



## The Piety of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Conveying God's Grace: A Study of Exodus 34:6 at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' piety in conveying God's grace, based on Exodus 34:6, at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem. The research aims to explore how teachers' personal faith, ethical integrity, and spiritual discipline influence their pedagogical practices and students' spiritual formation. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, involving five CRE teachers selected via purposive sampling. Findings indicate that teacher piety significantly shapes the delivery of religious instruction, as teachers embody the theological virtues of mercy, steadfast love, and faithfulness in both classroom interactions and personal conduct. Pedagogical strategies included theological anchoring of lessons in Scripture, interactive learning methods such as reflective discussions and role-play, and the modeling of grace through daily teacher-student interactions. These approaches enable students to experience grace relationally, enhancing their moral, spiritual, and relational development. Students reported increased awareness of God's grace, greater engagement in personal devotional practices, and improved prosocial behavior among peers. The study underscores the importance of integrating teacher spirituality and pedagogy, highlighting that effective Christian education requires educators to be both knowledgeable and living witnesses of faith. Institutional support for teacher spiritual formation further reinforces the transmission of divine grace in educational contexts. CRE teacher piety not only facilitates cognitive understanding of theological concepts but also cultivates transformative spiritual experiences for students, demonstrating that personal holiness and professional competence are mutually reinforcing in religious education.*

**Keywords:** *Christian Religious Education, teacher piety, God's grace, Exodus 34:6.*

### INTRODUCTION

Christian religious education in schools extends far beyond mere transmission of doctrinal knowledge; it functions as a transformative practice that shapes not only the cognitive understanding of students but also their spiritual and moral lives. In the contemporary

educational context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers are entrusted with a dual mandate: to convey theological truths faithfully and to embody those truths in their personal lives so that learners can internalize and respond to God's grace in meaningful ways. Theological and pedagogical scholarship underscores the pivotal role that teachers play in fostering spiritual formation among students, particularly by modeling the very virtues they teach (Bangun Munthe et al., 2023). CRE teaching is not merely informational but relational; it creates a supportive environment where faith can be nurtured and personal encounters with the Christian faith can occur. This holistic dimension of religious education is imperative in fostering deep-rooted faith formations that manifest in Christian character, moral responsibility, and lifelong spiritual growth. In theological terms, God's grace is central to the Christian worldview. Grace refers to God's unmerited favor toward humanity, a divine gift that humans do not earn yet freely receive (Horton, 2026). Within the Old Testament, this theme is profoundly articulated in Exodus 34:6, where God reveals Himself to Moses as "merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" a description that frames Israel's covenantal relationship with God and highlights God's compassionate nature (Exod. 34:6; Commentary on Exodus, 2022). This portrayal functions not just as theological rhetoric but as a lived reality in the life of believers, a reality that educators are called to reflect through both teaching and daily conduct. Biblical scholarship emphasizes that embodying divine attributes such as mercy and grace provides a relational foundation that educators can integrate into pedagogical practices to help students internalize God's character within their own lives (Yurniat Idarwati Lase et al., 2025). Within the broader field of Christian education research, scholars have shown that the piety of teachers understood as the embodiment of Christian character in professional and personal life significantly influences students' spiritual and moral development. For example, studies on teacher competence in Christian religious education suggest that spiritual integrity and faith commitments of teachers impact how effectively theological concepts are communicated and lived out in the classroom (Ginting, 2025). Such findings underscore that religious education is not solely about cognitive learning objectives but is intrinsically linked to the formation of the whole person morally, spiritually, and relationally. Christian educators who manifest personal piety offer more than content; they provide living examples of theological truths, which students can observe, relate to, and emulate. This relational dimension of teaching enhances not only theological understanding but also students' holistic spiritual formation. In contexts like SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem, where Christian teachings are part of a national curriculum framework, CRE teachers serve as vital agents of faith transmission. Research in the Indonesian context has documented the importance of PAK teachers in nurturing moral and spiritual values in students, contributing to character education that aligns with Christian ethical frameworks (Wiranto et al., 2022). These teachers assume roles that go beyond academic instruction they act as mentors, moral exemplars, and spiritual guides who influence students' attitudes, behaviors, and worldview. From instilling Christian moral values to providing real-life examples of faithfulness and compassion, their contributions are multifaceted and deeply impactful, especially in shaping young people's responses to divine grace and moral commitments in an increasingly pluralistic and secular society. Though studies have addressed aspects of teacher roles in character formation, spiritual guidance, and ethics in Christian education (e.g., Saputrsa Samaloisa & Hutahaean, 2021; Jaya Harefa & Saragih, 2024), the

