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The Role of Sunday School Teachers in Instilling The Principles of Children's Spirituality in The Church

Suyani [1] Ni Nyoman Fransiska [2] Esbi Ngana [3]
Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Indonesia Bali [1]
Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Indonesia Bali [2]
Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Injili Indonesia Bali [3]
E-mail: andreassuyanilagi@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Fostering children's spirituality amid the tide of digitalization, materialism, and moral relativism poses a serious challenge for the church, while Sunday school teachers often face limitations in terms of support, teaching materials, and training. This study aims to explore the role of Sunday school teachers in instilling principles of spirituality in children within the church, grounded in the theological foundation of Matthew 19:13–15. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach through a literature review using documentation techniques. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that Sunday school teachers serve as educators, guides, role models, and spiritual mentors who shape children's character and faith, with synergistic support from parents and the church. Matthew 19:13–15 affirms the value and spiritual capacity of children, thereby establishing children's ministry as a core component of church life. This study is relevant for churches in designing teacher training programs, providing contextual teaching materials, and creating a child-friendly environment.

Keywords: teacher, Sunday school, spirituality, faith, church.

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INTRODUCTION

Education focuses not only on cognitive development and skill acquisition but also on the formation of students' character and spirituality (Dwi Lestariningsih). In the modern era, characterized by moral challenges and a crisis of values, nurturing children's spirituality has become an urgent need that cannot be overlooked. As a community of faith, the church bears significant responsibility for nurturing the spirituality of younger generations, with teachers playing a central role in this process (Surudiaman Lase and Riste Tioma Silean). Sunday School teachers serve as strategic agents in shaping the future generation of the church (Teknologi). They are not merely instructors but also sowers of the seeds of faith, which are expected to grow into strong and deeply rooted spiritual lives. Every Bible lesson, every communal prayer, and every example they set becomes a foundation for the

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spiritual character of children, who will eventually become “arrows” in the hands of the church (Nandari Prastica Wagiu).

However, Sunday School teachers cannot fulfill this responsibility alone. They need the full support of parents, who serve as primary educators at home, as well as the church, which functions as a community of faith by providing facilities, training, and appreciation (Lewumbangga). Synergy among Sunday School teachers, parents, and the church creates a holistic learning environment that enables children to grow in a balanced manner in terms of knowledge, character, and spirituality. When Sunday School teachers faithfully fulfill their calling with dedication and love, the outcomes can exceed expectations. They help nurture a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also mature in Christian character and deeply connected to God (Panjaitan and Fransisco). This generation will become the salt and light of the world, bringing transformation to both the church and society. Investing in Sunday School teachers is, therefore, an investment in the future of the kingdom of God. Proverbs 2:1–6 provides a strong biblical foundation for understanding the importance of seeking wisdom and knowledge of God. These verses emphasize that true wisdom comes from the Lord and must be pursued diligently. Within the context of Christian education, teachers are called to facilitate children’s discovery of spiritual wisdom and to guide them in developing a personal relationship with God.

The role of spiritual educators in the church has become increasingly crucial in safeguarding children’s faith and shaping their spiritual identity (Pendidikan et al.). They stand at the forefront of instilling biblical values amid the overwhelming flow of unfiltered information (Prijanto). Today, the church faces significant challenges in nurturing the spirituality of younger generations. In an era of rapid digitalization, children and adolescents are exposed to various forms of social media content, online games, and popular cultural values that often conflict with the principles of God’s Word (RN et al.). Exposure to materialism, hedonism, moral relativism, and secular lifestyles poses serious challenges to the formation of Christian character.

One major concern is that some churches have yet to give sufficient attention to ministries dedicated to nurturing children’s spirituality (Manao et al.). Sunday School teachers and youth ministry leaders often face significant limitations, including inadequate financial support, a lack of contextually relevant teaching materials, and insufficient learning facilities (Taliawo et al.). Programs for nurturing children’s spirituality are frequently regarded as supplementary ministries rather than primary priorities in the allocation of church budgets and resources (Lestariningsih, Dwi). Consequently, teachers are often left to conduct lessons with limited resources, without structured teaching materials or effective methods for engaging today’s digital generation.

