




# Religious-social leadership values and principals' morality in Christian school



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## Dates:

Received: 02 July 2024

Accepted: 07 Oct. 2024

Published: 13 Dec. 2024

## How to cite this article:

Arjanto, P., Wahed, A., Jaya, H.N., Safitri, A., Ariefianto, L. & Sartika, R.P., 2024, 'Religious-social leadership values and principals' morality in Christian school', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80(1), a10010. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.10010>

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Leaders' morality in the context of principals in Christian school is of great significance in the education environment. However, there are gaps between religious insights, western education and principal's leadership in Christian schools in Indonesia. Anthropological, social, cultural and other differences can pose hindrances to the effective implementation of external ideas. Therefore, this research emphasises the importance of embracing moral religious leadership values from local cultural heritage that are appropriate to the Indonesian context. *Tonaas* and *Walian* leadership in Minahasa are promising alternatives that can contribute to the discourse on principals' morality in Christian school. This research adopts a descriptive qualitative methodology, critical analysis and argumentation to explore the intersection of moral leadership, local cultural heritage and educational leadership in Christian schools in Indonesia. As a result, the morality values of *Tonaas* and *Walian* religious leaders in Minahasa demonstrate the significance of responsibility towards the Christian school environment.

**Contribution:** The results of this study contribute to the conversation about morality among leaders in the Christian school environment. Specifically, the religious leadership of *Tonaas* and *Walian* in Minahasa provides valuable local insights that are relevant to the context of education and principals in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** religion; principal; leadership; morality; Minahasa; Christian's school.

## Introduction

The decline in the quality of the educational environment can be significantly attributed to the demoralisation of leadership among principals. The role of principals in maintaining high moral standards in Christian educational institutions cannot be overstated, because they play a vital role in establishing a culture of morality within schools. A study conducted by Saaduddin et al. (2019) showed that the leadership of principals has a significant impact on the management of morality in schools. In addition, Želvys et al. (2019) found that this concept is linked to the organisational climate and effectiveness of schools. According to Anastasiou and Papakonstantinou (2015), principals foster a work environment that promotes teamwork, teacher empowerment, performance improvement and collaboration with the community. The morality of principals is essential for creating effective Christian schools that cover organisational development, school environment and educational programmes, as observed by Valentine and Bowman (1991). Moreover, principals can enhance teaching and learning by affecting teacher motivation, commitment and working conditions, as found by Leithwood et al. (2008). Parlar et al. (2022) suggest that principals' leadership indirectly affects teacher commitment, while Özgenel (2022) found that the concept is associated with teacher job satisfaction. Imron et al. (2021, 2019) found that it affects the success of the educational process by creating policies consistent with school objectives. Furthermore, Sunandar et al. (2022) highlighted that principals manage the school environment to provide students with a comfortable learning experience. Given the significant influence on various dimensions of schools, it is crucial for educational institutions, specifically schools, to have morally sound principals.

Principals' morality is an essential aspect of effective Christian's school leadership. Furthermore, it serves as a preventive measure against demoralisation in the school environment and is closely related to leadership qualities. Leaders who exhibit immoral behaviour tend to have low levels of conscientiousness, high levels of neuroticism and elevated levels of narcissism. These leaders are often focussed on acquiring power and dominance and may be more prone to exploiting others to achieve their goals (Yukl & Gardner 2020:255). Creating effective schools requires visionary principals who communicate well, possess good personalities, serve as role models, demonstrate responsibility, exhibit passion, maintain discipline, display high levels of commitment and possess intelligence (Arjanto 2022). Principals with high integrity result in good teachers' performance,

staffs' performance, school infrastructure, school finance, new student enrolment, school culture, and environment, and students' achievement (Bafadal et al., 2020). Preparing strong leaders to thrive in the future requires high morality values (Burhanuddin 2017). This is important in the current learning environment, where students need to explore religious morals to develop a deeper understanding of ethical principles (Atmoko et al. 2022).

