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The Role of Catholic Religious Education in Fostering the Faith and Moral Development of Tenth-Grade Students at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu in Light of *Gravissimum Educationis*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the role of Catholic Religious Education (CRE) in fostering the faith and moral development of tenth-grade students at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu, to provide a detailed description of its implementation in accordance with the fundamental teachings of the Church's declaration *Gravissimum Educationis,* and to identify significant supporting and inhibiting factors. The study employed a descriptive qualitative research design and was conducted at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu. Primary data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation.

The findings revealed that Catholic Religious Education at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu plays a significant role that is consistent with the vision of *Gravissimum Educationis* in forming well-rounded individuals. Therefore, the role of Catholic Religious Education in fostering students' faith and morality at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu, from the perspective of *Gravissimum Educationis*, has demonstrated positive outcomes.

Keywords: Catholic Religious Education, Faith and Moral Formation, Gravissimum Educationis

Introduction

Education is fundamentally a means of helping individuals grow and mature. Human beings require education in order to achieve their full potential. This process involves continuous assistance and guidance from various factors necessary throughout the educational journey, enabling learners to develop into fully mature persons (Yohanes Pranyoto, 2018). Catholic Religious Education (CRE) in schools assists students in deepening their faith in God in accordance with Catholic teachings while maintaining respect for other religions. It serves as a means of teaching, guiding, and living out the Catholic faith and moral values within the school environment (Intansakti Pius X & Kana, 2020).

Education is a fundamental human right and the primary foundation for the development of human civilization. Within the Indonesian context, which recognizes religious diversity, Catholic

Religious Education (CRE) plays a strategic role that extends beyond the enhancement of cognitive knowledge and is essentially directed toward the formation of students' faith and morality.

Formation refers to a systematic and purposeful process designed to help individuals improve their abilities, skills, attitudes, and values, enabling them to achieve desired goals (Dendy Sugiono et al., 2008). The Catholic Church teaches that faith is the act of believing in God and in all that He has revealed to humanity, as proclaimed by the Church (Herman Embuiru, 1998). Morality refers to the principles that guide human behavior in relation to oneself and others, based on the norms and ethical standards prevailing in society. The essence of morality is closely related to the understanding of good and evil, as well as individual responsibility for one's actions (K. Bertens, 2013).

This formation should produce individuals who possess strong character, ethical values, and the ability to live out their faith within a pluralistic social context. In line with this, the Catholic Church, through the Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, emphasizes that Catholic schools, particularly religious education, have the noble mission of assisting young people in developing their physical, moral, and intellectual gifts in an integral (holistic) manner so that they may grow closer to God and to others (Hardawirjana, 1993).

The rapid development of the digital era and social changes have posed serious challenges to the moral and faith formation of adolescents. At SMKN 1 Kefamenanu, several phenomena have been identified that indicate inconsistencies between religious teachings and students' daily practices. For instance, some students continue to demonstrate undisciplined behavior, lack initiative in communal prayer activities, and exhibit tendencies toward cheating, which indicates a weakness in honesty as a Christian moral value.

Efforts to foster students' faith and morality in schools must be undertaken by teachers, who serve as second parents within the educational setting. Teachers are adults who, by virtue of their role, are obligated to provide education to students (Rosalia Herlinawati et al., 2022). Catholic Religious Education teachers bear broad responsibilities that go beyond merely delivering instructional content. They serve as guides, mentors, and role models who assist students in integrating Catholic teachings into their daily lives. As educators, they are responsible for instilling Christian values through learning processes that encompass knowledge, attitudes, and actions. Teachers must be able to create a learning environment that motivates students to know and love God, understand Church teachings, and apply moral values in social interactions (Aloysius Pieris, 2015). In addition to classroom instruction, teachers also contribute to students' faith development by organizing spiritual activities such as communal prayer, recollections, and Mass celebrations

(Driyarkara, 2017).

In schools, moral issues are often manifested in students' disrespectful behavior toward parents and teachers. Many students exhibit attitudes that fail to show proper respect toward elders. Deviant behaviors such as dishonesty—including cheating, lying, and academic misconduct—have shown an increasing trend among students. Furthermore, negative influences arising from unhealthy social interactions have encouraged some students to engage in behaviors that are inconsistent with moral values, such as premarital sexual activities and bullying. These issues require serious attention to prevent students from experiencing continuous difficulties related to faith and morality.

In responding to the challenges of faith and morality faced by students, Catholic Religious Education teachers carry the important responsibility of guiding them so that they do not fall into principles that deviate from Christian teachings. Teachers must provide concrete examples through the practice of honesty, charity, and empathy toward others (Pius Herman, 2029). Catholic Religious Education can serve as a solution to students' faith and moral problems. In the past, education focused primarily on classroom instruction. Today, however, education must be transformed. It should aim to develop students holistically by nurturing their intellectual, emotional, and physical dimensions, while also instilling sound character values (Yohanes Pranyoto, 2028).