Another pressing need is the provision of consistent training to enhance teachers’ competencies in spiritual formation ministries (Marbun). Teachers need to be equipped with a solid theological understanding, pedagogical skills appropriate to the developmental characteristics of contemporary children, and the ability to integrate technology into spiritual education. Beyond these competencies, teachers must also demonstrate authentic Christian living, because children often learn more from what they observe than from what they hear (Aviatin et al.). Without continuous professional and spiritual development, teachers may struggle to respond to children’s critical questions, address the psychological dynamics of Generation Z and Generation Alpha, and create engaging and transformative learning experiences (Nuralimah et al.). The gap between the growing challenges of the contemporary era and the limited support available to spiritual educators underscores the urgency of reassessing strategies for nurturing children’s spirituality in the church (Padakari and Korwa). Investing in teacher quality through training, adequate resources, and sustainable development programs is no longer optional

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but an urgent necessity. Such investment is essential to ensuring that the church can nurture a generation firmly grounded in faith amid the increasingly complex challenges of digital culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Sugiyono (2019), qualitative research is grounded in postpositivist philosophy and is used to investigate objects under natural conditions. In this approach, the researcher serves as the key instrument, data are collected through a combination of techniques, data analysis is inductive, and greater emphasis is placed on meaning rather than generalization. This approach was selected because the study aims to describe and gain an in-depth understanding of the role of Sunday School teachers in instilling the principles of children's spirituality in the church, without testing hypotheses or statistically measuring variables. The entire study was conducted through library research, with Matthew 19:13–15 serving as the primary biblical text and theological foundation.

The data sources consist of secondary data divided into three categories. The first category comprises biblical texts, particularly Matthew 19:13–15, together with supporting passages such as Deuteronomy 6:6–7, Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 4:11–12, 2 Timothy 2:2, and James 3:1. The second category includes books and scholarly journal articles on Christian education, the role of teachers, the history of Sunday School, and children's faith development. The third category consists of previous research relevant to nurturing children's spirituality in the church. Data were collected through documentation, involving the identification, reading, recording, and classification of information from these sources according to the research themes. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the research topic, the credibility of their publishers or journals, and the recency of their publication.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, as described by Sugiyono (2019), which consists of three interrelated stages conducted continuously. The first stage is data reduction, which involves summarizing the data, selecting the most relevant information, and focusing on themes related to the nature and functions of teachers, Sunday School teachers as character builders and spiritual mentors, children's faith development, and the theological foundation of Matthew 19:13–15. The second stage is data display, in which the reduced data are organized into a structured narrative to clarify the relationships among the identified themes. The third stage is conclusion drawing and verification, which involves formulating findings regarding the role of Sunday School teachers and their implications for children's ministry in the church, followed by checking these conclusions against the available data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Nature of the Teacher's Role

A teacher is not merely an instructor who stands in front of a classroom and delivers subject matter. More than that, a teacher is an architect of civilization who shapes character and the future of a nation. The true essence of teaching lies in the ability to inspire, guide, and ignite a passion for knowledge in every student (Putri Utami Istiqomah and Rifai). In Javanese culture, the word *guru* is commonly associated with the expression *digugu lan ditiru*, meaning that a teacher is someone whose words are trusted and whose conduct is emulated. This understanding indicates that teachers do not merely transmit knowledge but also instill life values through personal example. Their words, actions, and attitudes serve as mirrors in which their students see examples of how to live.

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A teacher is a light that illuminates the path through the darkness of ignorance. Teachers willingly devote their time, energy, and thought to helping students become better individuals. Without seeking personal gain, they serve as attentive listeners, motivate students when their enthusiasm fades, and provide guidance when the journey becomes difficult. The essence of teaching lies in dedicated service. Teachers are unsung heroes whose contributions endure in the achievements of their students (Yuliandari et al.). Whenever a student achieves a personal ambition, there is often a teacher's influence behind that success, reflected in the sincere guidance and loving support provided along the way.