It is imperative to foster and reinforce the morality values of Christian school principals. However, the social and psychological context of communities and education in Indonesia differs significantly from the perspectives on leadership in religion and education in the West. In Indonesia, there is a pressing concern regarding morality, particularly children sexual abuse and corruption. For instance, the issue of sexual harassment by a school principal against a female student has gained significant attention (Fua 2017). Sexual abuse by school principals is a matter of grave concern, as highlighted by Riqar Manaba, the Chairman of the SMAN 9 Kendari Alumni Association, who stated, 'We must not allow morally questionable principals to lead our juniors' (CNN-Indonesia 2020). In another instance, a principal was apprehended by local authorities for drug use (Kompas-TV 2021), which manifests as uncontrolled lust. The unrestrained and immoderate sexual urges have the potential to cause harm not only to oneself but also to others (Kretzschmar 2020). In addition, the case of a school principal and teacher being apprehended for corruption related to the management of school operational assistance funds (BOS) provided by the government (Petrus 2021) indicates greed, where individuals prioritise money over ethical values (Kretzschmar 2020). Mahmudin in Puspita (2018) stated that these issues result from decay of morality in the education system. According to Bafadal (2022), the solution to this problem is that 'student and teacher moralities are related, while teacher and principal moralities are related'. Therefore, it is crucial to prepare teachers, who are prospective principals, to become morality leaders in schools.

The implementation of certain religious and morality values may present challenges for Christian school principals in Indonesia, given the diverse demographic in which individuals follow different religions. Therefore, exploring leaders' morality values through the lens of local culture is a viable alternative. Minahasa, one of the sub-ethnic groups in Indonesia, has a leadership system presenting morality values for social life that principals can adopt as school leaders.

Despite previous research on leadership in Minahasa, small attention has been given to the morality values of school principals in this context (Masoko et al., 2021; Rondonuwu & Pati 2021; Koyongian 2020; Sasue, Nelwan & Saerah 2021; Rumbay, Hutagalung & Sagala 2023). This research explores the leaders' morality values of Minahasa culture, from the perspectives of *Tonaas* (social leader) and *Walian* (spiritual leader) to develop school principals' morality. The morality values of the religious-social leaders offer a promising alternative for developing principals' morality. These values

stem from local indigenous traditions and are more suitable for the Indonesian context of spirituality, nationality, humanism, and education than the Western thought. Accordingly, this study aims to address the research question: what morality values can be learned from Minahasa leaders and applied to the development of principals' morality?

## Research methods and design

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative methodology, integrating critical analysis and argumentation to explore the intersection of moral leadership, local cultural heritage and educational leadership in Christian schools in Indonesia. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, focussing on the leadership practices of *Tonaas* and *Walian* leaders in Minahasa. The study critically examines how these indigenous leadership models can be adapted to enhance the moral responsibilities of principals in Christian schools. Data were thematically analysed to identify key values and practices that can bridge the gaps between religious insights, Western educational principles and the unique cultural context of Indonesia. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how local moral frameworks can inform and improve leadership in Christian educational settings.

## Discussion

### Morality through the lens of principals' leadership in Christian school

Explaining morality is complex, as different views and conflicting conceptions have emerged over the centuries. To understand the concept of morality, it is necessary to focus on normative theories that present different ethical frameworks based on principles to guide decisions about what should or should not be accomplished. Morality can be seen as a social control mechanism determining actions and choices in dilemmas, where individuals should decide whether to act or refrain from acting (Falikowski 1990).