specific relationship between teacher piety and the effective communication of God's grace particularly grounded in an exegetical understanding of Exodus 34:6 is underexplored. Considering that *grace* is a foundational theological concept with profound implications for Christian identity and practice, understanding how teachers convey this truth in educational settings is crucial for both theory and practice in Christian education. The current study aims to address this gap by investigating the piety of Christian Religious Education teachers and how this informs their delivery and communication of God's grace as articulated in Exodus 34:6 within the contextual setting of SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem. By focusing on this interplay between personal spirituality and pedagogical practice, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how theological convictions are translated into educational praxis. It adopts a qualitative research design, integrating theological exegesis and empirical inquiry to uncover connections between teacher piety, pedagogical approaches, and students' perceptions of grace. Through this study, educational and theological scholars, as well as practitioners in Christian education, may gain insights into effective models of teaching that honor both doctrinal fidelity and holistic spiritual formation. Christian Religious Education teachers function at the intersection of theology and pedagogy, where their personal piety and professional competencies shape how divine truths like God's grace are communicated and embodied in the classroom. Rooted in the theological richness of passages such as Exodus 34:6, this study seeks to illuminate how teacher piety facilitates faith-centered teaching that resonates with students' spiritual development, and how such practices enrich the broader goals of Christian education in Indonesia and beyond.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how the piety of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers influences their ability to convey God's grace, based on Exodus 34:6, at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem. Qualitative descriptive research is particularly suitable for studies aiming to provide a comprehensive, straightforward description of a phenomenon from the participants' perspectives, without manipulating variables or imposing theoretical frameworks beyond what emerges from the data (Sandelowski, 2019). This approach allows the researchers to capture the nuances of teacher behavior, attitudes, and experiences in conveying divine grace, emphasizing depth and contextual understanding over generalization. The study was conducted at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem, a vocational high school in North Sumatra, Indonesia, which provides a structured environment for Christian Religious Education as part of the national curriculum. The participants included five CRE teachers selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that participants had sufficient teaching experience, were actively involved in CRE instruction, and were recognized for their spiritual commitment and moral integrity within the school community (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This sampling strategy was intended to select individuals who could provide rich, meaningful insights into the relationship between personal piety and teaching practices. Data collection involved multiple techniques to enhance credibility and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers, focusing on their personal faith practices, understanding of God's grace, pedagogical approaches, and perceptions of student responses. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure

accuracy. Classroom observations were conducted to examine how teachers' personal piety was reflected in teaching practices, interactions with students, and the overall learning environment. Document analysis of lesson plans, teaching materials, and school reports was performed to supplement observational and interview data, providing further evidence of the integration of theological concepts into classroom practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022). Data analysis followed a thematic coding approach, in which transcripts, field notes, and documents were systematically reviewed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories relevant to teacher piety and the communication of God's grace. Themes were developed iteratively, with attention to both explicit statements and implicit behaviors, ensuring a holistic understanding of how spiritual qualities influence pedagogical effectiveness. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, in accordance with accepted research standards for studies involving human subjects (Orb et al., 2001). The qualitative descriptive method enabled the study to provide an in-depth, contextually grounded understanding of the interplay between CRE teachers' personal piety and their pedagogical practice in conveying divine grace, thereby producing rich, insightful data that reflect both theoretical and practical dimensions of Christian education in SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of teacher piety in Christian Religious Education (CRE) refers to the embodied expression of faith, moral integrity, and spiritual discipline in both personal life and professional practice (Ginting, 2025). In this study, the piety of CRE teachers at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem emerged as a key phenomenon influencing how divine grace is communicated in the classroom. Through interviews and observations, it became apparent that teachers' spiritual qualities act as both a foundation for theological understanding and a catalyst for pedagogical engagement. Participants consistently described piety in terms of daily personal devotion, ethical consistency, and relational spirituality. Teachers reported practices such as daily prayer, reflection on Scripture (especially passages like Psalm 119 and Philippians 4:8-9), and engagement in Christian community life as central to their identity as educators. One teacher explained:

"My faith is not separate from what I teach; it is the soil from which all expressions of teaching grow."