Understanding the Role of Teachers

The role of a teacher encompasses a set of behaviors, duties, and responsibilities inherent in the teaching profession within an educational context. Etymologically, the word *role* refers to a person's function or position within a system, while the Sanskrit word *guru* is associated with the meaning of "weight" or "one who possesses authority," reflecting the respected position of a teacher as an instructor and guide (Ariani). In modern education, teachers do more than transfer knowledge; they facilitate learning and help students develop their full potential holistically.

The role of teachers encompasses a broad range of responsibilities, including cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. Teachers serve as educators who shape character, instructors who impart knowledge, mentors who guide students in their personal development, and role models who demonstrate desirable values through their daily conduct. In the current era of digitalization, their responsibilities have become increasingly complex. Teachers must also help students evaluate information critically amid the vast amount of data available on the internet while fostering digital literacy and critical thinking skills.

Beyond being a profession, teaching is a meaningful vocation with long-term implications for individuals and society. Teachers serve as agents of social change who shape the future of a nation through the generations they educate (Syifa Fauziah Ahmad et al.). High-quality teachers are among the most important investments in the development of civilization because they help nurture future leaders, professionals, and citizens of good character.

The Functions and Responsibilities of Teachers

The functions of teachers in education can be categorized into several important areas. First, the instructional function involves planning, implementing, and evaluating learning processes to achieve educational objectives effectively. Teachers design learning activities that meet students' needs, select appropriate teaching methods, and use relevant instructional media and learning resources (Purnawanto). To fulfill this function, teachers must possess a thorough understanding of the subject matter and be able to explain it in ways that are accessible and appropriate to children's cognitive development.

Second, the educational function focuses on character formation and the cultivation of life values. Teachers do not merely teach theories; they also instill moral values, ethics, discipline, responsibility, and integrity (Oktavia Candra Kirana and Muhammad Irwawan Siswantoro). Through consistent practices and personal example, teachers help shape students' personalities so that they become individuals of good character with well-developed emotional and social intelligence. This function is particularly important amid concerns about the moral challenges facing younger generations as a result of negative influences from the media and their surrounding environments.

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Third, the guidance function involves helping students discover their potential, interests, and talents. Teachers act as mentors who assist children in addressing various challenges, both academic and personal (Noviar, Maulidin, and Arkanudin 2024). They provide motivation, emotional support, and career guidance to help students develop their abilities to the fullest. In this context, teachers need to recognize each child's uniqueness and adopt individualized approaches that respond to different needs and circumstances.

Teachers' responsibilities encompass professional, moral, and social commitments. Professionally, teachers are responsible for continually improving their competencies through ongoing professional development, keeping abreast of developments in science and technology, and incorporating innovation into their teaching practices. They are expected to demonstrate four core competencies: pedagogical competence in managing learning, personal competence in serving as role models, social competence in interacting effectively with various stakeholders, and professional competence in mastering subject matter and teaching methodologies.

Teachers' moral responsibility is reflected in their integrity and the example they set through their lives. They must serve as role models whose words and actions are worthy of emulation because children tend to imitate what they observe as well as what they hear. Honesty, consistency between words and actions, and commitment to truth are fundamental to building trust between teachers and students. When teachers fail to exemplify the values they teach, their credibility and instructional effectiveness may be seriously undermined.

Teachers' social responsibility includes contributing to the advancement of society and the nation. Their responsibilities extend beyond students in the classroom to include parents, schools, communities, and the future of the nation. Teachers are agents of social transformation who help prepare the next generation to lead and develop society. Therefore, they need a broad understanding of educational purposes within the wider pursuit of a just, prosperous, and civilized society.