This study is relevant because it seeks to examine in depth the implementation of Catholic Religious Education (CRE) at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu from the perspective of *Gravissimum Educationis*. Focusing on tenth-grade students who are in a transitional stage and in the process of identity formation, this study aims to analyze the extent to which Catholic Religious Education contributes to faith and moral formation, how it is implemented in practice, and the key factors that support or hinder its effectiveness. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for Saint Peter Pastoral College, the Diocese of Atambua, Catholic Religious Education teachers, and school authorities in strengthening integrated and contextual efforts toward students' faith and moral formation.

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Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. This method was chosen because its purpose was to describe and analyze in depth the phenomena, roles, and implementation of Catholic Religious Education in the faith and moral formation of tenth-grade students at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu, as well as to explore the factors surrounding these processes.

The study was conducted at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu, located at Jl. El Tari No. 18, Kefamenanu City District, North Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. The research was carried out over a period of two months, namely April and May 2025. The selection of the research site was based on the availability of informants who could provide relevant data regarding the role of Catholic Religious Education in students' faith and moral formation.

The subjects or informants in this study consisted of twelve participants: four Catholic Religious Education teachers and eight tenth-grade students of SMKN 1 Kefamenanu. From the available informants, the researcher selected these twelve participants to respond to the research questions. Secondary data, which consisted of information obtained from supporting sources, were collected from records, school documents (such as religious activity reports, lesson plans, and instructional modules), and other literature relevant to the themes of Catholic Religious Education, Faith and Moral Formation, and *Gravissimum Educationis*.

Data collection techniques included direct observation conducted within the school environment and during the learning process (for example, in Class X during April and May 2025), in-depth interviews with Catholic Religious Education teachers and Catholic tenth-grade students to explore the informants' perspectives, and documentation in the form of photographs of school activities. The collected data were subsequently analyzed through the stages of Data Reduction, Data Display, and Conclusion Drawing/Verification. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through Source Triangulation by comparing interview results obtained from teachers, students, and the school principal.

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Results and Discussion

- Result

Observations of the implementation of Catholic Religious Education (CRE) at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu, particularly among tenth-grade students in the Electrical Power Installation Engineering (TITL) program, revealed integrated efforts in faith and moral formation in accordance with the spirit of *Gravissimum Educationis*. Several important findings emerged from the observations.

First, a well-maintained religious environment was evident. The school fosters a religious atmosphere through communal morning prayers led by students on a rotating basis, as well as opening and closing prayers conducted by teachers at the beginning and end of each CRE lesson. This reflects the school's commitment to creating an environment that supports faith formation. Second, relevant

instructional methods were employed. CRE teachers used a combination of lectures and group discussions, addressing topics closely related to students' daily lives, such as human uniqueness, conscience, and the influence of mass media. Learning materials were linked to Sacred Scripture and Church teachings, while students were also given opportunities to share their personal experiences. This approach has significant potential to promote students' holistic understanding. Third, students demonstrated varied responses. The majority of students showed interest and attentiveness during lessons and were able to relate Christian values to their everyday experiences. However, a small number of students remained passive and did not actively participate in discussions, indicating that efforts to engage all students need to be further strengthened. Fourth, extracurricular support was available. Religious extracurricular activities, such as choir practice and catechetical sessions guided by religion teachers, served as valuable complements to students' faith formation outside formal classroom instruction.

Overall, SMKN 1 Kefamenanu has demonstrated a strong commitment to implementing holistic and integral Catholic Religious Education through a religious learning environment, relevant teaching methods, and supportive extracurricular activities. Nevertheless, challenges related to increasing the active participation of all students remain an important concern.

Interview findings further revealed that faith and moral formation among tenth-grade students in Catholic Religious Education classes at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu is not limited to the transmission of theoretical knowledge but is primarily directed toward character formation and the internalization of Christian values in daily life. Based on interviews with Catholic Religious Education teachers, the principal instructional strategy employed is a combination of lectures and group discussions, grounded in catechetical methods and based on Sacred Scripture and Church Tradition.

The greatest challenge in instilling faith and moral values among students from diverse backgrounds is the lack of habitual spiritual practices within families and the negative influence of technological advancement. Although economic and geographical differences also play a role, the faith foundation established at home constitutes the most dominant factor. Consequently, teachers are required to adapt their approaches in order to reach all students, regardless of their backgrounds, and to foster interest and participation in religious activities. Catholic Religious Education becomes more meaningful, dynamic, and effective when strong synergy exists between family and school. When families provide a foundation of faith at home and schools reinforce it through a supportive environment and conducive spiritual activities, the inculcation of faith and moral values among students becomes more comprehensive and firmly established.

