



## An Internalization of Doctrine to Strengthen Christian Identity: Considering a Mosaic Approach

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.226>

### Abstract

The aim of this research was to highlight the importance of internalizing Christian religious doctrine in strengthening Christian identity, due to the declining faith among Indonesian Christian youth, which was reflected in the increasing number of members exiting from the church. Therefore, this research attempted to strengthen the identity of Indonesian Christian youth by developing what is termed the Moses internalization model. Social research methods and hermeneutics were used in order to achieve appropriate results. The results could be used to develop the Moses internalization model in order to teach Christian religious doctrine to young Indonesians in churches and schools, thereby strengthening their level of identity. The paper demonstrates the centrality of the example posed by Moses which serves as an internalization process, which has four stages. The first is doctrinal information, the second stage comprises doctrinal application exercises or training, the third is identity formation, and the fourth stage is the crystallization and strengthening of identity. Moses informed the Israelites through doctrines that God is One and God is God. The people were to fear the Lord and keep all the given statutes and commandments. They were taught to love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The model or framework of Moses for a Christian's identity can be applied to pastoral ministry. This model is thus offered as a support for pastors in the important aspect of forging and internalizing strong Christian identities in their adherents.

**Keywords:** Education, internalization, identity, church, school, Moses.

### Introduction

Christian doctrine is generally introduced in early childhood education, though its impact on students' behavior is very minimal. This was indicated in a survey by the Bilangan Research Center (BRC, 2018), which recorded an insignificant increase in the number of Indonesian Christian youth attending churches. Also, there was a high potential for some to leave church after obtaining their freedom. Could the reasons for this occurrence be the factors outlined by the BRC survey, such as reduced attractiveness of the church? The unchallenging form of worship? High levels of pretense within the church? Or was there a failure in Christian education within the church and Christian schools? Effective Christian religious education in churches and schools may prevent Christian youth from leaving the church.

The research by the Barna Group (Harian Sib.Com, 2021) revealed that young people aged between 18 and 29 left church during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the number may increase in the coming years. Therefore, the group advised pastors to help the younger generation to



reconnect with their faith. This includes fostering personal relationships with the youth, promoting Bible study, and involvement in ministry. However, there are doubts concerning the ability of these suggestions to restore the faith of Indonesian youth.

In the Holy Bible, a similar occurrence was recorded in Judges 2:10, where a generation that lacked the knowledge of God and His deeds was raised after the death of Joshua and his entire generation. This led to inquiries into the reason behind the split in the Israelites' generation, despite having witnessed God's great deeds. In the book of Judges, the phrase "when the judge was dead, the Israelites returned to follow other gods to serve them" was repeated (Judges 2:18-19; 3:11-12; 6:1). The Israelites were firm in their faith and worshipped God while there was a judge. However, they turned away from God and began to worship the Canaan gods, such as Baal and Asherah, each time a judge died. Why did this happen?

Indonesian Christian youth have received Christian education from an early age through Sunday School in church as well as in kindergartens, elementary and middle schools, and high schools. However, there is a significant increase in the number of young Christian between the ages of 18-29 abstaining from church and there is now a greater potential for existing church attendees to leave church.

The decline in faith and church attendance among Indonesian youth has raised a question about how to strengthen the development of Christian values and behaviors within this group. In the Holy Bible, an Israelite generation that lacked knowledge of God arose after the death of Joshua and his generation. A similar event occurred during the time of the Judges when the Israelites easily left God every time an existing judge died. This research aimed to determine the reasons for this regression by attempting to answer several questions. Was this a failure of Christian religious education or an error in its execution? Is Christian religious education taught unable to achieve the doctrine's internalization for students thus causing their identities to sway easily?

## **Research Method**

This research employed the social criticism method proposed by Anderson and Moore, (1992) and the hermeneutical technique. The social criticism method was used to examine the social institutions in Christian religious education. Meanwhile, the hermeneutics technique was applied to find the meaning contained in a range of texts in order to highlight the nature and essence of internalization and identity in the Bible.

