

## Social Responsibility in Christian Education: Matthew 25:40 as a Moral Mandate (A Case Study at SMPN Satu Atap 1 Miri Manasa)

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores social responsibility in Christian education as a moral mandate grounded in Matthew 25:40 through a qualitative case study at SMPN Satu Atap 1 Miri Manasa-Gunung Mas. In the context of social vulnerability and moral challenges faced by adolescents, Christian Religious Education (CRE) is called to shape not only spiritual understanding but also concrete social engagement. This research involved 47 Christian students and 11 Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher. Using a qualitative descriptive design that integrates a Simple Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews, the study examines how social responsibility is theologically understood, pedagogically implemented, and personally internalized by students. The SLR provided a biblical-theological and pedagogical framework on Matthew 25:40 and social responsibility, while empirical data were gathered through interviews with teachers and students, supported by classroom and school observations. The findings reveal that social responsibility is perceived as service to Christ expressed through empathy, care for the vulnerable, fairness, and mutual support. Teacher modeling emerges as the most influential factor in student internalization of social responsibility. Experiential learning, collaborative classroom practices, and simple service activities enable students to embody biblical values in daily life. Despite structural limitations and external challenges, students show growing moral awareness and willingness to serve others. The study concludes that Matthew 25:40 functions effectively as a Christ-centered moral framework for Christian education when integrated with consistent pedagogical modeling and school culture. It recommends that Christian education in public schools strengthen service-based learning and holistic teacher formation to sustain authentic social responsibility.*

**Keywords:** *Social Responsibility, Christian Religious Education, Moral Mandate*

### INTRODUCTION

Christian education is not only concerned with nurturing personal faith but also with forming social responsibility as an essential expression of discipleship. In contemporary educational contexts marked by social inequality, moral fragmentation, and growing individualism, the need to cultivate social sensitivity among students has become

increasingly urgent. Within Christian pedagogy, social responsibility is not merely a civic virtue but a theological mandate rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. One of the most powerful biblical foundations for this mandate is found in Matthew 25:40, where Jesus declares, *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”* This verse positions social action not as an optional moral add-on, but as a direct expression of faith in Christ (Wright, 2012; Osborne, 2010). At the junior high school level, students are in a critical developmental phase characterized by heightened moral awareness, expanding social relationships, and a growing capacity for ethical reasoning. This stage provides a strategic opportunity for Christian Religious Education (CRE) to shape students’ social conscience and sense of responsibility toward others. However, effective formation of social responsibility requires more than doctrinal instruction; it demands pedagogical strategies that integrate biblical values with lived social practice. Teachers therefore play a decisive role as moral agents and facilitators of transformative learning who model compassion, justice, and service in their daily interactions (Groome, 2011; Knight, 2006).

The context of SMPN Satu Atap 1 Miri Manasa in Gunung Mas presents a unique setting for examining the intersection between Christian education and social responsibility. With 47 Christian students guided by 11 Christian teachers, including a CRE teacher, the school operates within a socially diverse rural environment where many students encounter economic limitations, communal challenges, and cultural pluralism. These contextual realities render social responsibility not merely a theoretical virtue but a practical necessity for daily survival and communal harmony. In such a setting, Christian education is called to function as a moral compass that guides students in responding to social suffering, inequality, and mutual dependence. Matthew 25:40 forms part of Jesus’ discourse on the final judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), in which the criterion of divine evaluation is not religious ritual but compassionate action toward the marginalized. The phrase “the least of these” (*tōn elachistōn toutōn*) encompasses those who are socially invisible, vulnerable, and often excluded from systems of power. Theologically, Jesus’ radical identification with the needy collapses the false dichotomy between devotion to God and service to others. In this text, love for neighbor becomes the concrete embodiment of love for Christ Himself (France, 2007; Hauerwas, 2001). Social responsibility in Christian education is not motivated primarily by humanitarian sentiment but by a Christological imperative. Matthew 25:40 offers a powerful moral framework for shaping learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessment practices in CRE. Teaching social responsibility means guiding students to recognize suffering, cultivate empathy, and engage in concrete acts of service within their social environments. This aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasize experiential learning, moral modeling, and reflective practice as core components of effective character education (Lickona, 2012; Bandura, 1986). When students participate in acts of care-helping peers, supporting the vulnerable, and respecting differences—they internalize social values not merely as abstract ideals but as lived commitments. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that students acquire social and moral values primarily through modeling and relational interaction rather than through verbal instruction alone (Slavin, 2018). Teachers who consistently display compassion, fairness, and a servant attitude function as living texts through which students interpret Christian ethics. Conversely, when social

