

## Digital Faith Formation and Christian Religious Education Teachers' Leadership in 21st-Century Learning

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**Abstract:** The rapid integration of digital technology in education has transformed how faith is taught and experienced in Christian contexts. This shift challenges Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers to maintain theological integrity while engaging learners in online and hybrid spaces. Traditional models of discipleship must now coexist with virtual practices of learning and community building, requiring teachers to navigate the tension between spiritual authenticity and digital innovation. As education in the 21st century emphasizes creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking, Christian educators must also redefine their leadership as a calling that unites faith, ethics, and pedagogy. This transformation positions teachers not merely as instructors but as spiritual mentors who embody servant and transformative leadership within digital learning environments. The purpose of this study is to develop a theological and pedagogical framework for digital faith formation and teacher leadership in contemporary Christian education. Employing a qualitative theological method and literature-based analysis, the research draws from biblical principles and scholarly works in theology, education, and digital pedagogy. Findings show that faith formation in digital contexts must remain relational, participatory, and grounded in the incarnational model of Christ. Effective leadership integrates humility, moral integrity, and technological discernment to sustain authentic spiritual growth. The study contributes by bridging theology and pedagogy, offering a holistic model for spiritually grounded and digitally competent Christian educators in the 21st century.

### **Contribution:**

This study contributes to contemporary Christian education by formulating an integrative framework that unites theology, pedagogy, and digital literacy, positioning Christian educators as transformative spiritual leaders who cultivate faith, ethics, and relational depth within digital learning communities.

**Keywords:** digital faith formation; Christian Religious Education; teacher leadership; 21st-century pedagogy; spiritual formation

## INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has transformed the global educational landscape through the rapid integration of digital technology into every dimension of learning. For Christian Religious Education (CRE), this shift introduces both new possibilities and profound theological challenges in the way faith is formed and expressed.<sup>1</sup> While digital tools provide unprecedented access to Scripture, theology, and global faith communities, they also risk encouraging shallow spirituality and fragmented identities.<sup>2</sup> The spiritual development once nurtured through face-to-face relationships now unfolds within screens and networks, demanding new models of formation.<sup>3</sup> In this context, Christian educators are called not only to teach about faith but to lead students toward spiritual maturity within a digital environment that often resists depth and reflection.<sup>4</sup>

As digital spaces increasingly shape values, relationships, and worldview, the mission of Christian education must extend beyond information delivery to transformational discipleship.<sup>5</sup> The post-pandemic learning landscape has accelerated online engagement, making digital faith literacy essential for teachers and students alike.<sup>6</sup> However, without strong spiritual leadership, digital learning can easily become morally neutral and spiritually detached.<sup>7</sup> The classroom, whether physical or virtual, must become a sacred space for nurturing Christlike character and discernment amid technological change.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, educators must rethink faith formation as both a pedagogical and spiritual practice that integrates technology responsibly and redemptively.<sup>9</sup>

Research on Christian education has long emphasized faith formation as the heart of pedagogy, yet recent scholarship reveals a pressing need to contextualize it within the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2019), 45.

<sup>3</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1993), 67.

<sup>4</sup> B. Smith, "Transformative Leadership in Post-Digital Classrooms," *HTS Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 4.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, 112.

<sup>6</sup> Kara Sevensma, Marj Terpstra, Jack Gibson, Isabella Napitupulu, Elle Quist Nieuwsma, Meri Fuji Siahaan, & Yoolim Song. "Seeking a scholarship of pedagogy, technology, and faith: A literature survey." *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 22, no. 3 (2018): 252-273.

<sup>7</sup> John M. Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (London: SCM Press, 2021), 53.

<sup>8</sup> Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 98.

digital age. Groome's *shared praxis* model underscores participatory and reflective faith learning, but it was conceived before the emergence of digital culture.<sup>10</sup> Pazmiño similarly defines Christian education as "spiritual formation through relational teaching," but his framework must now adapt to online and hybrid learning realities.<sup>11</sup> Hull expands this discourse by proposing education as an act of communal meaning-making, a vision now mediated by digital technologies.<sup>12</sup> Collectively, these classical perspectives affirm that teaching and formation are inseparable but insufficiently address the ethical and spiritual tensions of virtual learning.<sup>13</sup>