Morality is an intricate concept because it has been subject to divergent perspectives and conflicting ideas historically. To comprehend the concept, it is essential to focus on normative theories that present ethical frameworks based on principles to guide decisions to be accomplished. Morality can be viewed as a mechanism of social control that determines actions and choices in dilemmas, where individuals must decide whether to act or refrain from acting. Morality arguments deal with fundamental issues such as freedom, equality, justice, goodness, human dignity, self-realisation, happiness, respect for others, benevolence and self-interest. It is considered to be an inherent biological attribute that enables humans to make moral judgements. Furthermore, it would be impossible to differentiate between good and bad actions without morality sense. However, some philosophers argued that morality does not come from biology but from cultural or religious traditions, giving rise to a set of norms controlling behaviours. Morality values vary from each

culture and are not biologically predetermined. Some philosophers over the centuries, such as Aristotle, believed that humans possess a natural morality sense because they are homo sapiens and homo moralis (Ayala 2012:169).

Morality is defined as 'the ability to make decisions and act appropriately' (Kohlberg 1964). This definition highlights that morality competence is only when people are confronted with tasks to make decisions and judgements. This should be assessed based on their morality standards derived from internal principles. Kohlberg's definition clarified that the competence is a tangible trait observed in people's behaviour, reflecting the ability to act appropriately according to morality judgements. Kohlberg (1971) viewed morality as an aspect of justice and reasoned deliberation, while Gilligan (1982) stated that the concept is a caring form. Turiel (1983) codified this approach into a widely cited definition of the morality domain as 'prescriptive judgments about justice, rights, and well-being relating to how people should relate to one another'. Any value not related to 'justice, rights, and well-being' is considered immoral (Turiel et al., 1991). Definitions of morality in philosophy also emphasise rules or ethical codes (Gert 2010). One possible framework for expanding the domain is values research, which posits morals as 'the principles guiding the life of an individual or group' (Schwartz 2007). Leaders have a significant responsibility to shape the judgement, which is the essence of leadership (Spector 2019). From a scientific perspective, Kohlberg (1964, 1984) constituted a milestone in the psychological analysis of morality as morality reasoning was considered a cognitive process that may exist even without any emotions. However, findings in evolutionary psychology (Pinker 1997; Trivers 1971) and primatology (Flack & de Waal 2000) suggested that emotions play a key role in the origin of human morality.

In the broadest terms, morality is a distinctively human phenomenon, often involving conflicting choices based on essential norms and obligations significantly affecting human interests. Actions without bearing on human lives, or including normative conflicts, are neither freely nor intentionally selected outside the morality domain.

According to Bafadal et al. (2021), morality leadership can be defined as the consistent behaviour of leaders that aligns with their personal and organisational values, in coherence with ethical systems. Simmie and Sheehan (2022) suggested that it can also be considered a way of life and a commitment to serving the best interests of children. A strong morality leader can unite their followers around specific teachings and values, promoting them to remain focussed on positive goals and supporting one another, as stated by Beauchamp et al. (2021). Leaders who embody morality leadership make decisions based on prevailing principles rather than personal inclinations or situational factors. They consider the welfare and interests of all affected individuals by their choices, including themselves, and rely on complete and accurate information (Greenfield Jr., 2004). Gu et al. (2020) pointed out that morality leadership is grounded in underlying morality values to influence team members, as noted by Bao and Li (2019).

According to Guo et al. (2018) and Maqsoom et al. (2022), promoting workplace virtue is a key aspect of morality leadership, which can create a healthy work environment, motivate team members and enhance creativity. To apply principals' morality, the Core Competencies of Christian Elementary School Teacher Personality can be used, which include presenting oneself as honest, noble and a role model, being a stable, mature, wise and authoritative figure, demonstrating work ethic, responsibility, pride and self-confidence, as well as upholding ethical standards for teaching, as outlined by Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia (2007). The competence dimensions further strengthen this framework by promoting a culture of noble character, demonstrating leadership integrity, fostering a strong desire for self-development, being open in performing main tasks, controlling oneself when dealing with work problems, as well as possessing talent and interest in educational leadership (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia. (2007).