responsibility is taught only at the cognitive level without consistent modeling, students tend to develop moral dissonance and ethical apathy. This reality highlights the critical importance of teacher integrity and pedagogical coherence in the transmission of social values. Social responsibility in Christian education has often been treated as a peripheral theme compared to doctrinal mastery or liturgical participation. Many studies still focus predominantly on cognitive achievement, leaving the social dimension of faith formation underexplored, particularly within public school contexts where Christian students represent a minority. In rural Indonesian settings such as Gunung Mas, where structural limitations and social vulnerability are tangible, the integration of faith and social action becomes even more urgent and pedagogically significant. This study aims to explore how Matthew 25:40 functions as a moral mandate for cultivating social responsibility within Christian education at SMPN Satu Atap 1 Miri Manasa. Specifically, it seeks to examine how social responsibility is interpreted by CRE teachers, how it is implemented in classroom practice and school culture, and how students experience and internalize this value in their daily social interactions. By integrating biblical exegesis with empirical educational analysis, this research seeks to contribute to the development of a holistic model of Christian education that unites faith, compassion, and social engagement as inseparable dimensions of authentic discipleship.

## **METHODS**

A qualitative descriptive research design integrating a Simple Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews was implemented to explore the implementation of social responsibility as a moral mandate in Christian education based on Matthew 25:40. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how biblical values are interpreted, practiced, and experienced within a real educational context. The SLR component systematically reviewed academic publications from 2000 to 2024 sourced from reputable journals, theological books, and educational research databases, focusing on three main thematic areas: exegetical and theological interpretations of Matthew 25:40 and the concept of social responsibility in the Bible, pedagogical theories related to moral education, social responsibility, and character formation, and empirical studies on the role of teachers in value internalization within Christian and general education contexts. The selected literature was screened based on relevance, methodological rigor, and direct engagement with social responsibility or Christian pedagogy, and it served as the conceptual framework for developing the interview instruments and analytical categories. The empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected participants, including one Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher and five Christian teachers from other subject areas, as well as ten Christian students representing different grade levels and gender groups. The interviews aimed to capture diverse perspectives regarding the meaning of social responsibility, its practical application in teaching and school life, and students' experiences of social care, compassion, and service. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was conducted in a quiet and safe setting within the school environment to ensure participant comfort and confidentiality. In addition to interviews, limited non-participant classroom and school observations were conducted during CRE lessons and selected school activities related to social interaction and service to strengthen data triangulation. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure using an inductive-deductive approach. Deductive

