that can be used is spiritual formation activities.

Christian Spirituality

Robert A. Emmons mentions that the components of spirituality include: (a) the capacity for transcendence, (b) the ability to enter into states of heightened spiritual awareness, (c) the ability to invest daily activities, events, and relationships with a sense of sacredness, (d) the ability to draw upon spiritual resources to solve problems in life, (e) the ability to engage in virtuous behaviour to demonstrate forgiveness, express gratitude, be humble, and show compassion.[21] Westgate also proposed, as cited by Raftopoulos and Glen Bates, four dimensions of spirituality, namely (a) the meaning of life purpose, (b) transcendence related to a higher power, awareness of existence beyond the worldly, (c) intrinsic values referring to internal value systems that shape one's behaviour, and (d) communal values and mutual support. All dimensions framing spiritual intelligence work together or process to form a transcendent ability, which then gives birth to attitudes or behaviors that go beyond ordinary qualities.[22]

The description above leads to the conclusion that spirituality is the response of human existence to sense (whether consciously or unconsciously) that there is something beyond oneself, a higher reality responsible for all life. Spirituality is needed to understand and integrate the inner life of mind and soul with the outer work life in the world. Spirituality can be developed through seeking, inquiry, and practice. Spiritual maturity is expressed through wisdom and compassionate actions. Spiritual intelligence is necessary for affirmation in making spiritual choices that contribute to psychological well-being and the holistic development of humans. Spirituality is a set of capacities

Remaja Di Era 4.0,' *Jurnal Dinamika Pendidikan* 14, no. 2 (2021): 117–30, http://ejournal.fkipuki.org/index.php/jdp/article/view/56.

18   Fransiskus Irwan Widjaja et al., 'The Role of Christian Religious Education as a Mission Development in 4.0 Era,' *International Conference on Theology, Humanities, and Christian Education (ICONTHCE 2021)*, Atlantis Press, 2022, 187–91, https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/iconthce-21/125975637.

19   Craig S. Keener, 'Matthew's Missiology: Making Disciples of the Nations (Matthew 28: 19-20),' *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009): 3–20.

20   Beverly Vos, 'The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry,' *Evangelical Review of Theology* 36, no. 2 (2012), 100-114.

21   Robert A. Emmons, 'Is Spirituality an Intelligence? Motivation, Cognition, and the Psychology of Ultimate Concern,' *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 10, no. 1 (2000): 3–26, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327582IJPR1001_2.

22   Mary Raftolpoulos and Glen Bates, "It's That Knowing That You Are Not Alone': The Role of Spirituality in Adolescent Resilience,' *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 2 (2011): 151–67, https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2011.580729.

and abilities that enable individuals to solve problems and achieve goals in daily life. Zohar and Marshall detail the characteristics of high spirituality, including (a) being able to adapt spontaneously and actively, or in other words, being flexible, (b) having high awareness, (c) having the ability to face pain, (d) having a vision and mission in life, (e) always seeking fundamental answers to something, (f) being independent, (g) being able to face suffering and find wisdom behind it.[23] In short, it can be said simply that individuals with high spirituality have steadfastness, enabling them to control themselves and any external influences in their lives. In the context of Christianity, Christian spirituality is grounding life in Christ, which can be seen in lifestyle, thought patterns, and decision-making processes.

Essentially, Christian spirituality is the power of relationship with the Lord Jesus, which is always manifested in real life that a relationship with God produces various conditions such as patience, loyalty, self-control, peace, goodness, generosity, joy, and love (Galatians 5:22-23). Christian spirituality is the life of Christians who are in a true relationship with God. Such a life is manifested in everyday life that actualises Christian values.

Spiritual Formation in Christian Religious Education

The approach of Christian Religious Education (CRE) presents a vital option in the effort of discipleship to shape Christian character through spiritual formation for Generation Z. This strategy emphasises delivering the Gospel message in accordance with the cultural reality and current needs of Generation Z. Discipleship can be aligned with the daily lives of Generation Z, so that the Gospel message through spiritual formation in CRE is not just a theoretical concept, but also practical guidance in their lives. The CRE learning approach needs to leverage the sophistication of this technological era, realising that effectively delivering the Gospel message requires consideration of the needs and relevant thoughts for individuals and communities targeted by the Gospel outreach. In this digital era marked by strong connectivity with technology and social media, CRE needs to integrate Gospel messages into the daily lives of Generation Z. This approach creates a relevant framework for understanding cultural changes and the demands of the times that influence Generation Z, while still holding fast to the truth of Gospel teachings. This makes discipleship calling relevant and significant for Generation Z in their unique reality. Building strong character and morality based on Christian teachings, so that Generation Z can become positive agents of change in society.