### Western tradition and religion through the lens of leadership

The context of Western knowledge differs from Indonesia, with variations in demographics, anthropology and culture. Therefore, a different approach is needed to ensure that principals' morality aligns with the local context. Indonesian context is diverse in terms of ethnicities, languages, dialects and backgrounds, whereas most Western nations have rather homogeneous environments. It is important to adopt a holistic and comprehensive approach designed to the specific needs of the local context. Anthropologically, there is a gap between the Western and Indonesian contexts. For instance, Americans prioritise honesty over dishonesty, while Asians tend to prioritise promoting advice over telling the truth to avoid potentially hurting others. Americans may rest on a chair at the airport because self-esteem is essential, while Asians may sleep on the floor for comfort. Leaders with Western characteristics may interact with subordinates directly without considering the psychological impact of their words. Furthermore, principals with Western characters may be honest without considering the psychological effects of their words on teachers or students. Discussing issues of sexual misconduct or corruption in schools openly may potentially reduce comfort in the work environment.

In contrast, the concept of religion may not be universally applicable because of the diverse beliefs of principals and the scope of their work. Rumbay et al. (2022b) proposed Pauline's leadership from a Christian perspective to bridge and align values with local concepts. This idea may not be embraced by principals of other religions. There are Islamic perspectives on leadership based on Muhammad SAW (Tyas 2019; Umam 2018; Sulaiman 2017), but these may not be relevant for non-Muslim principals. Therefore, local knowledge of leaders' morality provides a valuable discussion point that transcends demographical, anthropological, religious, and cultural gaps. Leaders' morality rooted in local cultural insights can apply

to all groups, regardless of religious background. It is crucial to develop local leaders' morality identity awareness to facilitate its adoption. Other sources, such as Western knowledge and religion, offer less potential for scientific development and implementation in schools than local culture-based leadership ethics for school administrators.

### **Tonaas and Walian: The contribution of Minahasa religious-social leaders' values to principals' morality**

Minahasa tradition recognises the terms *Tonaas* and *Walian*. *Tonaas* can be compared to magical individuals with certain abilities. Renwarin (2006:361) explained that this title is taken from the word *tou*, meaning person, and *nahas*, or *ta'as* referring to the palm fruit, with a tough and soft exterior and interior. This definition suggests that *Tonaas* possess strength, prowess, ability and experience in their field of expertise. Furthermore, it has been associated with the hardwood used to build houses in Minahasa, such as the *Magnolia vrieseana*, known for its strength and durability.

According to Sual (2022), *Tonaas* are responsible for performing political, social and economic functions. They play a crucial role in ensuring political continuity within community groups while promoting social and economic justice by opening new fields for planting. Fairness should be maintained by not taking advantage of themselves and ensuring that the entire community benefits equally from open agricultural land. Therefore, Sual stressed that *Tonaas* embody individuals' morality ability, and community leaders can be selected or appointed. Pinontoan (2022) suggested that *Tonaas* are more of a title than a position within the community structure. Individuals with expertise in hunting animals in the forest [*Panumaan*], farming [*Mangundang*], astrological insight, forest work [*Manalun*], or bird sound detection [*Manalingga*] can be classified as *Tonaas*.

Karundeng and Sual (2022) identified several characteristics necessary to become a *Tonaas*. Firstly, one should possess wisdom or *ngaasan*, interpreted as 'brainy', in association with the concept of *Tonaas*. Therefore, individuals can become a *Tonaas* when they possess the knowledge and wisdom to lead specific activities within the community. Wisdom, as understood in the Minahasa community, is distinct from other interpretations. It differentiates between rights and wrongs in close proximity to *Tonaas'* morality principles. To maintain their innate magic and gain recognition from the community, various taboos should be upheld. Karundeng (2022) recounted a story in which a *Tonaas* disregarded the *foso* [taboo] against engaging in relationships with a non-legal partner according to custom, resulting in losing their magic and being shunned by the community.