Based on the experiences shared by the participants, it is evident that Catholic Religious Education plays a crucial role in helping individuals grow closer to God and develop respect for others. Closeness to God is manifested through various religious practices. Prayer, for example, serves as the primary means of communicating with God, both through routine prayers and spontaneous prayers taught in class. Regular attendance at Sunday Mass also serves as an important means of strengthening one's

spiritual relationship with God. Furthermore, reading the Bible, although sometimes requiring initial encouragement, contributes to a deeper understanding of God's teachings and ultimately fosters a closer relationship with Him. Behavioral changes, such as the transition from reluctance to worship to more consistent participation in religious practices, indicate significant spiritual transformation resulting from these lessons.

In addition, Catholic Religious Education effectively instills values of respect toward others. Although specific examples were not described in detail by the participants, the explicit emphasis placed on this value demonstrates that religious instruction focuses not only on the vertical relationship between human beings and God but also on horizontal relationships among individuals. Catholic Religious Education teachers play a central role in helping students understand and live out the teachings of the Catholic faith in their daily lives. The various approaches and guidance provided by teachers contribute significantly to students' spiritual and moral development.

- **Discussion**

Teachers' Strategies and Methods in Faith and Moral Formation

An analysis of interview data with Catholic Religious Education (CRE) teachers (HMS, NYB, YAU, and MFA) revealed that their instructional strategies were not merely focused on the transfer of cognitive knowledge but were primarily directed toward character formation and the internalization of Christian values. The combination of lectures and group discussions constituted the principal instructional approach. This approach was further enriched through catechetical methods, which, according to HMS, are grounded in Sacred Scripture and Church Tradition. This indicates that teachers do not merely teach students what to believe but also how faith should be lived out in everyday life.

The teachers consistently connected instructional materials with students' real-life experiences. YAU and MFA illustrated how values such as human uniqueness, respect for diversity, and human dignity as God's creation were integrated into classroom learning. HMS even emphasized the importance of concrete actions following instruction, such as planning activities aimed at helping others. This approach is highly consistent with the principle of integral education advocated in Gravissimum Educationis, which emphasizes the formation of the whole person—not only academically competent individuals but also persons with strong moral, spiritual, and social character. The fact that most students demonstrated interest and attentiveness and were able to relate Christian values to daily life confirms the effectiveness of this approach. Nevertheless, the presence of a small number of passive students indicates the need for continuous efforts to enhance active participation among all learners.

Spiritual and Pastoral Formation Activities as Supporting Programs

In addition to formal classroom instruction, SMKN 1 Kefamenanu organizes various spiritual and pastoral formation activities that support students' faith and moral development. YAU mentioned activities such as catechesis during the Bible Month Program (Bulan Kitab Suci Nasional—BKSN) and seminars conducted by external speakers addressing moral issues such as bullying and social relationships. HMS added that faith enrichment activities are also conducted in preparation for Easter, specifically targeting adolescents. NYB and MFA emphasized that these activities involve all grade levels, not only tenth-grade students, with a particular focus on deepening faith and cultivating spiritual habits such as regular prayer.

Religious extracurricular activities, including choir practice and catechetical sessions guided by religion teachers, provide strong support for students' faith formation beyond formal instructional hours. The existence of these programs demonstrates the school's commitment to providing opportunities for students to continuously develop their spiritual and moral dimensions. Such initiatives represent a concrete manifestation of the school's efforts to implement comprehensive education that extends beyond the intramural curriculum.

Challenges in Faith and Moral Formation

Despite the considerable efforts devoted to faith and moral formation, teachers identified several significant challenges in instilling faith and moral values among students from diverse backgrounds. According to YAU, HMS, MFA, and NYB, the major challenges include the lack of habitual spiritual practices within families and the negative influence of technological advancement.

HMS and MFA specifically highlighted how excessive exposure to gadgets and digital games reduces students' focus on spiritual activities and decreases their willingness to participate in worship services. NYB emphasized that the faith atmosphere within the family—including habits of prayer, Mass attendance, and Scripture reading—constitutes the most influential factor. When a strong faith foundation is absent at home, teachers face a much greater challenge because they must begin faith formation from the most basic level. In addition, differences in economic and geographical backgrounds also contribute to disparities in students' foundational understanding of faith, as noted by YAU and MFA. These challenges indicate the necessity for closer collaboration among schools, families, and the broader community to ensure that faith and moral formation is carried out synergistically and sustainably.

Family Involvement and the School Environment

Family involvement, as expressed by HMS, is crucial yet remains the greatest challenge. Although the school has made maximum efforts, many Catholic parents tend to delegate the

entire responsibility for their children's faith formation to the school, including students who reside in boarding houses. This situation reveals a gap between the school's expectations and the realities within the family environment.