## **Internalization of Christian Religious Doctrine**

Internalization means incorporating external teachings or doctrines into oneself in order to facilitate their integration into the individual's identity, rather than existing separately as a form of knowledge that is merely lived. KBBI online defined internalization as an appreciation of teachings or doctrines embodied in attitudes and behavior (Kemdikbud.go.id, 2016). However, this appreciation leaves little room for differences from one's true self. A doctrine can manifest in a person's life and behavior without becoming an integral part of their being because good doctrines can be followed without becoming an identity. For example, Mahatma Gandhi lived and manifested the doctrines of Jesus, but still identified as being a Hindu.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989), internalization is "The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality". This means internalization cannot be defined basically as an embodied realization but must



become an identity or self-identity. It must cover everything, from known facts, as well as internalized and embodied knowledge in one's identity. Therefore, internalization is the appreciation of a doctrine or value that is embodied in one's behavior and blends or becomes their identity. This understanding becomes clear when described as identity (Erikson, 1968). Erikson uses the term 'identity' in a similar way to self-concept, which is a union between personal and social identity. Fearon (1999) distinguished between social and personal identity. However, these phenomena are inseparable because they are united within a person and form a self-concept. This is because identity construction is an inclusive process that internalizes the same values but is also an exclusive process, where other identities are eliminated (Inac, 2013).

The biggest question concerning identity is its existence as the result of creation or invention (Waterman, 1984). Self-identity as a result of creation is most clearly represented in the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre (Sartre, 1966), where humans were described as creatures with no essence. No Daimon (a tutelary divinity or spirit that watches over a person or a place), no "true self" from Greek δαίμων: "god", "godlike", "power", "fate". The self is seen as emerging from "nothingness", and all actions are personal choices from which identity is formed. In contrast, Aristotle argued that each individual "is obligated to know and live in truth to Daimon" (Ibid). This spirit is embodied in two well-known classical Greek commandments, namely "know thyself" and "become what you are". These mandates are an affirmation of personal responsibility and a statement of integrity, which are made as a commitment to living with identity as an invention rather than a creation. To be eudaimon is to be living in a way that is well-favoured by a god (Aristotle, 2013).

In this research, identity was considered a gift and not an invention or creation. It is not created by the individual but is received as a gift by believing in Jesus as the Lord and savior. The Christian identity given by God must be lived and embodied in one's personal life to conform to internal values and not external elements. Conformity is recognized when the individual lives according to the teaching of Jesus, who created that identity.

In order to live in conformity with Jesus, Christian identity must be strengthened by internalizing the doctrines of Jesus. This can be done optimally using the Moses internalization method found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which was given to strengthen the identity of the Israelites as God's people as His nation or *laos* (Nicolaidis, 2010). The Israelites were given a new identity by God as His people. This is documented in the Bible, where God affirmed, "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7).

### **The 'Moses Method'**

According to Exodus 3:13-15, YHWH was still fairly unknown to Moses and the Israelites, believed that there was a covenant between God and Abraham that had continued with Isaac and Jacob as the patriarchs of Israel. Moses and the Israelites were unfamiliar with the Lord's name. However, Moses perceived the knowledge of God's name as important to facilitate an introduction to the Israelites. This led him to ask the question, to which God replied, "I am who I am". The sentence, "I am who I am" contains three important elements, namely 1) He is the only God to whom Israel's loyalty is targeted, 2) God is YHWH, the sovereign Being who made a covenant with Israel, and 3) He is God who has a special relationship with the Israelites (Grisanti, 2012). This name would be subsequently used by Moses to remind the Israelites of God's love. In addition, the people were reminded of the expectations God had of them, which were to obey and love Him.

The next journey of the Israelites in knowing and understanding God was exemplified in the creation of the golden calf as a god (Exodus 32:1-6). The Israelites easily forgot YHWH and Moses, and in just 40 days, they replaced YHWH with a golden calf. The reason was that the Israelites had lived for a long time in Egypt, and had witnessed the people of the land worshipping these gods. As a result, the Egyptians' worship of gods and goddesses had been



internalized by the Israelites. Through this experience, they assumed that God was a physically visible god who could be in their midst during celebrations and rejoicing. After the incident of the golden calf, Moses began to build the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33:7-10). Following this experience, the Israelites began to feel and recognize God's presence through the descending of the pillar of cloud, which stopped at the tent, and bowed down to worship YHWH from their tents. However, their knowledge of YHWH was minimal, causing Moses to ask for directions, saying, "Teach me your ways" (Exodus 33:13).

The Bible shows that YHWH passed down His laws through two stone tablets at Mount Sinai. Regulations were formulated concerning inter alia the Sabbath, the establishment and construction of the tabernacle, the making of the Ark of the Covenant, the bread of the Presence, jars, and anointing oil, alongside the building of the altar. Gradually, rules were added to the manner through which Israelites were to worship God. Despite this preparation, they failed to have a firm identity as God's people or as the *laos tou Theou*. In the Old Testament, the '*Laos tou Theou*' were the Israelites and people from other nations – *ethne*, who aligned themselves with the true God of Israel. Holy Scriptures that YHWH set aside the nation of Israel as his beloved people (Nicolaidis, 2010). We also read "And the Lord has chosen thee this day that thou shouldst be to him a peculiar people, as he said, to keep his commands, and that thou shouldst be above all nations, as he has made thee renowned and a boast, and glorious, that thou shouldst be a holy people to the Lord thy God, as he has spoken" (Deuteronomy 26:18–19).