Contemporary scholarship has begun bridging theology, pedagogy, and digital culture under the concept of *digital faith formation*. Peckham argues that online platforms can facilitate authentic spiritual growth if guided by theological discernment and communal accountability.<sup>14</sup> Sevensma et al highlights that digital pedagogy demands faith-centered leadership to sustain moral integrity within virtual learning communities.<sup>15</sup> Smith advances this discussion through the framework of *transformative digital leadership*, where teachers act as co-pilgrims guiding students toward reflective and incarnational faith.<sup>16</sup> Yet, despite these insights, few studies explore how Christian Religious Education teachers embody such leadership in the context of 21st-century learning.<sup>17</sup> This research thus positions itself within that emerging intersection of theology, leadership, and digital pedagogy.

This study aims to explore how Christian Religious Education teachers exercise transformative leadership in facilitating digital faith formation within 21st-century learning contexts. It argues that faith formation in the digital age requires not only technological fluency but also theological wisdom, spiritual maturity, and relational empathy. By synthesizing theological education, leadership theory, and digital pedagogy,

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 102.

<sup>12</sup> Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?*, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, 118.

<sup>14</sup> John C. Peckham, "Digital Discipleship and Faith Formation," *Christian Education Journal* 20, no. 2 (2024): 105.

<sup>15</sup> Kara Sevensma, Marj Terpstra, Jack Gibson, Isabella Napitupulu, Elle Quist Nieuwsma, Meri Fuji Siahaan, & Yoolim Song. "Seeking a scholarship of pedagogy, technology, and faith: A literature survey": 252-273.

<sup>16</sup> B. Smith, "Transformative Leadership in Post-Digital Classrooms": 7.

<sup>17</sup> Kara Sevensma, Marj Terpstra, Jack Gibson, Isabella Napitupulu, Elle Quist Nieuwsma, Meri Fuji Siahaan, & Yoolim Song. "Seeking a scholarship of pedagogy, technology, and faith: A literature survey": 252-273.

this research offers a conceptual model for faith-centered teaching that is both contextually relevant and spiritually grounded. The study contributes to global discourse by redefining the teacher's role as a spiritual leader who integrates faith, ethics, and technology in transformative learning environments. Ultimately, it seeks to renew Christian education as a formational practice that shapes discipleship, community, and moral discernment in the digital era.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative theological approach using library-based research to examine the interrelationship between faith formation, digital pedagogy, and Christian leadership.<sup>18</sup> The method focuses on interpreting theological and educational texts through a contextual lens, emphasizing how scriptural and pedagogical insights can be applied to modern educational settings.<sup>19</sup> Primary sources included the Bible, theological writings, and classic works on Christian education by Groome, Pazmiño, and Palmer. Secondary sources such as contemporary journals, conference papers, and digital ministry reports were also analyzed to capture emerging perspectives on digital faith formation. The goal of this approach was to synthesize theological reflection with practical educational theory to construct a coherent conceptual framework for Christian Religious Education in the digital era.

Data were analyzed using a thematic and hermeneutical approach, identifying recurring theological and pedagogical motifs related to leadership and digital formation. Following Tanasyah et al's model of qualitative analysis, themes were coded, compared, and integrated into broader interpretive categories.<sup>20</sup> Each source was examined critically to trace theological continuity between traditional faith formation and its digital adaptations. Validity was maintained through cross-referencing multiple authors and triangulating theological insights with pedagogical applications. This process allowed for a robust understanding of how Christian Religious Education teachers can embody servant and transformational leadership in 21st-century learning environments.

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<sup>18</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 42.

<sup>19</sup> Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Yusak Tanasyah, Sutrisno, & Bobby Kurnia Putrawan, *Metode Penelitian Teologi & Pendidikan Agama Kristen* (Jakarta: Indonesia Press, 2021).