On the other hand, the involvement of the wider school environment, including policy support and initiatives from the principal, Dra. Yohana Gaudensiana Kapitan, has been highly positive. The implementation of vocational programs tailored to regional needs, the cultivation of discipline, socialization regarding ethical use of social media, and the facilitation of student innovations (such as the development of electric go-karts) demonstrate the school's commitment to producing graduates who are not only vocationally competent but also possess strong character and ethical awareness. The school's strategic role as a venue for the Civil Servant Candidate Examination (CPNS) further indicates its strong reputation and the high level of trust placed in it by external stakeholders. However, to optimize faith and moral formation, greater awareness and active participation from families—as the first "domestic seminary"—remain essential.

Students' Perspectives on the Influence and Learning Experiences of Catholic Religious Education

The findings from students' perspectives regarding the influence of Catholic Religious Education at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu indicate a positive correlation between classroom instruction and the development of independent character grounded in conscience. Students acknowledged that understanding human beings as rational creatures encourages them to act both rationally and ethically in loving others.

This spiritual transformation is reflected in changes in students' religious practices, where teachers' guidance in spontaneous prayer and consistent Bible reading has successfully strengthened students' personal relationship with God. This finding is in line with the declaration Gravissimum Educationis, which emphasizes that Christian education should help young people become increasingly aware of the gift of faith they have received.

Beyond the spiritual dimension, students evaluated their CRE learning experiences positively because the instruction emphasized interactive and participatory methods that transcended purely doctrinal boundaries. Religion teachers played a crucial role as motivators who instilled social ethics, such as honesty and civic responsibility, reinforced through collective activities such as school Mass celebrations and public ethics awareness programs. Although some academic challenges related to assignments and memorization were reported, students' active participation in authentic religious practices demonstrates that Catholic Religious Education has become an

effective means of fostering moral development. The integration of holistic teacher guidance and students' openness in living out their faith emerged as key factors contributing to the success of moral formation within this vocational secondary school setting.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study is limited to the *Sekaf* tradition of the Haumen tribe in relation to the sacrament of marriage within the teachings of the Catholic Church; therefore, its findings cannot be generalized to other ethnic groups. Accordingly, future research may examine traditions related to the sacrament of marriage among other tribes. In addition, subsequent studies may explore the educational values embedded in the *Sekaf* tradition as a form of learning for tribal members and, more broadly, for society in general.

Conclusion

This Catholic Religious Education (CRE) at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu plays a highly fundamental and central role in the faith and moral formation of tenth-grade students. This role is profoundly aligned with the vision and principles of *Gravissimum Educationis*, which emphasizes the importance of integral education and the formation of the whole person as part of the Church's mission in the modern world.

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that Catholic Religious Education (CRE) at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu occupies a central and strategic position in fostering students' faith and morality. This role is implemented in accordance with the vision articulated in *Gravissimum Educationis*. The success of this formation is reflected in the integration of cognitive learning methods with concrete spiritual practices, such as regular prayer traditions, catechesis, and liturgical participation, all of which contribute to strengthening students' personal relationship with God.

The implementation of CRE in this school extends beyond the mere transmission of doctrinal teachings and has evolved into a means of internalizing moral values, particularly through the strengthening of conscience and reason, which encourage positive behavioral changes among students, making them more disciplined, honest, and socially empathetic. Catholic Religious Education teachers play a crucial role as role models and holistic mentors who bridge the teachings of faith with the practical challenges of the digital era.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this formation still faces significant challenges, particularly the limited habituation of spiritual practices within families and the negative influence of technology, which tends to distract students from spiritual matters. Therefore, the success of integral faith formation in this vocational school largely depends on the synergy among participatory teacher guidance, students' openness to living out their faith, and the fundamental support provided by families as the domestic Church. Overall, the role of CRE at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu has demonstrated positive outcomes in guiding students toward becoming well-rounded individuals within a pluralistic society. Practically, these findings indicate that moral formation cannot be separated from intensive and continuous spiritual accompaniment.

Concrete Impact on Students' Faith and Moral Development: From the students' perspective, Catholic Religious Education directly influences their attitudes and behavior. Values such as love, forgiveness, honesty, responsibility, faith in God, and fraternity are not merely understood at a cognitive level but are also internalized and manifested in everyday interactions. This constitutes an indicator of successful formation oriented toward the development of the whole person, as emphasized in *Gravissimum Educationis*, which upholds every person's right to learn to appreciate moral values and deepen their love for God.

Overall, Catholic Religious Education at SMKN 1 Kefamenanu has successfully carried out its important mission of fostering the faith and morality of tenth-grade students in accordance with the perspective of *Gravissimum Educationis*. Nevertheless, the existing challenges underscore the importance of closer and more sustainable collaboration among the school, families, and the Church to ensure the formation of mature and resilient Christian individuals

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