categories were derived from the SLR framework, including theological understanding of Matthew 25:40, teacher modeling, student empathy, service-oriented behavior, and relational responsibility, while inductive themes emerged organically from participants' narratives. The data were coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring patterns, contrasts, and meaning structures related to the cultivation of social responsibility. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation of data sources (teachers, students, and observations) was applied, along with peer debriefing and member checking with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations, securing institutional permission from the school, obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, and protecting anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. This integrated methodological design enabled the study to connect biblical theology with lived pedagogical practice and to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Matthew 25:40 operates as a moral mandate for social responsibility in the context of Christian education.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that social responsibility in Christian education at SMPN Satu Atap 1 Miri Manasa is not understood merely as a social virtue or civic obligation but as a theological mandate rooted in faith in Christ, particularly as articulated in Matthew 25:40. Teachers and students consistently interpreted social responsibility as an expression of obedience to God manifested through concrete acts of care for others. This theological framing significantly shapes pedagogical practice, school culture, and students' social behavior. The Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher demonstrated a clear exegetical awareness of Matthew 25:40, emphasizing that Jesus' identification with "the least of these" establishes a direct relationship between faith and social action. According to the teacher, serving others is not optional charity but a visible sign of authentic discipleship. This interpretation aligns with biblical scholarship that views Matthew 25:31-46 as a judgment narrative in which compassionate action becomes the decisive criterion of one's relationship with Christ (Osborne, 2010; Wright, 2012). The teachers emphasized that students must understand that loving God cannot be separated from loving and serving others. Students echoed this interpretation in simpler language. Many described social responsibility as "helping friends who are in trouble," "sharing with those who have less," and "not ignoring people who suffer." Although their theological vocabulary was limited, their understanding reflected an internalization of the core biblical message: that helping others is equivalent to serving Christ. This indicates that Matthew 25:40 has been translated from an abstract biblical text into a lived moral framework within students' daily experiences. This finding confirms that biblical values become meaningful when they are continuously interpreted within concrete life situations. The integration of theology and lived practice allows students to perceive Scripture not merely as a religious text but as a guide for daily social interaction. This reflects Groome's shared Christian praxis model, which emphasizes the dialogical integration between biblical narrative and lived experience in faith formation (Groome, 2011).

One of the most significant findings of this study is the central role of teacher modeling in shaping students' social responsibility. Both CRE and non-CRE Christian teachers consistently demonstrated behaviors of care, fairness, patience, and willingness to help students without discrimination. Examples included visiting sick students, providing emotional support to students facing family hardship, offering academic assistance outside classroom hours, and mediating peer conflicts with a restorative rather than punitive approach. Students frequently cited their teachers' actions as the primary reason they felt motivated to help others. Rather than pointing to specific lessons, they referred to how teachers "always help," "never get tired of listening," and "treat all students the same." This finding strongly supports Bandura's social learning theory, which asserts that moral behavior is primarily acquired through observation and imitation of significant role models (Bandura, 1986). In this context, teachers functioned as living embodiments of Matthew 25:40. The consistency between what teachers taught and how they behaved created what students perceived as moral credibility. When teachers spoke about caring for the poor, students recalled seeing those same teachers organizing collective donations for peers in need. When teachers taught about forgiveness, students observed how teachers handled conflicts calmly and refused to humiliate students publicly. This congruence between instruction and behavior strengthened the internal coherence of Christian education and prevented value dissonance among students. This phenomenon also resonates with Palmer's concept of "teaching from the inside out," which emphasizes that the integrity of the teacher's inner life profoundly shapes the educational environment (Palmer, 2007). In the present study, the teacher's spirituality and moral orientation became an implicit curriculum that deeply influenced student attitudes and behavior.

The study identified several pedagogical strategies through which social responsibility was intentionally cultivated. Contextualized biblical teaching played a crucial role. The CRE teacher consistently connected Matthew 25:40 with real-life issues such as poverty, illness, family hardship, and peer conflict. Rather than remaining at the level of abstract doctrine, lessons were framed around everyday experiences that students could readily understand and encounter. Collaborative learning and group activities were frequently used to nurture mutual care. Students were often assigned to work in mixed-ability groups, where stronger students were encouraged to assist those who struggled academically. This practice fostered empathy, patience, and a sense of shared responsibility. Such strategies reflect Vygotskian principles of social learning, where knowledge and values are constructed through interaction and cooperation. Service-oriented activities became an extension of classroom learning. Although limited by the school's rural location and resource constraints, students participated in simple service acts such as collecting donations for classmates experiencing bereavement, assisting peers with financial difficulties, and engaging in communal cleaning activities as expressions of shared responsibility. These practices allowed students to embody Matthew 25:40 in tangible ways, transforming biblical teaching into lived action. From an educational theory perspective, these findings align with experiential learning models in character education, which emphasize that moral values are most effectively internalized when students are actively involved in meaningful social practices rather than passively

receiving information (Lickona, 2012). Through such experiences, students learn not only what social responsibility means but also how it feels to act responsibly toward others.