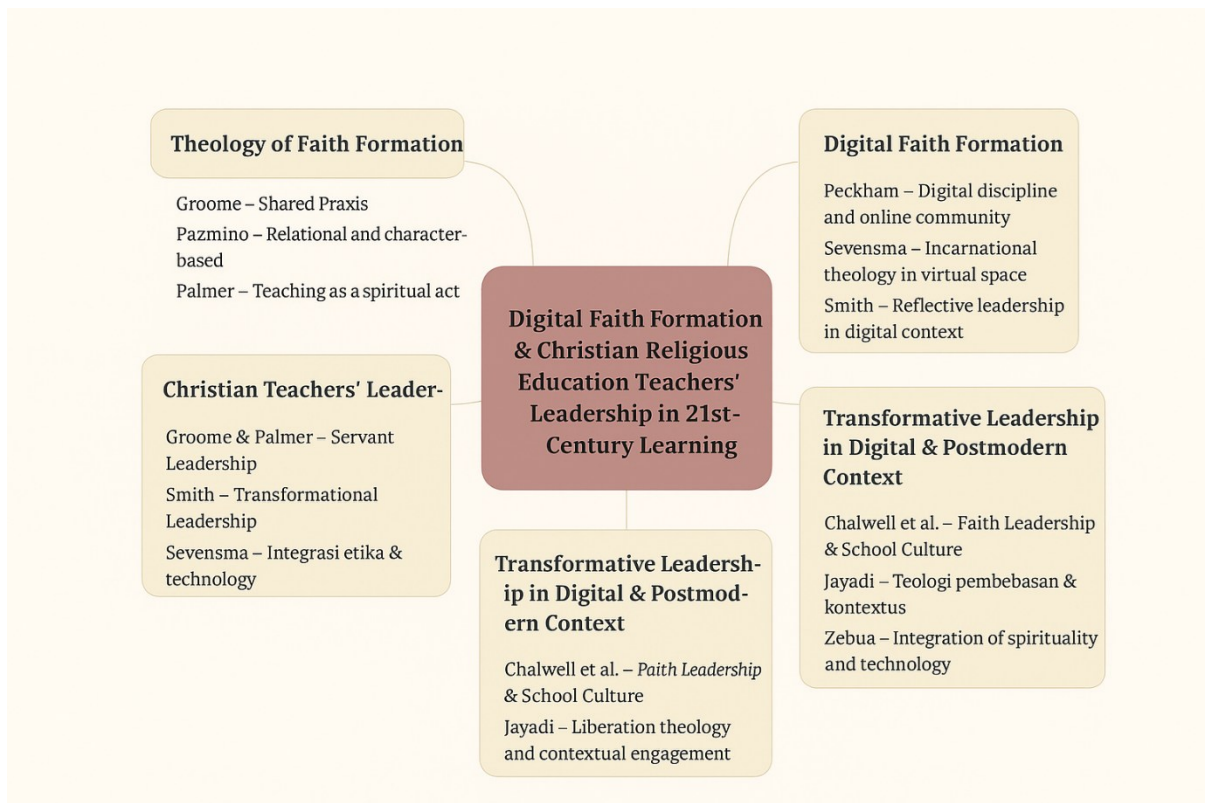


Figure 1. Research Map: Digital Faith Formation and Christian Teacher Leadership

## Theological Foundations for Digital Faith Formation and Transformative Christian Leadership

### *Theology of Faith Formation*

Faith formation, in the Christian tradition, refers to the holistic process through which believers are shaped into the likeness of Christ in thought, attitude, and action.<sup>21</sup> It is not merely cognitive instruction but a relational journey that integrates belief, practice, and community life.<sup>22</sup> Groome emphasizes that authentic Christian education must move beyond knowledge transmission toward participatory reflection and shared praxis in everyday life.<sup>23</sup> This understanding positions faith formation as a continual interaction between divine grace and human response within lived experience.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, faith formation serves as both a theological foundation and a pedagogical framework for Christian Religious Education (CRE).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, 42.

<sup>22</sup> Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, 22.

The process of faith formation requires intentional engagement with Scripture, worship, and community, forming the spiritual identity of learners. Pazmiño asserts that Christian education is fundamentally about cultivating character and moral imagination shaped by the gospel narrative.<sup>25</sup> Palmer expands this notion by describing teaching as a spiritual act that invites both teacher and learner into a deeper awareness of God's truth.<sup>26</sup> Thus, formation occurs not only through content but through relationships that embody the presence of Christ.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, the teacher becomes a co-participant in God's formative work rather than a mere transmitter of doctrine.