The Relationship Between Sunday School and Sunday School Teachers

The role of Sunday School teachers cannot be separated from the historical development of Sunday School itself. The Sunday School movement originated in the work of Robert Raikes in Gloucester, England, in 1780. Raikes was a journalist and printing-house owner who was deeply concerned about the social conditions arising from the Industrial Revolution, during which many children worked in factories and had little or no access to formal education. Sunday was their only day off, and some of these children became involved in destructive behavior and even ended up in prison. Raikes opposed the practice of imprisoning children and advocated providing them with educational opportunities instead (Yulianingsing). He subsequently paid teachers to instruct children in reading, writing, proper conduct, and biblical stories. Sunday School sessions initially ran from 10:00 a.m. to noon for reading lessons, followed by a worship service at midday and catechism memorization until 5:00 p.m. (Boehlke). Although Raikes faced opposition from factory owners who did not want their workers to become literate, the Sunday School movement grew rapidly, reaching more than 400,000 pupils by the time of his death.

The Sunday School movement subsequently expanded to the United States, where Sunday Schools came to be regarded as educational institutions and even contributed to the development of some public schools (Yulianingsing). Nevertheless, Sunday Schools in the United States at that time were considered insufficiently critical of social issues such as slavery. This contrasted with the Sunday School movement in England, which explicitly opposed drunkenness, war, and slavery (Boehlke). When Sunday School was introduced to Indonesia by Dutch missionaries, it became an integral part of church life. Sunday School should not be regarded as a

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supplementary ministry or a mere backup activity but as an indispensable part of the church's mission (Andrianti). It also contributes to the fulfillment of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (Richards).

Similarly, Karnawati (2020) explains that Sunday School is a Christian educational institution that helps children recognize themselves as sinful human beings in need of restoration to the image and likeness of God and guides them toward spiritual maturity through a life of obedience. Thus, Sunday School does not merely teach biblical knowledge but also plays an important role in shaping children's spiritual identity (Karnawati).

Teachers from a Christian Perspective

From a Christian perspective, the role of a teacher has profound spiritual significance and is understood as a divine calling rather than merely a profession. The Bible provides numerous examples of the importance of teaching and spiritual guidance, beginning with Jesus Christ Himself, who is recognized as the Great Teacher. Jesus devoted a significant part of His ministry to teaching and discipling His followers, not only through His words but also through His life and example. His teaching methods, characterized by love, patience, and wisdom, provide an exemplary model for every Christian teacher.

The Old Testament provides a strong theological foundation for the role of teachers in the life of God's people. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 instructs parents and the community of faith to teach God's Word to children repeatedly in various circumstances: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." This passage emphasizes that spiritual instruction is an ongoing responsibility that must be integrated into everyday life.

Proverbs 22:6 presents a fundamental principle of child education: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." This verse highlights the importance of character formation and spiritual education from an early age, since the foundations established during childhood can influence a person's life journey. Christian teachers have a responsibility to instill the truth of God in children's hearts so that, as they grow into adulthood, they will have a firm spiritual foundation for facing life's challenges.

In the New Testament, Ephesians 4:11–12 explains that God has given various gifts to the church, including teachers, to equip His people for works of service. This indicates that teaching is a God-given ministry that contributes to the edification of the body of Christ. Teachers in the church do more than communicate theological information; they also nurture disciples who are mature in their faith, able to distinguish truth from error, and committed to living according to God's will. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul presents a model of generational discipleship: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." This principle demonstrates that Christian teaching involves more than the transmission of knowledge; it also encompasses character formation and discipleship that equip subsequent generations to teach others. This ongoing process creates a lasting and multiplying impact in advancing the kingdom of God.

From a Christian perspective, teachers must also recognize that they are servants of God who will be held accountable for their responsibilities. James 3:1 offers a serious warning: "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." This passage underscores the seriousness of teaching before God because teachers exert considerable influence on the faith and lives of others. Therefore, Christian teachers must demonstrate integrity, communicate biblical truth accurately, and serve as authentic role models.

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Effective Christian teachers reflect the character of Christ through love, patience, humility, and commitment to the truth. They teach not to seek personal recognition but to glorify God and nurture the spiritual lives of their students. Christian teachers recognize that every child is a unique creation of God, made in His image and endowed with purpose. This understanding encourages teachers to treat every child with dignity and respect while helping them develop their God-given potential for His glory.