Considering the characteristics and needs of Generation Z, the CRE approach through spiritual formation is expected to help them grow in faith and become good examples in the midst of modern society and ultimately understand their missiological calling for their generation. The spiritual formation approach must be actualised in real and continuous activities within CRE learning activities. These spiritual formation activities must be implemented and developed according to the needs and developmental stages of Generation Z. The following are forms of spiritual formation activities in CRE to build the Christian character of Generation Z:

Morning Devotion

Teachers can conduct morning devotions as a contemplation of God's word, which is done every morning for about 10-15 minutes before classes or lessons begin. Reflecting on the word of God

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23   Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall, SQ-Kecerdasan Spiritual (Mizan Pustaka, 2007), 19-20.

is a unique and necessary spiritual discipline. How can believers know God's will for their lives? How can believers understand God's longing for them? All this knowledge is found in the word of God. The way to unlock all these mysteries is to study the word of God.

Through morning devotions, students are taught to make reflecting on the word of God a permanent habit. Reflecting on the word of God affects one's relationship with God. Students are challenged to internalise the verses of God's word: Is your life in accordance with the word of God? What does it mean to have a life in harmony with the word of God? The principle of following God, loving others, and all that is taught in the Bible becomes the character of a Christian, the way of life of a Christian. Students are challenged with the need to repeatedly ponder the verses of God's word in their minds. Setting aside time to read and remember the word of God is important. Christians need a system to guard themselves from sinful actions. The key to avoiding sin is to keep the word of God in the heart and obey it. When Christians fail and do not know how to restore their relationship with God, His word guides them back to Him.

Through morning devotion, it is emphasised that students should act in obedience to the word of God by reflecting on themselves:

- How does meditating on the word of God help you grow closer to God?
- Can you fully know God without studying His word?
- Why is memorising the word of God important?

The theme of reflection in morning devotion is the characters of Christ that should be emulated, including: loving, holy, wise, just, merciful, gracious, good, kind, forgiving. The hope is that the knowledge taught by the CRE teacher in morning devotion enables students to understand the image of God and how they should emulate Him. Being taught repeatedly helps them remember this knowledge and encourages them to apply it. Morning devotion, as part of spiritual activities, aims to provide understanding and guidance about the character of Christ intensively, allowing students to emulate Him and ultimately have His character resemblance.

Retreat

Following Christian Religious Education (CRE) learning in class, one example is to hold a retreat. A retreat is an activity conducted outside of school, ideally once a year with a changing theme each year, and can last for several days (2-3 days) requiring students to stay overnight.

Retreat activities have become a favourite in spiritual activity because the events are enjoyable, and the delivery of material about dynamic Christian life can be more profound. Retreat activities become moments for self-reflection, alone time to become more aware of God's presence. A quiet and peaceful place just to be with God can be an opportunity to learn how to distinguish His gentle presence amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Through the retreat activities, individuals are enabled to grow spiritually because the experiences formed from these activities have a stronger impact than mere information taught through theoretical teachings in the classroom. In other words, spiritual formation through retreat creates opportunities not only to learn about aspects of Christian life but to directly experiment with them. Students are taught through retreats about the necessity of setting aside quality time with God. Individual changes occur continuously, encompassing both knowledge and attitudes. Changes in the affective domain of students can be demonstrated through attitudes. For example, being brave to speak in public, being independent in learning, and being mature in behaviour, well as enjoying prayer and reading the Bible.

Counseling Guidance

One important element of spiritual formation implementation is counseling. Counseling does not just involve physical issues or external matters alone, but also concerns internal and spiritual matters. Counseling guidance provided by Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers aims to provide students with support in dealing with emotional issues, anxiety, depression, or trauma that can affect their mental well-being. Spiritual warfare often involves internal battles against fear, anxiety, or feelings of worthlessness.

Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers not only act as educators transferring knowledge but also as counselors. Ideally, counseling guidance programmes should be conducted once a week regularly and routinely with a primary focus on shaping students' characters. Counseling guidance provides services to students experiencing problems or needing special assistance.

Students' learning activities are not free from learning difficulties. The learning process of each student does not always run smoothly. Sometimes students are highly motivated, and sometimes they experience stress and have difficulty concentrating on lessons in class. Sometimes they can learn smoothly, quickly, and with high spirits, but sometimes it is also difficult to focus and concentrate on absorbing the material. As a result of experiencing learning difficulties, students fail to achieve the scholarly competence required in that subject.