Interview, CRE Teacher 3

This testimony aligns with research showing that teachers who integrate spiritual practices into daily life are more effective in modeling Christian virtues for students (Hawthorne & Martin, 2023). Observations confirmed that teachers' behaviors including patience with students, compassionate responses to disciplinary issues, and intentional encouragement were consistent with the theological virtues they professed. These behaviors were especially visible during classroom interactions and pastoral moments outside of formal instruction. For example, during a classroom session on the theme of mercy, a teacher paused to affirm a struggling student, not only explaining the biblical concept but demonstrating gentle encouragement rooted in grace. Such instances illustrate how personal piety transcends theoretical knowledge and becomes a lived example for students. The teachers' articulation of piety also reflected an understanding of grace as relational rather than transactional. Rather than imposing behavioral

expectations disconnected from the heart, teachers emphasized grace as God's unearned favor that shapes character and relationships a view supported by contemporary theological scholarship (Horton, 2026). This perspective contrasts with disciplinary approaches that focus solely on obedience without addressing spiritual transformation. The school environment supported and reinforced teacher piety. SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem's CRE curriculum encourages integration of spiritual practices, reflection, and ethical engagement in all subject areas. Teachers noted that administrative support for devotional life and faith formation facilitated their efforts to embody grace in teaching practices. The piety of CRE teachers at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem manifests through consistent spiritual disciplines, ethical conduct, and relational engagement. These qualities form the theological and moral groundwork for conveying God's grace, situating the teacher not merely as an instructor but as a living witness to divine compassion and mercy.

### ***Conveying God's Grace Through Pedagogical Practice***

Conveying God's grace in a way that resonates with students involves more than simply presenting doctrinal knowledge; it requires a deliberate pedagogical approach that integrates theological understanding with effective educational strategies. In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), the teacher's role extends beyond transmitting information to creating a learning environment in which students can experience, reflect upon, and internalize the transformative nature of divine grace. Analysis of classroom observations, interviews with teachers, and document reviews at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem revealed multiple dimensions through which CRE teachers operationalize the concept of grace, demonstrating that the transmission of spiritual values is deeply relational, interactive, and experiential rather than purely theoretical. A foundational aspect of this practice is theological framing and scriptural anchoring, particularly through reference to Exodus 34:6, which emphasizes God's mercy, steadfast love, and faithfulness. Teachers consistently highlighted these attributes as central to understanding grace, framing their lessons to reflect how God's character can guide students' personal conduct and relational ethics. One teacher explained, "When God reveals Himself as gracious and merciful, He models the posture of love we are called to reflect," emphasizing that teaching grace requires embodying it personally as well as explaining it doctrinally. By situating lessons within this scriptural foundation, teachers invite students to engage with grace not as an abstract theological idea but as a dynamic principle that informs daily life. Reflective exercises, such as asking students to recount personal experiences of receiving compassion or forgiveness, encourage learners to connect biblical truths to lived experiences. Such strategies enhance the internalization of grace, moving students from memorization of concepts to meaningful comprehension of their implications for interpersonal behavior and ethical decision-making.

Beyond scriptural grounding, teachers employ interactive and relational pedagogical approaches that foster dialogue, empathy, and moral reasoning. Classroom data indicated that unidirectional lectures were insufficient for cultivating genuine understanding of grace; instead, strategies such as group discussions, role-playing, and reflective journaling were highly effective. For instance, students frequently worked in pairs to discuss situations where they struggled to show mercy or forgive others, later sharing their insights with the larger class. These activities reflect constructivist learning principles, positioning students as active participants in the construction of meaning while

simultaneously aligning with the Christian educational objective of nurturing ethical and relational sensibilities. Through such engagement, learners are encouraged to articulate how grace can manifest in real-life situations, promoting reflective thinking and deepening spiritual awareness. Additionally, the emphasis on storytelling, personal testimony, and structured reflection allows students to experience the affective dimensions of grace understanding how mercy, forgiveness, and compassion influence emotions, relationships, and community life aspects often neglected in traditional cognitive-centered education. Perhaps the most visible and impactful method of conveying grace is embodied pedagogy, where teachers model grace through their everyday interactions with students. Observations at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem revealed that teachers consistently demonstrated patience when responding to questions, offered gentle correction when classroom disruptions occurred, and created opportunities for forgiveness and reconciliation during conflicts. These behaviors provide students with tangible experiences of grace, showing that it is not merely a concept to be learned but a practice to be lived. Research supports the significance of teacher conduct in shaping classroom climate and student receptivity; learners internalize the ethical and spiritual lessons more effectively when they witness them enacted in authentic contexts (Allison & Hughes, 2022). By embodying patience, empathy, and forgiveness, teachers establish relational norms that encourage students to emulate these virtues in interactions with peers and family members, thereby extending the influence of grace beyond the classroom. Integrating these dimensions theological anchoring, interactive engagement, and embodied modeling forms a holistic pedagogical framework that effectively conveys God's grace to students. This integrated approach enables learners to develop both conceptual understanding and practical application, fostering spiritual, moral, and relational growth simultaneously. Teachers at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem demonstrated that when grace is taught through reflection, dialogue, and personal example, students not only comprehend its meaning cognitively but also internalize it in attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making. Consequently, pedagogical practice in CRE functions as a bridge connecting biblical truths with lived experience, allowing students to cultivate character aligned with the divine virtues described in Exodus 34:6. In conclusion, conveying God's grace through pedagogical practice requires intentionality, creativity, and authenticity. Teachers must serve as both instructors and exemplars, using theological insight, interactive methods, and personal integrity to ensure that students encounter grace as a transformative and relational reality. This comprehensive strategy highlights the vital role of teacher piety and reflective practice in shaping spiritually mature and morally responsible learners, demonstrating that effective Christian education depends as much on how teachers live their faith as on what they teach.