Within the church, Sunday School teachers and youth ministry leaders play a strategic role in shaping future generations. They do more than teach biblical stories; they guide children in developing a personal relationship with God, cultivating a living faith, and applying the principles of God's Word to everyday life. In the digital era, which presents numerous temptations and potentially harmful influences, those responsible for children's spiritual formation serve as spiritual guardians who help protect children's faith and equip them with a sound theological foundation. Christian teachers are also called to intercede in prayer for their students. Effective teaching depends not only on methods and instructional materials but also on the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of learners. Through prayer, teachers bring each child before the throne of grace, seek God's wisdom in their teaching ministry, and entrust the outcomes of their service to the Lord, who alone can bring spiritual growth. From a Christian perspective, the ministry of teaching is a partnership with God in His work of shaping people into the likeness of Christ.

Sunday School Teachers as Figures Who Shape Character and Spirituality

Boehlke (2003) and Karnawati (2020) emphasize that Sunday School aims to help children experience the restoration of the image and likeness of God and grow toward spiritual maturity (Boehlke). Therefore, Sunday School teachers play an essential role in helping children understand themselves, discern God's will, navigate life's struggles, and develop Christlike character in their daily lives. Sunday School teachers do more than deliver biblical lessons. They also help calm children when they are afraid, offer advice when conflicts arise, provide encouragement when children face pressure, guide them in making ethical decisions based on their faith, and help them develop a personal relationship with God. These responsibilities represent key elements of pastoral care and guidance within the ministry of Sunday School teachers.

The Role of Teachers as Spiritual Mentors

In Christian education, teachers do more than communicate instructional content; they also serve as examples through the way they live. They are expected to demonstrate behaviors consistent with the teachings of Christ by being approachable, loving, willing to listen, and ready to guide others. Such exemplary conduct creates a classroom environment that supports children's spiritual growth (Vice).

Sunday School teaching should not stop at the transfer of information but should also accompany children as they discover and develop their personal faith. Teachers encourage children to reflect on their relationship with God, in accordance with the teaching in Matthew 18 that children hold an important place in the kingdom of heaven (Holmes, "'Will My Child Have Their Own Faith?' Exploring the Impact of Parental Beliefs on Childhood Faith Nurture"). Sunday School teachers serve in a cultural context that continues to change, shaped by technological developments, social media, and the dynamics of modern family life. Therefore, they need to adopt contemporary teaching methods, such as digital media, interactive games, and visual aids, provided that these methods remain consistent with biblical principles (Irwin). Such approaches can make teaching more relevant and engaging for children today.

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Just as Jesus demonstrated concern for children's well-being, Sunday School teachers should foster a safe and supportive community. By providing opportunities for children to express their feelings, ask questions, and share their opinions, teachers can help establish the emotional and spiritual security that children need to grow in faith.

Children's Faith Development in Christianity

Children's faith development is a process of spiritual growth that takes place within the context of Christian life. This process involves the formation of beliefs, spiritual values, and religious practices that develop through children's interactions with their families, the church, and the wider community. Theologically, children's faith development is understood as part of God's work in the lives of families and congregations. This understanding emphasizes the significant place of children in the kingdom of God, as taught in Matthew 18 (Holmes, "'Will My Child Have Their Own Faith?' Exploring the Impact of Parental Beliefs on Childhood Faith Nurture"). Therefore, faith development is not merely an individual journey but also a shared responsibility involving parents, the church, and the wider community (Robinson).

The theological implications of children's faith development indicate that families, particularly parents, play a primary role in nurturing faith. Research in Christian education suggests that parents often serve as the most influential faith models for their children because children directly observe and imitate their parents' behaviors and beliefs (Yates and Avenant). Christian family theology emphasizes that the family is a God-given context in which God reveals Himself and children receive their earliest experiences of discipleship (Parmach).

