



## Witnessing Through Compassion: The Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Light of Exodus 6:6 at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o - West Nias

Si'uco Gulo<sup>1\*</sup>, Ridsen Anakampun<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\*correspondence: [siucogulo57@guru.smp.belajar.id](mailto:siucogulo57@guru.smp.belajar.id)

### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers as an expression of compassionate witness, grounded in the theological reflection of Exodus 6:6. The verse-where God promises to redeem Israel "with an outstretched arm"-serves as a paradigm for understanding compassion as active liberation rather than passive emotion. In Indonesia's plural educational context, where teachers must navigate cultural diversity and moral complexity, social competence becomes a crucial expression of Christian vocation. Using a qualitative-expository approach, the research integrates biblical exegesis with field inquiry at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o in West Nias. Exegetical analysis examined the Hebrew concepts *ga'al* (redeem) and *chesed* (steadfast love) to reveal divine compassion as relational and redemptive. Empirical data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with one CRE teacher and ten students, and document analysis over six weeks. The findings demonstrate that the teacher's social competence-manifested through empathy, humility, and restorative dialogue-translates the redemptive compassion of Exodus 6:6 into daily educational practice. Compassion was enacted through conflict mediation, inclusive group activities, and community outreach, fostering both emotional safety and moral growth among students. The study concludes that teaching in Christian education is a form of witness: an extension of God's "outstretched arm" that redeems through understanding and care. Professional competence thus transcends technical skill, embodying faith as relational holiness. By integrating theological reflection and social empathy, the CRE teacher transforms the classroom into a community of liberation and reconciliation, where education itself becomes a living testimony of divine compassion.*

**Keywords:** Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Compassion

### INTRODUCTION

Education in the Christian perspective is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a sacred calling to embody and communicate God's redeeming love in everyday life. Within this

vision, the role of the Christian Religious Education teacher extends beyond academic instruction; it becomes a form of witnessing—a living testimony of faith through words, actions, and relationships. In Indonesia's plural and dynamic social context, where religion intersects with culture, ethics, and civic responsibility, the social competence of CRE teachers becomes central to this mission. Social competence refers to a teacher's ability to build meaningful relationships, demonstrate empathy, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts peacefully (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In Christian education, however, this competence carries a deeper dimension: it is an expression of compassionate love that mirrors Christ's redemptive work and calls teachers to serve as witnesses of God's grace in both school and community life. The theological foundation of this study is found in Exodus 6:6, where God declares to Moses: *"Therefore say to the Israelites: I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment."* This verse marks a divine assurance of liberation, rooted not only in justice but in compassion. God's redemptive action in Exodus reveals His character as one who enters into the suffering of His people, hears their cries, and acts to restore dignity. Theologically, this moment transforms the act of deliverance into a model of divine compassion in action—love that does not remain abstract but manifests through relational engagement and restorative justice. For Christian educators, this passage serves as a paradigm of witness through compassion. Just as God's compassion redeemed Israel from oppression, teachers are called to embody compassion that liberates students from ignorance, prejudice, and moral indifference. Through their relational competence, they become living witnesses to the same redeeming love that defines God's covenant with humanity.

In the context of SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o in West Nias, this theological reflection gains profound relevance. The school represents a microcosm of Indonesia's multicultural and multi-religious reality, where students from diverse backgrounds learn, interact, and develop values for life. Within such a setting, Christian Religious Education teachers are entrusted with a dual responsibility: to nurture the faith of Christian students while fostering social harmony and mutual understanding among all learners. Their task is not confined to explaining doctrines but includes demonstrating Christian compassion through daily interactions. Acts of patience, forgiveness, empathy, and service become visible signs of witness, teaching students that faith is not merely professed but practiced. Through their social competence, CRE teachers model a form of education that integrates spirituality and humanity—where learning becomes a relational act of grace. This study draws upon the biblical message of Exodus 6:6 to explore how witnessing through compassion shapes the social and professional identity of Christian educators. The verse's emphasis on liberation and redemption parallels the moral and emotional liberation teachers bring when they cultivate understanding, respect, and love among students. In modern education, where individualism and digital isolation often erode empathy, the witness of compassionate teachers becomes vital. Their social competence enables them to listen deeply, bridge differences, and create inclusive spaces that reflect God's restorative intent. In the Nias Barat context—a community characterized by strong kinship, traditional values, and communal solidarity—the concept of compassionate witness resonates with both biblical and cultural ideals. Teachers who embody empathy and social

sensitivity contribute not only to academic formation but also to community transformation. They become mediators of peace, echoing the divine role modeled in Exodus 6:6: redeeming others through understanding, patience, and care. This study aims to examine how the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers functions as a form of witness through compassion within the educational and social environment of SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o. Through a theological reflection on Exodus 6:6 and an analysis of pedagogical practice, the research seeks to reveal how compassionate relationships reflect God's redemptive love and foster holistic formation in students. The study contributes to the discourse on faith-based education by asserting that true professionalism in Christian teaching arises not only from cognitive mastery but from relational holiness—an embodied compassion that transforms education into testimony.