Students' narratives reveal that social responsibility has begun to take root as a personal value rather than merely an external rule. Many students described changes in how they treated classmates, especially those who were economically disadvantaged, academically weak, or socially excluded. Several students acknowledged that they previously avoided peers who were perceived as "different" or "problematic," but gradually learned to approach them with greater patience and compassion. Students also reported increased sensitivity toward suffering. They mentioned becoming more attentive when a friend was sick, when someone was bullied, or when a family experienced loss. This heightened moral awareness suggests that social responsibility had progressed from behavioral compliance to moral consciousness, which is a critical indicator of authentic character formation. The internalization process remained uneven among students. A few admitted that their participation in social responsibility activities was still motivated by external pressure from teachers rather than intrinsic conviction. This reflects a developmental reality in adolescent moral formation, where students often move gradually from heteronomous morality toward autonomous ethical reasoning. From a pedagogical standpoint, this indicates the importance of sustained guidance, reflection, and reinforcement. The findings support Slavin's assertion that moral development in students is shaped through continuous interaction between instruction, modeling, and reinforcement within a consistent social environment (Slavin, 2018). At SMPN Satu Atap 1 Miri Manasa, this environment was largely supportive of such moral development despite existing limitations.

Beyond individual classrooms, the study found that social responsibility had become a defining feature of the school's micro-culture among Christian students and teachers. The small size of the Christian community within the school fostered strong relational bonds and a heightened sense of mutual dependence. Teachers often referred to students as "part of a spiritual family," and students reciprocated this sense of belonging. This communal atmosphere reinforced collective responsibility. When one student experienced difficulty, others were naturally mobilized to offer help. This pattern reflects a biblically grounded understanding of community in which members bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2-though not the main exegetical text, it supports the social ethic observed in practice). This finding demonstrates how minority religious communities within public schools can develop strong internal solidarity that becomes a resource for moral formation rather than a source of isolation. The Christian identity of students at this school was not confined to private belief but expressed through relational responsibility toward one another. Several challenges emerged. Structural poverty in the surrounding community often limited the capacity for broader social engagement. While students were encouraged to help others, many also came from economically vulnerable families, which constrained their ability to participate in material forms of assistance. Time constraints within the formal curriculum posed limitations. CRE instructional hours were relatively limited compared to the breadth of moral formation expected. Teachers acknowledged that cultivating social responsibility requires long-term consistency that cannot always be fully accommodated by the formal timetable. Not all teachers

demonstrated equal levels of theological depth in articulating the relationship between faith and social responsibility. While the CRE teacher exhibited strong biblical grounding, some non-CRE teachers expressed social responsibility mainly in humanitarian rather than explicitly theological terms. Although still valuable, this occasionally led to fragmented moral messaging among students. External influences such as digital media, peer pressure, and family conditions sometimes undermined the internalization of social responsibility. Students reported exposure to individualistic values that conflicted with the communal ethic promoted at school. This tension reflects broader cultural shifts that challenge Christian moral formation in contemporary society. These challenges align with broader findings in Christian education research, which emphasize that character formation must contend with structural, cultural, and contextual forces beyond the classroom (Knight, 2006; Hauerwas, 2001). The present study confirms that the cultivation of social responsibility is an ongoing process shaped by both internal pedagogical efforts and external social realities.