Secondly, *Tonaas* should possess the attribute of strength or *tumawai*, a term originating from the wood centre that implies toughness and resilience. It should be as sturdy as a piece of wood while exhibiting sensitivity or *niaten* in morality matters frequently encountered. They should be aware of the challenges of being morally upright to aid the community effectively.

Lastly, *Tonaas* should possess magic or *mawayi*, the capability to defend and maintain security. They can organise village operations such as opening new plantation land by leading several *taranak*, ensuring that the land is appropriately prepared for cultivation. Land clearance, soil cultivation, and seedling planting groups would receive a portion of the workforce. During harvest, *Tonaas'* expertise ensure an abundant harvest, which is vital for the next planting season. Additionally, they would lead the hunting of wild animals for sustenance, utilising their ability to decipher astrological signs and interpret bird sounds. *Tonaas* would coordinate with others and establish communal cooperation to achieve a common goal. During the hunt, consultation with *Ukung Tua* or the *Walak* chief and the participation of village elders with hunting experience who are no longer leaders are required.

The leadership of *Tonaas* is not merely a socio-political position, but rather it entails being a morally upright leader. In certain instances, *Tonaas* earn the trust of the *taranak* and hold official public positions because of their abilities and integrity, but not a mandatory requirement. The title is a community label that an individual carries indefinitely unless norms related to morality are violated. The community can forcibly demote or withdraw *Tonaas* from social activities that pertain to their expertise when violation occurs.

However, another interesting leadership perspective is the ability to lead, organise and strive for communal work. *Tonaas* are the foundation of the community in performing a task, but the execution will be carried out collaboratively. For instance, they will collaborate with the *Ukung Tua* and *Walian* in agriculture to perform ceremonies and land clearance.

*Walian* are religious leaders who deal with matters related to spirituality, religion and health. To become *Walian*, one should exhibit signs from an early age recognised by the local community. Furthermore, when an individual is identified as possessing the qualities, the elders give particular instructions to prevent the prospective *Walian* from breaking village rules and customs. The general characteristics include the ability to heal the sick, being born at odd hours, having unique hand lines and possessing certain powers such as flying in trees and not being injured when struck by sharp objects (Sual 2022). Pinontoan (2022) noticed that *Walian* are categorised as shaman, although the term has a negative connotation from a secular perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to understand its concept from a cultural perspective. In the context of shamanism, *Walian* can be interpreted as a priest or imam leading traditional rituals, which should maintain their morality as a traditional priest, be honest and fair, refrain from seeking personal gain and maintain dignity as a religious leader.

*Tonaas* and *Walian* collaborate in certain activities by performing tasks together. These individuals, bound by social and religious obligations, gather with the community to carry out communal activities. *Walian* perform prayers and rituals before beginning agricultural fields to seek God's blessings for a fertile and successful harvest. Wowor (2022) stated that a *Walian* prepares a container and offers prayers to

invite seeds from the sky to fill the designated area. Additionally, *Tonaas*, with astrological expertise, guide on the appropriate time for planting and harvesting. Community mobilisation is usually led by the *Ukung Tua* or *Walak* chief, and the Minahasa community's chain of work involves leaders and individuals working collaboratively in the public space. Therefore, management transitions from individual to collective efforts.

The model of harmoniously integrated communal work is exemplified in the duties of a *Walian*. Sual (2022) stated that a companion assists the activities of a *Walian*, and this individual is known as *Kasule* in the Minahasa community. The *Kasule* is responsible for coordinating the rituals to ensure their smooth execution. They make offerings by taking threads and betel nut, prepare *umper*, slaughter sacrificial animals, pray for the sick, read animal signs and perform other ritual tasks. This demonstrates the interaction and integration between leaders and the working class in the community, for effective social and field coordination. Meanwhile, *Tonaas*, *Walian*, *Kasule*, *Ukung Tua*, *Walak* chief, *Pakasaan* chief, and others hold social positions that entail leadership functions based on their expertise.