Learning difficulties mean that individuals are disrupted in their learning activities. Individuals who experience learning difficulties have a negative impact and do not achieve optimal learning activities. Learning difficulties are not only seen from the results of report cards but also evident in various negative behaviours. Therefore, learning difficulties must be immediately addressed by the students themselves because it can have a negative impact on their learning achievements and behaviour. Because learning difficulties that are not immediately addressed will cause students to not be able to develop optimally according to their potential. This is where the important role of CRE teachers comes in as a counselor called upon to help students overcome the problems they face through guidance and solutions based on biblical values. Therefore, CRE teachers are also required to learn independently, whether through training, seminars, reading books that can support knowledge and skills in counseling. It is hoped that with counseling actions, it can help overcome students' learning difficulties with various useful tips to foster active learning abilities in students and tap into their potential for optimal development in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences.

Counseling guidance can help individuals explore the spiritual dimensions of their lives, find deeper meaning and purpose, and seek strength from their beliefs and spiritual practices. In this context, spiritual warfare can be seen as a struggle to strengthen spiritual relationships and overcome obstacles in spiritual growth.

In carrying out spiritual formation, there needs to be support in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18) through counseling guidance. Does the spiritual world exist? Does the devil have a significant influence on our world? Do they affect us? There is a relationship between the 'spiritual world' and the 'physical world'. The Apostle Paul stated it and experienced it in Ephesus, which is why he wrote about the importance of spiritual warfare and the spiritual armour to His people in Ephesus. This forms the basis of spiritual warfare, that the devil intends to divert our focus from God and drown us in self-love, doubt, and rebellion. Paul encourages us to fight back. Adewuya says theologically, the spiritual world exists and also influences our world. It was Paul who stated

it in Ephesians 6:10-18.[24]

CRE teachers need to be aware of spiritual warfare to realise that the spiritual world exists and to be vigilant. We can learn how Jesus won in spiritual warfare against the temptations of the devil (Luke 4:1-14). The Bible declares the reality of spiritual warfare, and the spiritual weapons to face it are prayer and the word of God. 1) Jesus knew the word of God. Knowing the word of God is the protection of Christians. When the devil tempted Jesus, He had the ability to remember the word of God as a shield to protect Himself from the devil. Jesus knew the word of God and practised it so well that when the devil tempted Him, Jesus was ready. 2) Jesus was not anxious. Jesus was not anxious but stood firm against the devil. Jesus could have become emotional and started blaming others for what was happening. However, He remained calm and was able to defeat the devil with clarity of mind and not get trapped when the devil tried other tactics to bring Him down. As Jesus triumphed over temptation, so should Christians face temptation in the same way.

Mentoring

Mentoring or personal guidance becomes a spiritual necessity for students. Students require personal, intimate, intense, and continuous guidance in dealing with life's challenges, and this is the essence of mentoring. This mentoring activity leads students into spiritual formation, requiring walking alongside them through guidance rather than just teaching them to cope with pressures.[25] A CRE teacher must have communication skills as a basic skill. The communication process in learning activities involves two parties: the teacher and the students. The teacher plays a primary role as a communicator and the students play a role as communicators, resulting in the sharing of knowledge in learner communication both inside and outside the classroom. This clearly implies that learning activities are not just about sharing or transferring knowledge/cognition to students, but rather a process of building interaction between teachers and students. Additionally, CRE teachers also have a role as motivators for their students, even though they do not have specific training to be counselors. Students will always face decision-making needs and in this process, they need the assistance of teachers.

Prayer Group

The CRE teacher can organise prayer group activities regularly every week, for example, every Friday outside of class hours. Mutak said there is a positive correlation between the intensity of spiritual discipline and the ability to control one's bodily desires. Spiritual discipline is a path to subduing bodily desires and placing God at the center of one's life.[26] God calls His people to draw near to Him in various ways. Some believers become more intimate with God through honest, deep, and regular prayer. Others may become intimate with God through memorising Bible verses. Yet others through regular fasting. Varieties of spiritual disciplines can foster intimacy with God and assist His people in journeying together with Him. Curran reminds us of the importance

24 J. Ayodeji Adewuya, 'The Spiritual Powers of Ephesians 6: 10–18 in the Light of African Pentecostal Spirituality,' *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22, no. 2 (2012): 251–58.

25 Jatmiko, B., Mtukwa, G., & Kawengian, S.E.E. 'Embracing Psychology for Theology: The Role of Developmental Theories in Christian Spiritual Formation,' *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili Dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat* 8, no. 1 (2024): 49-63, DOI: Https://Doi. Org/10.46445/Ejti.V8i1.737.63.63.