In order to strengthen their identity as God's people, Moses entreated the Israelites to continue following YHWH forever. According to contemporary scholarship, this call (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) can be called an internalization process, which has four stages. The first is doctrinal information, the second stage is the doctrinal application exercises or training, the third is identity formation, and the fourth stage is the crystallization and strengthening of identity. Moses informed the Israelites through doctrines that God is One and God is God. The people were to fear the Lord and keep all the given statutes and commandments. They must love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). This doctrinal information was very important, considering Israel was a nation that was formed in the land of Egypt. At this stage of doctrinal information, the Israelites still lacked knowledge of God, which was highlighted by Moses' delay in descending from Mount Horeb. They immediately asked Aaron to make a god that would lead them, and a golden calf was created (Exodus 32:22-24). This shows that God and His doctrines were foreign to the people and were yet to be internalized by them.

There are two important doctrines from Moses, namely loving and fearing the Lord God (Deuteronomy 6:13). The foremost doctrine is to love the Lord God, and must be done with all of the heart, soul, and strength. According to Timo Veijola in McDonald (2017), the commandment of love in Deuteronomy 6:5 is an interpolation into the Shema, as the same vocabulary of the final chapters of the Bible verse was used. However, this is not an interpolation because the main emphasis of Moses' doctrine was to prevent the Israelites from worshipping the other gods. The allegiance to gods from the surrounding nations angers God and will lead to their destruction from the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 6:15). Therefore, Moses emphasized the doctrine of loving the Lord God to the Israelites, as it was the best way to avoid falling into the destruction.

The concept of love in Deuteronomy is similar to the ancient covenant in the Near East and can be described as loyalty (similar to political loyalty) or obedience (Arnold, 2011). It was also depicted in Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:8; 10:15, which expressed God's love for the forefathers of Israel. This love was interpreted as a covenant, which led to the deliverance of the Israelites from the land of Egypt. Another illustration was the friendship, loyalty, love, and covenant between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1). This love, which comprises loyalty, obedience, and covenant, was the concept Moses wished to teach the Israelites in relation to the Lord God. Loving God was the main principle in building the relationship with





Israel. In addition, the commandments given by God to the Israelites through Moses were a means of expressing their love for God (Craigie, 1975). Obeying and keeping God's commandments as laws was a demonstration of their love for YHWH.

Supposing the commandments were adhered to without being based on the love of God, then the commandments still belonged to God and not the Israelites, as they remained compliant to their consciousness. Obedience as a result of love was different from being commanded. This is because obedience based on love involves self-awareness while conforming to orders can exist outside of self-awareness. For instance, robots follow commands from their programmers and possess no self-awareness. These machines are unaware of their individuality and move according to the commands of the programmer.

The exclusive loving relationship with God, who pledged the promised land to the Israelites, must be maintained by internalizing the concept of love. Successful internalization means the individual's heart and intentions will continue to be oriented to YHWH only. In order to achieve this, training was performed as the second stage to ensure the doctrines were applied in the lives of the Israelites (doctrinal application exercises).

The training stage was important because education is not a preparation for a distant period, called adulthood, but for the present (Chazan, 2016). This stage ensure the Israelites became active partners and played significant roles in the formation of knowledge, namely the concepts of the love and fear of God. The concept of fear (yr) of God can have two meanings (Arnold, 2011), namely terror (Deuteronomy 1:29; 5:5) and obedience, as in Deuteronomy 13:12-18; 17:13; 21:21. The nuances of respectful obedience written as in Deuteronomy 13:18 have been defined as the integrity of the Israelites. Integrity is rooted in a responsive knowledge of God, where life's potential can be actualized.

The third stage was identity formation, where the doctrine became their identity and was no longer external. The inability to imbibe the doctrine may cause alienation, as the individual's consciousness and desires will be purportedly controlled by God rather than being a personal decision. This will cause Christian doctrine to become a heavy burden, as obedience is imperative and only motivated by orders.