One of the most important contributions of this study is its demonstration of how Matthew 25:40 can be operationalized as a pedagogical framework rather than merely a theological statement. The verse functions as a moral compass that guides curriculum planning, classroom interaction, teacher-student relationships, and school culture. Teachers consciously translate the text into pedagogical objectives, behavioral expectations, and reflective practices. The study affirms that Matthew 25:40 establishes a Christ-centered ethic in which social responsibility becomes an expression of communion with Christ. Pedagogically, the study shows that this ethic is most effectively transmitted through modeling, experiential learning, and relational pedagogy. Educationally, the integration of Scripture and practice creates a holistic learning process that engages cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of student formation. This integrated model resonates strongly with Knight's vision of Christian education as the harmonious development of faith, character, and competence (Knight, 2006). It also reflects a praxis-oriented approach in which theology informs practice and practice, in turn, deepens theological understanding. The findings of this study offer several important implications. They reaffirm that Christian education within public schools can effectively cultivate strong moral and social values when grounded in biblical theology and supported by consistent teacher modeling. The minority status of Christian students does not necessarily hinder moral formation; instead, it can foster deeper solidarity and intentional faith practice. The study highlights the necessity of equipping CRE teachers not only with cognitive biblical knowledge but also with pedagogical skills that translate theology into lived experience. Continuous professional and spiritual development is crucial if teachers are to sustain the moral credibility required for effective character education. The study underscores the importance of integrating social responsibility into the broader school culture rather than confining it to CRE lessons alone. When values are supported across subjects and by multiple teachers, students encounter a more coherent moral environment that strengthens internalization. The findings suggest that Matthew 25:40 offers a powerful biblical framework for developing service-learning models in Christian education. Such models could expand students' social engagement beyond the classroom into broader community service initiatives, even within resource-limited contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that social responsibility in Christian education at SMPN Satu Atap 1 Miri Manasa is deeply rooted in the biblical mandate of Matthew 25:40, which frames compassionate service as a concrete expression of faith in Christ. The findings confirm that social responsibility is not merely taught as a moral concept but is actively embodied through pedagogical practice, teacher modeling, and school culture. Teachers consistently interpret service to others as service to Christ, and this theological understanding significantly shapes both instructional approaches and relational interactions within the school community. One of the most significant conclusions of this study is the central role of teacher example in cultivating social responsibility among students. Students are shaped not only by what is taught in Christian Religious Education lessons but, more importantly, by what they observe in the daily conduct of their teachers. Acts of care, fairness, patience, and sacrifice demonstrated by teachers function as a living interpretation of Matthew 25:40. This confirms that moral formation in Christian education is fundamentally relational and experiential rather than purely cognitive. The study also reveals that students have begun to internalize social responsibility as a personal value rather than as external obligation alone. Many students exhibit increased empathy, willingness to help peers, and sensitivity to suffering, especially among classmates facing economic or emotional hardship. Although the level of internalization varies according to individual maturity and external influence, the overall trajectory reflects positive moral development facilitated by consistent pedagogical guidance. The implementation of social responsibility as a moral mandate is not without challenges. Economic limitations, time constraints in the formal curriculum, unequal theological depth among teachers, and external cultural influences continue to shape the complexity of moral formation. These findings highlight that cultivating social responsibility is a dynamic and ongoing process that requires perseverance, institutional support, and continuous teacher formation. This study reinforces the inseparable relationship between faith and social action. Matthew 25:40 provides not only an ethical command but a Christ-centered vision of discipleship in which love for others is the authentic sign of communion with Christ. The study affirms that this vision can be meaningfully integrated into classroom practice through contextualized biblical teaching, experiential learning, and relational modeling. Social responsibility in Christian education is most effectively nurtured when biblical mandate, teacher integrity, pedagogical strategy, and school culture operate in harmony. This study contributes to the growing body of Christian education research by demonstrating that even within a public school setting and a minority-Christian context, Matthew 25:40 can function as a transformative moral framework that shapes both personal character and communal life. Future research is encouraged to explore longitudinal impacts of service-oriented Christian pedagogy and to examine broader implementations across diverse educational contexts.

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