### ***Digital Faith Formation***

The rise of digital media has significantly transformed the landscape of faith formation, introducing both opportunities for creativity and challenges to spiritual depth. Peckham describes *digital faith formation* as the practice of nurturing discipleship through online platforms, communities, and mediated experiences of faith.<sup>28</sup> While such environments offer accessibility and inclusivity, they risk reducing spirituality to consumption and performance if not guided by discernment. Sevensma argues that effective digital pedagogy must retain theological intentionality, ensuring that faith remains incarnational rather than virtualized.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, digital faith formation demands a renewed understanding of embodiment, presence, and authenticity within virtual spaces.

Smith contends that teachers play a crucial role in shaping digital faith communities through reflective leadership and ethical engagement.<sup>30</sup> By modeling humility, empathy, and moral clarity, educators can transform digital platforms into arenas of discipleship and witness. This aligns with Hull's vision of education as communal meaning-making, which now extends into digital collaboration and dialogue.<sup>31</sup> In digital contexts, faith

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<sup>25</sup> Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 100.

<sup>26</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, 64.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, 203.

<sup>28</sup> John C. Peckham, "Digital Discipleship and Faith Formation," *Christian Education Journal* 20, no. 2 (2024): 107.

<sup>29</sup> Kara Sevensma, Marj Terpstra, Jack Gibson, Isabella Napitupulu, Elle Quist Nieuwsma, Meri Fuji Siahaan, & Yoolim Song. "Seeking a scholarship of pedagogy, technology, and faith: A literature survey": 252-273.

<sup>30</sup> B. Smith, "Transformative Leadership in Post-Digital Classrooms," *HTS Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 5.

<sup>31</sup> John M. Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (London: SCM Press, 2021), 59.

formation must integrate technology as a means of grace rather than a distraction from it. Christian Religious Education should intentionally cultivate *digital discernment*—the ability to use technology for spiritual growth and moral formation.

### ***Christian Teachers' Leadership***

Leadership in Christian education is best understood as *servant leadership*—a model grounded in humility, service, and empowerment rather than control. Groome links effective Christian teaching with moral authority rooted in love and authenticity, emphasizing that educators must lead by example.<sup>32</sup> Palmer adds that such leadership flows from an inner integrity that allows teachers to create learning spaces where truth is encountered relationally.<sup>33</sup> In this framework, leadership becomes an act of ministry, shaping the spiritual environment in which learning occurs. Thus, the teacher's character becomes a living curriculum that communicates faith beyond words.

In the context of 21st-century learning, leadership must also embody adaptability, collaboration, and digital competence. Smith proposes a *transformational leadership* approach where teachers inspire innovation while maintaining spiritual grounding.<sup>34</sup> Sevensma et al reinforces that Christian leaders in education must integrate faith-based ethics into technological practices to sustain moral coherence.<sup>35</sup> Such leadership empowers students to engage technology responsibly and to practice their faith authentically in digital contexts. The convergence of faith formation, digital engagement, and servant leadership defines the new paradigm of Christian Religious Education in the modern era.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Transformative Leadership in Digital Faith Formation**

#### ***From Teaching to Faith Leadership***

The results of this study emphasize that Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers are not merely transmitters of theological knowledge but spiritual leaders

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, 212.

<sup>33</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, 75.

<sup>34</sup> B. Smith, "Transformative Leadership in Post-Digital Classrooms": 8.

<sup>35</sup> Kara Sevensma, Marj Terpstra, Jack Gibson, Isabella Napitupulu, Elle Quist Nieuwsma, Meri Fuji Siahaan, & Yoolim Song. "Seeking a scholarship of pedagogy, technology, and faith: A literature survey": 252-273. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056997118782514>.

shaping learners' faith and character.<sup>36</sup> Leadership in faith-based education is inherently pastoral and transformative, requiring teachers to integrate biblical values into pedagogical practice. McMaster underscores that Christian leadership involves both teaching and mentoring, fostering a discipleship process where knowledge and faith coalesce.<sup>37</sup> In such contexts, leadership becomes relational and formational, guiding students toward mature faith through lived experience rather than doctrinal instruction alone. Consequently, the role of the CRE teacher transcends curriculum delivery—it becomes a ministry of guiding spiritual growth.

This transformation of teaching into leadership is further illuminated by Chalwell, Stanton, and Grice, who describe “Christian middle leadership” as a vocation in which educators' faith both shapes and is shaped by school culture.<sup>38</sup> Their findings reveal that faith-driven leadership fosters moral integrity and communal resilience, influencing how teachers engage learners and colleagues alike.<sup>39</sup> This dynamic interplay between belief and professional identity suggests that faith leadership in education must be reflexive, continually reinterpreting spiritual convictions through the lens of pedagogical practice. Such leadership nurtures a learning community where educational excellence and spiritual authenticity coexist.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, Christian educators are called to lead not only through authority but through embodied witness and relational presence.