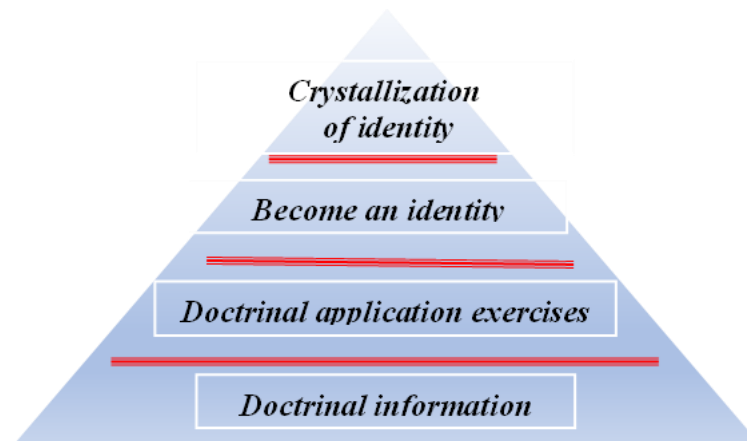
However, embracing the doctrine as an identity will lead the individual to possess an indicative awareness as a Christian. The realization of being a follower of Christ will clarify one's identity and inspire behavior according to this identity. This will stimulate feelings of pain or discomfort when performing unsuitable acts and happiness or joy when involved in activities that conform with the Christian identity (Aristotle's formulation of ethics). This is because there is no control by a will other than a personal decision, which forces believers to act against their choice. Aristotelian Ethics revolved around what makes a virtuous character (*ethikē aretē*) conceivable, which is in turn required if happiness is to be attained. He describes an order of essential steps to achieve this: First, righteous actions, mainly done under the encouragement of teachers, allows for the needed development of the right habits (Crisp, 2000; Reeves, 2014).

The fourth stage is identity strengthening or crystallization. A doctrine that has become a person's identity must be strengthened continuously. This is necessary considering the challenges faced by the Israelites, namely comfort (Deuteronomy 6:10-13). The comfort of God's presence lulled these people into forgetting God. As a result, they were asked by God to avoid following other gods from the surrounding nations (Deuteronomy 6:14). The method of identity strengthening used was documented in Deuteronomy 6:6-9. This involved repeating the teachings during all forms of activity and at any place the Israelites were. This thinking was embraced and termed "gates". The gate is the centre of all activities, such as buying and selling, as well as announcing important decisions (Grisanti, 2012). This means identity strengthening was to be repeated during all activities of the Israelites to ensure their

status as God's people was apparent. Therefore, surrounding nations witnessed the presence of YHWH among His people in Israel.

The result of the internalization by the Israelites was achieving righteousness, living in good conditions, and existing in peace (Deuteronomy 6:24-25). Also, the Israelites gained a land flowing with milk and honey and enjoyed long lives (Deuteronomy 6:2-3). These conditions were ideal because the Israelites, as God's people, were to become His representatives all over the earth. This necessitated unity with God's values that were to be emitted through their identity. Consequently, the initial goal of human creation would be fulfilled because Adam and Eve were created to be representatives of God in the universe. This was the reason other creatures were subjugated under men, who were given glory and honour, which is marked by the image and likeness of God (Psalm 8:3-8). As God's representatives in the universe, the lives of men must radiate His presence. Although Adam and Eve failed, the plans of God prevailed through the choosing of Israel as His people and representatives on earth. God made preparations in that direction through the forefathers of Israel until Moses saw the need to internalize the doctrine in the Israelites. This process of internalization was successful in the lives of Moses and his successor Joshua. However, the process of internalizing the doctrine subsequently deteriorated, leading to the arising of a generation that was ignorant of God after Joshua (Judges 2:10).

The Israelites also failed to be representatives on earth, but God's plan was successful. God prepared a way through His church, where Christ is the head. Jesus ensured the doctrine was internalized by the disciples during His lifetime on earth. The internalization was successful, based on the clear identity of the disciples as demonstrated in their lives. After the time of the disciples, there was another decline in the identity of Christians. This is visible from the schism in the ancient churches, as documented in the first letter to the Corinthians. This was triggered by the absence of internalized doctrine in the Corinthian congregation, thereby causing an absence of Christian identity in the region. As a result, they became vulnerable to worldly identity, which then triggered a series of disputes in the congregation.