In situations where *Tonaas* and *Walian* engage in morality transgressions, their magical abilities and leadership roles are rescinded and may face expulsion from the community group. This is because they are no longer deemed fit to hold the mandate as leaders. Specifically, the leadership system in Minahasa emphasises morality as a crucial factor in choosing a leader. In short, the *Tonaas* and *Walian* are key figures in Minahasa culture, with distinct roles. The *Tonaas* is a secular leader focussed on protecting and leading the community in cultural and strategic matters, while the *Walian* is a spiritual leader responsible for guiding the community in religious practices and maintaining spiritual well-being.

In respect to the leadership of a school principal, the appointed individual must possess strong ethical values and uphold them while fulfilling their responsibilities. The concept of local values in Minahasa has contributed to the idea that leaders' morality is a key criterion for the appointment of *Tonaas* and *Walian*. It is essential for leaders to possess good morality, as they bear a direct responsibility to the community. Morality attitude is not only focussed on leaders but is also extended to the community. In local perspective, morality relates to ethics, dignity and politeness of the people. There is a consensus among the community that any violation to the morality has consequences. Most of the punishment relates to isolate the individual who went against the moral law. Therefore, some traditional lessons were implemented through maengket dance, tetengkoren and bamboo music to teach and remind the people about morality (Manopo, Mamonto & Mamesah 2022). Besides, the nature of morality is deeply embedded in the religious system of the Minahasans, shaping their values, cultural practices, and guiding principles for community life. Most of rituals and sacraments perform morality as a high life standard (Rumbay, Hartono & Siahaya 2022c; Rumbay et al. 2022a; Rumbay 2021). With this in mind, leaders in Minahasa

know the moral system that operated traditionally in Minahasa. The ethical values based on political, social, economic and religious systems exclusively accentuate morality.

Furthermore, leaders are directly accountable to the environment, and their authority is in the hands of the community. In the modern organisational system, school is directly connected to the central government under the Ministry of Education and Culture, which often creates a disconnect between the school principal and the community. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a principal leadership model that is morally responsible and directly connected to the community around the school. The Minahasa leadership values offer a model where morality value is the responsibility of the community. This improves the school principals' morality control and accountability. Sexual misconduct and corruption can be minimised through direct supervision from the community. Therefore, a school principal should not only be morally responsible to government leaders but also have a social responsibility to the community within the school environment.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlighted the importance of the traditional leadership values of Minahasa embodied by *Tonaas* and *Walian*, in developing morality leadership among Christian school principals. Leadership concepts rooted in local culture are more likely to be effective in Indonesian education system given the contextual differences between Indonesia and the West. The Minahasa tradition of direct community oversight of leaders' morality conduct is an alternative approach explored in the context of school principals' morality behaviour. Educational administrators can foster a greater sense of morality obligation towards their communities, which can reduce unethical behaviours such as corruption and sexual impropriety by using these indigenous leadership values. Therefore, the incorporation of indigenous principles into school leadership can foster a more accountable and ethical educational system.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Charstar Arstilo Rumbay and Brenda Yeyen Abuno who support the technical matter such as reference tools and editing the language and English grammar.

## Competing interests

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

## Authors' contributions

P.A. contributed to conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation and writing – original draft. A.W. contributed to visualisation, administration, software and

validation. H.N.J. and A.S. were involved in data curation, resources, review and supervision. L.A. and R.P.S. contributed to reviewing, editing and supervising.

## Ethical considerations

The article is a part of research involving Christian school principal participations. In Indonesia, their age is considered to be adulthood, therefore neither their parents nor a legal guardian's permission is required. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study.

## Funding information

This research receives specific grant from Education Financing Service Center (Pusat Layanan Pembiayaan Pendidikan - PUSLAPDIK) and the Education Fund Management Institute (Lembaga Pengelolaan Dana Pendidikan - LPDP) Republik Indonesia who supported the funding in this project.

## Data availability

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

## Disclaimer

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