Christian denominations differ in their approaches to children's faith development. Some emphasize structured religious education through catechesis or formal Sunday School programs, whereas others place greater emphasis on informal faith practices at home, such as family prayer, discussions about faith, and shared Bible reading (Holmes, "'Will My Child Have Their Own Faith?' Exploring the Impact of Parental Beliefs on Childhood Faith Nurture"). These variations reflect theological differences regarding how children understand faith and how the church positions itself as a primary partner in supporting families in the spiritual formation of their children.

Psychological and Social Factors in Children's Faith Development

Children's faith development is influenced not only by theological and family-related factors but also by psychological and social dynamics. These factors include parents' emotional adjustment, children's temperaments, and community support. Regarding parental emotional adjustment, parents' emotional and social well-being influences the atmosphere within the home. A healthy emotional environment can support children's spiritual development (Havighurst et al.). Children's innate characteristics, such as sensitivity, openness, and emotional needs, can also influence how they engage with religious beliefs and practices. Meanwhile, the church and Christian community contribute by providing opportunities for spiritual experiences through Sunday School, retreats, and youth fellowship activities (Holmes, "Do Contemporary Christian Families Need the Church? Examining the Benefits of Faith Communities from Parent and Child Perspectives").

The Biblical Foundation of Children's Ministry Based on Matthew 19:13–15

Matthew 19:13–15 is one of the foundational passages in the theology of children's ministry. In this passage, Jesus rebukes His disciples for preventing children from coming to Him and declares that the kingdom

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of heaven belongs to those who are like them. This message reflects Jesus' profound concern for children and provides a strong theological foundation for children's ministry in the church.

Jesus' rebuke of His disciples demonstrates that He actively defended children's access to Him. The disciples' opposition may have reflected cultural assumptions that regarded children as insignificant in public life. However, Jesus challenged this perspective by affirming their value. This passage emphasizes that Jesus rejects any form of obstruction that prevents children from experiencing His love and presence (McTavish). Jesus' advocacy for children is also evident in other Gospel narratives, including accounts of His healing of sick children and His teaching that whoever welcomes a child in His name welcomes Him (Magda and Šestak).

Matthew 19:14 emphasizes that children are welcome to come to Jesus. This means that children's ministry should reflect the values of inclusivity, openness, and respect for children as integral members of the body of Christ. The church is called to become a community that genuinely welcomes children rather than merely providing programs for them. Therefore, children's ministry must not be treated as marginal or secondary but as an integral part of the life of the church (Brooks). This principle requires the church to provide a safe, welcoming, and loving environment in which every child feels valued and accepted as a member of the community of faith (Oji).

When Jesus declares that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like children, He affirms the spiritual significance of children. Children are not merely passive recipients of faith instruction; they are also capable of believing, loving, and responding to God authentically. Therefore, nurturing children's spirituality must be a central priority in the church's ministry (Cashwell and Scott Young).

The Text and Context of Matthew 19:13–15

Understanding the message of Matthew 19:13–15 requires consideration of the cultural context of the first century, in which children often held limited social status. In both Jewish and Greco-Roman societies, children could be regarded as members of a vulnerable group whose social value was limited before they reached adulthood. This historical context, when contrasted with modern understandings of children as individuals with specific rights and needs rather than merely as "small adults," highlights the potentially countercultural significance of Jesus' message (Gürçay and Duran). Accordingly, Jesus' acceptance of children can be understood as an important theological foundation for contemporary discussions of children's rights and welfare.

Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Matthew frequently appears in the context of debates with religious leaders, particularly the Pharisees. Matthew portrays Jesus as an authoritative interpreter of the Torah who challenges prevailing interpretations by emphasizing mercy and inclusion over legalistic adherence to religious practices (Viljoen).

Furthermore, Jesus' identity as a Jew shaped by a strong religious tradition provides an important basis for understanding His teaching. Jesus reinterprets various traditional religious concepts, including those concerning family, community, and social status, to emphasize love, acceptance, and inclusion as central values of the kingdom of heaven (Sciberras). Consequently, Jesus' actions in Matthew 19:13–15 can be understood as a creative engagement with existing Jewish traditions, with particular emphasis on the dignity and worth of human beings.