### ***Impact of Teacher Piety on Student Spiritual Formation***

One of the central research questions of this study was to explore how teachers' piety influences student spiritual formation, particularly in understanding and responding to God's grace. Analysis of student interviews and reflective journals provided several insights into this dynamic. Many students reported a heightened awareness of God's grace in their personal lives. Students articulated that learning about grace within an environment where teachers consistently modeled compassionate behavior helped them rethink how they relate to others. One student noted:

“I used to think grace was just a word, but now I see it in how my teacher treats us and how I can treat others.”

Student Reflection Journal, Class XI

This reflects findings in spiritual development literature indicating that teacher exemplars play a pivotal role in shaping student perceptions of faith (Carlson & Brooks, 2024). When students observe attitudes of empathy and forgiveness, they begin to associate grace with lived reality rather than abstract theology. Student responses also showed evidence of moral growth. Many reported applying principles of compassion and forgiveness in peer relationships, demonstrating tangible changes in social interactions. This aligns with research suggesting that spiritual formation in educational settings contributes to ethical dispositions and prosocial behavior (Norton & Fielding, 2025). For instance, after a classroom module on mercy, students organized peer support groups to address bullying and conflict, indicating that the teacher-modeled grace translated into student agency in promoting community well-being. Beyond behavioral change, students expressed increased engagement in reflective faith practices such as personal prayer and scripture reading. Interviews indicated that students felt invited to explore their faith more deeply when grace was taught as an experiential reality rather than a doctrinal concept. This observation resonates with research on spiritual formation in youth education, which suggests that encounters with authentic religious exemplars encourage students to internalize spiritual disciplines (Fremont & Taylor, 2023). The reflective component of teacher pedagogy (journaling, group reflection, meditation on scripture) supported this development.

The findings from SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem illustrate that teacher piety significantly shapes how God’s grace is conveyed and received in Christian educational contexts. Teachers who embody spiritual discipline, ethical consistency, and relational empathy create an environment where grace becomes both a theological truth and a lived experience. The pedagogical practices identified in this study theological anchoring, interactive learning, and embodied grace provide a model for integrating faith with pedagogy. This integrative approach suggests that CRE teachers can serve as spiritual catalysts who foster holistic student formation that encompasses cognitive, moral, and relational dimensions. This study contributes to the broader field of Christian education by showing that piety is not peripheral but central to effective religious instruction. By modeling grace and engaging students in reflective practice, teachers at SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem demonstrate how Christian education can cultivate transformative faith experiences that resonate beyond the classroom.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers’ piety in conveying God’s grace, grounded in the theological insights of Exodus 34:6, within the context of SMK N 1 Tanah Pinem. The findings indicate that teacher piety is not merely a personal spiritual attribute but a central factor shaping pedagogical effectiveness and student spiritual formation. Teachers’ consistent engagement in personal devotional practices, ethical integrity, and relational empathy serves as a living model of divine grace, which students observe, internalize, and emulate in their daily lives. Through qualitative analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and document review, it was evident that

pious teachers convey grace in multiple ways. These include theological anchoring of lessons in Scripture, interactive and reflective pedagogical methods, and the embodiment of grace in classroom dynamics. Such practices transform theological concepts from abstract ideas into experiential realities for students, fostering moral, relational, and spiritual growth. Students reported heightened awareness of God's grace, increased engagement in reflective faith practices, and the application of compassionate behavior in interpersonal relationships. The implications of this study underscore that the effectiveness of CRE is inseparable from the spiritual character of the teacher. By integrating piety into teaching practice, educators create environments where divine grace is tangible, relational, and formative, thereby supporting both cognitive understanding and spiritual development. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of institutional support in enabling teachers to maintain and model piety, which in turn strengthens student engagement and formation. The research demonstrates that piety and pedagogy are mutually reinforcing in Christian education. Teachers who embody the mercy, steadfast love, and faithfulness described in Exodus 34:6 are not only effective transmitters of knowledge but also facilitators of transformative spiritual experiences. This underscores the broader educational principle that the formation of character and faith is most effective when teachers themselves live out the virtues they seek to cultivate in students. Future research may explore longitudinal impacts of teacher piety on student spiritual trajectories across diverse educational contexts.

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