Furthermore, Chalwell and colleagues highlight that faith-oriented leadership reshapes the moral ecology of schools by embedding Christian virtues into institutional culture.<sup>41</sup> This aligns with McMaster's assertion that leadership development within Christian education must integrate mentorship, service, and ethical modeling.<sup>42</sup> Teachers who cultivate reflective practices grounded in Scripture and prayer demonstrate leadership that is both theologically sound and contextually relevant. The interplay of

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<sup>36</sup> Jeffery S. McMaster, “The Influence of Christian Education on Leadership Development,” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 7, no. 1 (2013): 70.

<sup>37</sup> McMaster, “The Influence of Christian Education,” 74.

<sup>38</sup> Kaye Chalwell, Graham D. Stanton, and Christine Grice, “Christian Middle Leadership: How the Faith of Middle Leaders Shapes and Is Shaped by School Culture and Community,” *International Journal of Christianity & Education* 28, no. 1 (2023): 8–9.

<sup>39</sup> Kaye Chalwell, Graham D. Stanton, and Christine Grice, “Christian Middle Leadership: How the Faith of Middle Leaders Shapes and Is Shaped by School Culture and Community”: 12.

<sup>40</sup> Kaye Chalwell, Graham D. Stanton, and Christine Grice, “Christian Middle Leadership: How the Faith of Middle Leaders Shapes and Is Shaped by School Culture and Community”: 15.

<sup>41</sup> Kaye Chalwell, Graham D. Stanton, and Christine Grice, “Christian Middle Leadership: How the Faith of Middle Leaders Shapes and Is Shaped by School Culture and Community”: 17.

<sup>42</sup> McMaster, “The Influence of Christian Education,” 80.

faith and professional engagement also redefines leadership as collaborative rather than hierarchical, emphasizing shared responsibility for spiritual formation. Thus, the Christian teacher's leadership is inherently communal, encouraging collective participation in the mission of transformative education.<sup>43</sup>

In the 21st-century learning environment, such faith leadership must adapt to digital and multicultural realities.<sup>44</sup> Byrne and Sweetman observe that leadership in faith education must remain dialogical, creating inclusive spaces for faith dialogue that transcend traditional hierarchies.<sup>45</sup> Zebua, Suparyadi, and Hariyanto argue that technological integration requires leaders who can merge digital fluency with pastoral care.<sup>46</sup> This convergence of leadership, technology, and relational ethics enables educators to respond to students' spiritual needs amid rapid social change. Therefore, CRE teachers act as mediators of faith in digital culture, embodying leadership that bridges tradition and innovation.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Digital Faith Formation Practices***

The findings indicate that digital faith formation is reshaping how individuals and communities experience spiritual growth in the digital age. Peckham defines digital faith formation as the practice of nurturing discipleship through online collaboration, media, and virtual worship spaces.<sup>48</sup> De Kock's research demonstrates that digital faith communities among young adults facilitate accessibility and engagement but must guard against superficial spiritual consumption.<sup>49</sup> These findings confirm that technology offers both potential and peril for faith development, depending on how it is pedagogically mediated.<sup>24</sup> When guided with theological intentionality, digital tools can expand spiritual participation beyond physical boundaries.

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<sup>43</sup> Kaye Chalwell, Graham D. Stanton, and Christine Grice, "Christian Middle Leadership: How the Faith of Middle Leaders Shapes and Is Shaped by School Culture and Community": 19.

<sup>44</sup> Gareth Byrne and Bernadette Sweetman, "Opening Up Adult Religious Education and Faith Development in Ireland: The AREFD Project," *British Journal of Religious Education* (2021): 3.

<sup>45</sup> Gareth Byrne and Bernadette Sweetman, "Opening Up Adult Religious Education and Faith Development in Ireland: The AREFD Project": 5.

<sup>46</sup> Yaterorogo Zebua, Zakharia Suparyadi, and Hariyanto Hariyanto, "Mengintegrasikan Teknologi Dan Spiritualitas: Kepemimpinan Gereja Di Era 5.0," *Indonesian Journal of Religious* 7, no. 2 (2024): 120.