26 Alfius Areng Mutak, 'Disiplin Rohani Sebagai Praktek Ibadah Pribadi,' *SOLA GRATIA: Jurnal Teologi Biblika dan Praktika* 4, no. 1 (2016), https://doi.org/10.47596/solagratia.v4i1.45.

of studying theology but not neglecting spiritual development, walking alongside Him.[27]
Spiritual discipline in the prayer group can include the following activities:

- Prayer: communicating with God regularly.
- Fasting: abstaining from food and drink, using time for prayer.
- Memorising Scripture: training the mind to meditate on the Word of God.
- Silence: being still to listen to the voice of God.

In the prayer group, each student is asked to consider the list above. The CRE teacher will pose questions to each student: which one resonates with you? Are you more suited to prayer? Does fasting assist you on your journey with Allah? Is your strength in memorising verses? Mentors will guide students to focus on spiritual discipline and realign their journey with Allah. Spiritual discipline enables them to draw closer to Him and transform distant relationships into more intimate ones.

Within the prayer group, the CRE teacher can engage students in reflection and initiate proactive action.

- Why do you think spiritual discipline is important?
- What challenges do you face in implementing one of the discipline lists above?
- What changes can you make in your life to train yourself in one of those disciplines?

Spiritual formation represents a vital component within Christian Religious Education (CRE) and serves as a formative approach to cultivating Christian character among Generation Z. By engaging in spiritual disciplines—such as Bible study, prayer, fasting, and participation in communal religious activities like retreats, morning devotions, and prayer groups—students are provided with experiential pathways to encounter the divine. These practices help internalise Christian values and reinforce identity formation that aligns with the life and teachings of Christ. Furthermore, the inclusion of mentorship facilitates personalised spiritual guidance, which is especially critical in navigating the complexities of digital-age challenges. Given the increasing secular influence marked by individualism, consumerism, and hedonism, particularly through social media platforms, spiritual formation offers a counter-cultural alternative grounded in scriptural ethics. In terms of pedagogical integration, the use of social media within CRE can enhance engagement among Generation Z by leveraging familiar platforms—such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook—for educational purposes. These digital tools can serve as extensions of the classroom, enabling asynchronous discussions, content sharing, and collaborative learning. However, such integration must be approached with critical pedagogy, ensuring that technological use does not merely replicate traditional instruction but instead encourages reflective and dialogical engagement with Christian teachings. Current research indicates that digital natives are more responsive to interactive and multimedia-based instruction[28], underscoring the necessity for educators to adapt CRE methodologies accordingly.

Conclusion

Spiritual formation can serve as a pivotal approach within Christian Religious Education (CRE) to foster Christian character among members of Generation Z. This formation process enables Generation Z to internalise the teachings and values of Christianity, which serve as the founda-

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27   Ian Curran, 'Theology as a Spiritual Discipline,' *Liturgy* 26, no. 1 (2010): 3–10, https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2010.519610.
28   Ruhut Parningotan Tambunan and Reni Triposa, 'Digitalisasi Terhadap Pendidikan Kristen Dan Praktik Spiritualitas,' *Journal of Christian Religious Education and Theology (JCRET)* 1, no. 1 (2025): 33–47, https://journal.sncopublishing.com/index.php/jcret/article/view/103.

tional principles for character development. Through spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, fasting, and participation in spiritual activities—including retreats, morning devotions, and prayer groups—students are offered meaningful opportunities to encounter the presence of God personally. These experiences not only nurture their spiritual awareness but also contribute to strengthening their faith and cultivating Christ-like character.

Moreover, the role of mentoring within the context of spiritual formation is vital. Through mentoring relationships, Generation Z receives guidance, support, and accountability necessary for spiritual and character growth. In an era marked by rapid technological advancement, which often contributes to the erosion of Christian values, spiritual formation stands as an essential and relevant strategy. It offers a means for Generation Z to respond to the pervasive challenges of secularisation—characterised by individualism, consumerism, and hedonism—often propagated through digital and social media, with responses that are grounded in Biblical truth.

In relation to the integration of social media into CRE, educators can utilise digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram as effective tools for Christian learning. These platforms may function as virtual classrooms, discussion forums, and channels for disseminating educational content. They can be employed to share teaching materials, inspirational videos, theological reflections, scripture-based imagery, and relevant links connected to CRE subjects. When used strategically and responsibly, social media not only enhances engagement and accessibility but also presents a contextually relevant medium for communicating Christian values to Generation Z.

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