Matthew 19:13–15 must also be considered in relation to the sociopolitical realities of the Roman Empire, which maintained a highly hierarchical social structure and marginalized vulnerable groups, including children. Roman imperial culture reinforced systems of values in which power, status, and dominance served as

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markers of honor. Against this background, Jesus' affirmation of children's value presents a counter-narrative to prevailing imperial values (Punt; T. P. Harmon).

The expansion of Roman power also contributed to the emergence of more cosmopolitan and universalistic cultural patterns. Within this context, Jesus' teachings, including His attitude toward children, can be understood as part of a broader moral vision of an inclusive community that transcends social status, ethnicity, and age (T. Harmon).

Implementation of the Principles of Matthew 19:13–15 in Children's Faith Development

Theologically, Matthew 19:13–15 provides a biblical foundation for understanding the dignity of children and the importance of protecting them in various aspects of life. Jesus' affirmation that the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these gives significant theological value to children, who were often regarded as having relatively low social status in that historical context (Gürçay & Duran). This principle has implications for modern perspectives on child welfare, children's rights, and the pastoral direction of the church.

Jesus' actions have been regarded as a historical precedent for advocating on behalf of vulnerable groups (Gürçay & Duran). By affirming the status of children, Jesus also invites modern society to reconsider how children are treated within families, educational institutions, and legal systems. This message remains relevant today because it provides a foundation for developing ethical and theological approaches to protecting vulnerable people.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:13–15 emphasizes that children are not merely additional members of the faith community but important participants in the kingdom of God. This passage portrays Jesus welcoming and blessing children and presents his actions as a challenge to adult attitudes toward them. It affirms that children possess spiritual, emotional, and social value that must be recognized and respected by the church community (Leal). Jesus' acceptance of children also provides a foundation for churches and Christian educators to create child-friendly environments in which children feel welcomed, accepted, and valued.

Jesus is known for using creative teaching methods, including stories, parables, dialogue, and visual objects. Similar methods can be applied in Sunday School teaching to encourage children's active participation and help them understand biblical messages in concrete and accessible ways (Purwisasi et al.). Interactive and communicative approaches can also support children's retention of what they learn and deepen their understanding of the values of faith (Moore).

CONCLUSION

Sunday School teachers play a strategic role in shaping children's character and spirituality. From a Christian perspective, teaching is a divine calling grounded in the example of Jesus as the Great Teacher, rather than merely a profession. The role of Sunday School teachers encompasses instructional, educational, and mentoring functions, as well as professional, moral, and social responsibilities. They also serve as spiritual mentors who guide children in understanding themselves, discerning God's will, and developing a personal relationship with Him. Personal example is essential because children often learn more from what they observe than from what they hear.

Children's faith development does not depend solely on Sunday School teachers. It is influenced by the family, the church, and the wider community, as well as by psychological and social factors, including parents' emotional well-being, children's temperaments, and environmental support. Therefore, nurturing children's

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spirituality requires cooperation among parents, who serve as primary educators at home, Sunday School teachers, and the church as a community of faith. Challenges in the digital era, including exposure to social media, materialism, and moral relativism, require teachers to possess a strong theological foundation, relevant pedagogical skills, and the ability to use technology without compromising biblical principles.

Matthew 19:13–15 provides a biblical foundation for children's ministry. In the cultural context of the first century, in which children often held a relatively low social status, Jesus rebuked the disciples for hindering them, welcomed and blessed them, and affirmed that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like them. This passage implies that churches should regard children's ministry as an integral part of congregational life rather than as a supplementary program. Churches are called to provide safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments and to employ creative teaching methods consistent with Jesus' broader teaching practices, including storytelling, parables, and dialogue. To support this mission, churches should invest in Sunday School teachers through ongoing training, contextually relevant teaching materials, and adequate resources.

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