<sup>47</sup> Byrne and Sweetman, "Opening Up Adult Religious Education," 8.

<sup>48</sup> John C. Peckham, "Digital Discipleship and Faith Formation": 105.

<sup>49</sup> A. (Jos) de Kock, "Christian Digital Faith Formation Among Young Adults: A Literature Review," *Religious Education* (2025): 7.

However, the digital environment can easily distort authentic spirituality if not rooted in incarnational theology. Sevensma et al warns that virtual learning may fragment communal worship and weaken relational bonds if educators neglect embodiment and presence.<sup>50</sup> Basuki et al. emphasize that Deuteronomy 6:4–9 remains a theological anchor for faith education, calling teachers to nurture relational discipleship grounded in Scripture.<sup>51</sup> This biblical model underscores that teaching, whether in person or online, must be relational, habitual, and God-centered. Therefore, faith formation in digital spaces must intentionally integrate relational depth with technological engagement.

Moreover, studies by Pello and Herrinton-Hodge suggest that technology enhances learning motivation when integrated into spiritually purposeful pedagogies.<sup>52</sup> Herrinton-Hodge proposes a model of 21st-century faith formation that combines digital resources with intergenerational mentoring and community reflection.<sup>53</sup> Pello's findings in Christian education contexts affirm that digital literacy improves learner engagement when spiritual goals are clearly articulated. Hence, digital faith formation must be both instructional and inspirational, allowing students to experience God's presence through mediated environments.<sup>54</sup> Such integration bridges the divide between cognitive learning and affective spirituality, reinforcing holistic faith development.

Digital faith formation reflects the broader mission of the church to incarnate the gospel in every cultural medium. De Kock observes that digital faith spaces encourage creativity and participation, redefining how believers experience fellowship and learning.<sup>55</sup> Yet, these innovations require discernment, ensuring that digital ministry serves transformation rather than mere content distribution. Sevensma et al reiterates

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<sup>50</sup> Kara Sevensma, Marj Terpstra, Jack Gibson, Isabella Napitupulu, Elle Quist Nieuwsma, Meri Fuji Siahaan, & Yoolim Song. "Seeking a scholarship of pedagogy, technology, and faith: A literature survey": 252-273.

<sup>51</sup> Eko Basuki, Liantoro Liantoro, Dunant Frederick Saukotta, and Yusak Tanasyah, "Peran Pendidikan Agama Kristen Dalam Pembentukan Iman Kepada Anak Di Jemaat Gereja Bethel Injil Sepenuh Yerusalem Baru, Surabaya Berdasarkan Kitab Ulangan 6:4–9," *Journal of Religious and Socio-Cultural* 5, no. 1 (2024): 75.

<sup>52</sup> Eleonora Patricia Selfina Pello, "Teknologi Dan Motivasi Belajar: Analisis Pengaruh Teknologi Informasi Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Kristen," *MODERATE: Journal of Religious, Education, and Social* 1, no. 2 (2024): 95.

<sup>53</sup> Beth Herrinton-Hodge, "A Model for 21st Century Faith Formation," *Ecclesio.com*, October 23, 2022, <https://www.ecclesio.com/2012/10/a-model-for-21st-century-faith-formation-by-beth-herrinton-hodge>.

<sup>54</sup> Herrinton-Hodge, "A Model for 21st Century Faith Formation".

<sup>55</sup> de Kock, "Christian Digital Faith Formation," 10.

that faithful digital pedagogy demands critical reflection on ethics, power, and presence.<sup>56</sup> Digital faith formation should not be viewed as a replacement for traditional discipleship but as its contextual extension into new spiritual frontiers.

### ***Integrating Religious Literacy and 21st-Century Competencies***

Another major finding highlights that faith formation in contemporary education must be accompanied by religious literacy and 21st-century skills. Marcus and Ralph assert that religious literacy enables learners to interpret diverse beliefs with empathy and critical understanding.<sup>57</sup> This skill is indispensable in pluralistic societies where faith encounters public life and digital culture. Singsuriya and Rimpeng further argue that linking religious literacy to competencies such as communication and collaboration strengthens both moral reasoning and civic engagement.<sup>58</sup> Thus, modern Christian education must cultivate literate, critical, and compassionate believers.