**Figure 1.** Moses Internalization Model Chart

## Analysis

The first-grade elementary book for Christian Religious Education by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Bessie & Robinson, 2017) provides 12 teaching materials about self, body, family, nature, helping friends, being grateful for friends and teachers, and caring for God's creation. The content is informative and knowledgeable and encompasses an internalization of doctrine theme through the act of singing and drawing. However, the



formation of the identity stage is not included, limiting the research to crystallizing the material understanding. The third-grade elementary book for Christian Religious Education by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Napitupulu & Hematang, 2015) provides 14 teaching materials. These include topics about God's presence in the universe and various natural phenomena, learning to love like God, maintaining equality in the presence of God despite differences, and being friendly with everyone. The book is informative and knowledgeable and contains an internalization of doctrine portion. This includes writing stories according to the material given, noting observations of biblical texts, documenting opinions, and singing. However, the formation of the identity stage is not attained, as the book is limited to crystallizing material understanding.

Christian Religious Education Junior High School book for seventh grade by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Non-Serrano, 2017) provides 14 teaching materials about school and family as a place to instill discipline, social solidarity in a plural society, humility, Christian values, and the beauty of God's forgiveness. The internalization of doctrine exists through activities examining students' understanding of the presented material, reading tasks, Bible text research assignments according to the material being taught, songs, documenting impressions of the songs, and playing games to survive temptation. However, the material failed to achieve identity formation and only crystallizes material understanding.

For the eleventh grade, the Christian Religious Education Senior High School book curated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Sumiyatiningsih & Stephanus, 2014) provides 14 teaching materials. They are about God as the guide for family life, family as the main center of education, meaningful relationships between family and school, growing as God's family, family as a mini church, the impact of modernization on family, and Christian family as a blessing to the environment. Internalization of doctrine was achieved by listening to soap opera stories, singing, commenting, discussing with friends, describing God's role in the family, memorizing Bible verses, and filling in tables about examples of the role of the family in socialization and education.

All forms of internalization seem to be only intended to crystallize material understanding and not the stage of identity formation. The examination of Christian religious education textbooks mentioned above signified the need for changes. The changes should involve the use of the Moses pattern or method because this form of internalization of doctrine attains the level of identity strengthening. This will result in students with a Christian identity that becomes stronger every time Christian doctrine is accepted. This means students will obtain 12 times the confirmation of Christian identity by learning the doctrine from the elementary to the high school. This will ensure a strengthening or crystallization of students' identities as Christians.

Internalization using the Moses method can be applied in Christian religious education settings. First, the doctrinal information stage was performed by teaching the concepts of God, the future (eschatology), salvation, and man. After the information about these concepts is sufficient for students' understanding, training should be conducted concerning these concepts (doctrinal application exercises). Training on the application of these concepts should be performed continuously in school and at home in order to achieve positive identity formation. Identity can be concluded as formed when the identity of students becomes the basis for their life and relationships. This means identity has been understood as a quality that must be nurtured, supported, and appreciated (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Therefore, the decision to act, behave, and think must be based on one's identity as a true Christian in word and deed.



## Conclusion

Learning from Moses' internalization model for strengthening the identity of the Israelites as God's people can be used to answer the challenge of the increasing number of young Indonesians who are withdrawing from church. Positive identities will certainly encourage children and other young people to have greater resilience so that they will be able to adapt to new situations or circumstances which may arise and make them feel challenged. This will in turn permit them to continue to learn more and operate well in church settings in terms of adhering to God's will. This will ensure a higher tendency to remain in church as well as embody and reflect God's presence. All people have a need to know that their identity in Jesus Christ can affect the way they think and also how they tend to behave. Where one does not have identity, one does not know themselves in Christ, and this can adversely affect one's thoughts and result in negative behaviours. Paul in Galatians 4: 1-7 reminded the Galatians that they were no longer slaves, but in reality sons in Christ Jesus. Psalm 139:14 advises us that we are specially made by the Creator and that this gives one greater confidence, a sense of self-esteem, and far greater awareness. If we have an identity in Christ then we accept His gift of eternal life through our faith in Him as our Lord. After the formation of identity, continuous reinforcement is necessary. Strengthening of identity involves the internalization of Christian values, which are considered to be the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit as Christian values consists of nine dimensions, which can strengthen Christian identity. For example, the value of love can strengthen a believer's identity in terms of love. This training in the value of love can be done through various forms of appearance (phenomena) by training one to love oneself, others, and God. The consistent and persistent repetition of this treatment will ensure the crystallization of the identity of believers as Christians. Ephesians 2:10 informs us: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" and in Ephesians 4:13 we read "...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ". People should constantly strive to strengthen their Christian identity.

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### **Acknowledgment**

#### Competing interests

The authors declare that no financial or personal relationships may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this research.

### **Author's Contributions**

All authors contributed equally to this work.

### **Ethical Consideration**

This research followed all ethical standards without direct contact with human subjects.



### Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this research as no new data were created or analysed.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this research are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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