In this study, faith literacy emerges as a pedagogical bridge between theology and praxis. Viinikka et al. observe that effective religious educators combine theological depth with pedagogical adaptability, particularly in technologically mediated environments.<sup>59</sup> Castelli introduces "faith dialogue pedagogy" as a transformative method where learners and teachers engage in mutual reflection about faith and culture.<sup>60</sup> This approach aligns with Sweetman's call for participatory religious education that encourages self-reflection and communal meaning-making.<sup>61</sup> Together, these findings point toward a holistic model where faith literacy and digital fluency advance both spiritual and intellectual formation.

Implementing religious literacy within Christian education requires intentional curricular design. Ngumba, Mutula, and Arbuckle demonstrate that digital theology

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<sup>56</sup> Kara Sevensma, Marj Terpstra, Jack Gibson, Isabella Napitupulu, Elle Quist Nieuwsma, Meri Fuji Sahaan, & Yoolim Song. "Seeking a scholarship of pedagogy, technology, and faith: A literature survey": 252-273.

<sup>57</sup> Benjamin P. Marcus and Allison K. Ralph, "Origins and Developments of Religious Literacy Education," *Religion and Education* 48, no. 1 (2021): 21.

<sup>58</sup> Pagorn Singsuriya and Laila Rimpeng, "Linking Religious Literacy to 21st Century Skills," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* (2025): 4.

<sup>59</sup> Kaisa Viinikka, Martin Ubani, Tuuli Lipiäinen, and Arto Kallioniemi, "21st Century Skills and Finnish Student Teachers' Perceptions About the Ideal RE Teacher Today and in the Future," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 18, no. 8 (2019): 77.

<sup>60</sup> Mike Castelli, "Faith Dialogue as a Pedagogy for a Post Secular Religious Education," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 33, no. 2 (2012): 208.

<sup>61</sup> Bernadette Sweetman, "Reimagining Adult Religious Education and Faith Development in a Detraditionalised Ireland," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 965.

learning enhances collaboration and contextual discernment among students.<sup>62</sup> Their findings show that online platforms, when combined with reflective dialogue, strengthen both knowledge and empathy. This approach reframes the classroom as a community of inquiry where theological reflection intersects with digital competence.<sup>63</sup> Hence, religious literacy in the 21st century must encompass both theological understanding and media wisdom.

Furthermore, integrating 21st-century skills demands that faith-based educators redefine success beyond academic achievement. Byrne and Sweetman reveal that adult faith development programs thrive when learners are invited into co-creative and dialogical processes.<sup>64</sup> Such practices affirm agency and mutual learning, essential for spiritual maturity in postmodern contexts. Religious literacy thus functions not merely as cognitive knowledge but as an ethical framework guiding action, empathy, and community engagement.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the integration of literacy, technology, and spiritual formation equips learners to embody their faith authentically in the public digital sphere.

### ***Transformative Leadership for a Postmodern and Digital Context***

The final theme identifies transformative leadership as the key to sustaining faith formation amid postmodern complexity. Chalwell, Stanton, and Grice contend that Christian leadership reshapes school culture by embedding faith into relational and organizational practices.<sup>66</sup> Their study demonstrates that middle leaders who embody Christian virtues can foster coherence between faith and professional identity. This insight confirms that leadership in religious education must be both spiritual and strategic, integrating theological reflection with institutional influence. As a result, teachers act as catalysts of transformation, modeling ethical consistency and servant leadership within digital and multicultural environments.

Jayadi's theological reflection on postmodernity reinforces this paradigm by calling for education that engages liberation, contextualization, and justice.<sup>67</sup> Pangumbahas and

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<sup>62</sup> Lelo J. Ngumba, Stephen Mutula, and Katherine Arbuckle, "Learning of Catholic Theology in the Digital Age," *HTS Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 3.

<sup>63</sup> Lelo J. Ngumba, Stephen Mutula, and Katherine Arbuckle, "Learning of Catholic Theology in the Digital Age": 6.

<sup>64</sup> Byrne and Sweetman, "Opening Up Adult Religious Education," 9.

<sup>65</sup> Marcus and Ralph, "Origins and Developments of Religious Literacy," 32.

<sup>66</sup> Chalwell, Stanton, and Grice, "Christian Middle Leadership," 9.

<sup>67</sup> Lionarto Erson Jayadi, "Teologi Pembebasan Dalam Pascamodernitas: Suatu Kontribusi Bagi Pendidikan Keagamaan," *Indonesian Journal of Religious* 7, no. 1 (2024): 18.

Winanto add that Christian ethics must reinterpret postmodern morality through relational accountability and humility.<sup>68</sup> McMaster supports this view, emphasizing that spiritual maturity is essential for leadership development in faith-based institutions.<sup>69</sup> When combined, these perspectives highlight that transformative leadership integrates moral formation, intellectual vision, and contextual adaptability. Therefore, leadership in Christian education must navigate the tension between timeless theology and evolving cultural realities.

Additionally, transformative leadership in the digital era demands a balance between technological proficiency and moral integrity. Zebua et al. argue that church and educational leaders must integrate technology without compromising spiritual depth.<sup>70</sup> Sevensma et al warns that digital leadership must preserve authenticity, ensuring that educators embody faith both online and offline.<sup>71</sup> Byrne and Sweetman note that transformative leaders cultivate dialogue and inclusivity, fostering trust in detraditionalized communities.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, Christian teachers' leadership must embody transparency, empathy, and service as digital ministry continues to expand.

Transformative leadership reimagines Christian education as a movement of hope, dialogue, and digital discernment. Chalwell and colleagues affirm that the faith of middle leaders shapes institutional ethos, influencing how schools embody compassion and spiritual purpose.<sup>73</sup> Basuki et al. remind that authentic leadership remains grounded in Scripture and intergenerational mentorship as modeled in Deuteronomy 6.<sup>74</sup> Jayadi concludes that such leadership embodies the liberating power of faith, resisting both moral relativism and digital superficiality.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, transformative leadership in the 21st-century learning context becomes a redemptive vocation—forming educators and learners alike into agents of grace and renewal.

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<sup>68</sup> Recky Pangumbahas and Oey Natanael Winanto, "Membaca Kembali Pandangan Moralitas Postmodernism untuk Konteks Pendidikan Kristen," *QUAERENS: Journal of Theology and Christianity Studies* 3, no. 1 (2021): 75.

<sup>69</sup> McMaster, "The Influence of Christian Education," 85.

<sup>70</sup> Zebua, Suparyadi, and Hariyanto, "Mengintegrasikan Teknologi," 127.

<sup>71</sup> Kara Sevensma, Marj Terpstra, Jack Gibson, Isabella Napitupulu, Elle Quist Nieuwsma, Meri Fuji Siahaan, & Yoolim Song. "Seeking a scholarship of pedagogy, technology, and faith: A literature survey": 252-273.

<sup>72</sup> Byrne and Sweetman, "Opening Up Adult Religious Education," 10.

<sup>73</sup> Chalwell, Stanton, and Grice, "Christian Middle Leadership," 20.

<sup>74</sup> Basuki et al., "Peran Pendidikan Agama Kristen," 83.

<sup>75</sup> Jayadi, "Teologi Pembebasan," 28.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital faith formation provides a transformative framework for reimagining Christian Religious Education (CRE) in the 21st century. Integrating theology, pedagogy, and technology enables educators to nurture discipleship that remains relational and spiritually authentic amid digital realities. Peckham and De Kock affirm that faith formation through digital platforms must remain theologically grounded, emphasizing presence, participation, and discernment over passive content delivery. Chalwell, Stanton, and Grice further demonstrate that Christian educators' faith leadership shapes institutional culture, fostering moral integrity and communal coherence in both physical and digital environments. Consequently, digital faith formation demands educators who are spiritually mature, pedagogically adaptive, and capable of leading with empathy and integrity.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that teacher education programs integrate digital pedagogy with theological reflection to cultivate faith-informed leadership. Institutional collaboration between churches and schools should support educators' ongoing spiritual formation and technological competence. As McMaster and Tafetin et al. highlight, mentoring and servant leadership are essential for developing teachers who embody Christlike guidance in the classroom and online. Future research should expand cross-cultural studies on faith formation and leadership models to ensure inclusivity and contextual relevance. By merging faith, literacy, and innovation, Christian Religious Education can sustain its mission of shaping transformative, digitally literate disciples who live out their faith with wisdom, justice, and compassion.

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