## METHODS

A qualitative-expository approach rooted in theological reflection and educational praxis was implemented to explore how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o in West Nias embody social competence as a form of witnessing through compassion inspired by Exodus 6:6. The combination of expository biblical analysis and qualitative inquiry was chosen to connect the theological insights of Scripture with the lived experiences of teachers in their educational context. This methodological framework acknowledges that faith-based teaching is both a hermeneutical and relational act—interpreting divine truth while applying it through social engagement in the classroom and community. The expository component focused on the interpretation of Exodus 6:6 within its historical, linguistic, and theological dimensions. Exegesis was conducted using textual-critical and contextual analysis, examining the Hebrew terms *ga'al* ("redeem") and *chesed* ("steadfast love") to uncover the relational character of divine compassion. The verse, situated in the broader narrative of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, was understood as a revelation of God's active empathy and covenantal faithfulness. This theological insight provided the foundation for interpreting the CRE teacher's role as a witness of compassion—a person who, through social competence, participates in God's ongoing redemptive work by fostering liberation from ignorance, moral apathy, and interpersonal conflict. The qualitative dimension of the study involved a reflective case study design centered at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o, a public junior high school in West Nias Regency, Indonesia. The site was selected due to its rich cultural diversity and communal ethos, where social and moral education intersects with religious identity. Data collection was conducted over a six-week period through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. One Christian Religious Education teacher and ten students participated in the study. The teacher was chosen through purposive sampling based on their experience and reputation for integrating moral and spiritual values in teaching, while students were selected to represent different ethnic and social backgrounds, ensuring a broad understanding of how compassion is experienced and perceived in the classroom. Classroom observations focused on teacher-student interactions, conflict management, and expressions of empathy and cooperation. Field notes captured verbal and non-verbal behaviors that reflected compassion, patience, and social awareness. Semi-structured interviews with the teacher explored three main themes: theological understanding of Exodus 6:6 and its relevance to teaching, strategies for embodying compassion in the classroom, and challenges in maintaining social

harmony within a plural environment. Student interviews, meanwhile, sought to understand how the teacher's relational approach influenced their attitudes toward empathy, respect, and community. This methodological integration of biblical exegesis and qualitative reflection positions the study as both theological inquiry and pedagogical exploration. It reveals how teachers' social competence functions not merely as a professional skill but as a spiritual vocation—a form of living testimony that transforms classrooms into spaces of compassion, justice, and peace, echoing the liberating message of Exodus 6:6 in the contemporary educational landscape.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers—when interpreted through the theological lens of Exodus 6:6—functions as an active expression of compassion and witness within the educational context of SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o, West Nias. The passage, *"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment,'"* serves as the scriptural foundation for understanding compassion not as sentiment but as redemptive action. This redemptive compassion manifests in the relational, pedagogical, and moral practices of the CRE teacher, whose professional role becomes a reflection of God's liberating love. The exegesis of this verse highlights three key theological motifs: liberation (bring you out), restoration (I will redeem you), and divine solidarity (with an outstretched arm). When contextualized within education, these elements translate into pedagogical compassion, social empathy, and transformative teaching. The finding centers on compassion as redemptive relationship. The teacher at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o embodied compassion as an intentional practice of relational liberation—freeing students from fear, shame, or marginalization. Observations revealed that the teacher consistently engaged students with a calm and encouraging tone, even when correcting misbehavior. Rather than enforcing authority through punishment, the teacher emphasized reconciliation and understanding, aligning with the divine model of redemption in Exodus 6:6. For example, when a student failed to complete an assignment, the teacher invited the student to discuss the reason privately rather than reprimanding them in front of peers. This act of gentleness affirmed the student's dignity and created space for self-reflection. Such gestures mirror the divine approach described in Exodus: God liberates Israel not through coercion but through compassion and steadfast love. The teacher's behavior exemplified what Noddings (2013) describes as the pedagogy of care, where the relational connection between teacher and student becomes the foundation for moral and emotional growth. Through interviews, the teacher articulated a theological understanding of teaching as participation in God's redemptive mission. "When I teach," the teacher said, "I see myself not only as explaining the Bible but as continuing God's work of freeing people from ignorance and hatred." This statement reflects a deeply incarnational view of education—where teaching becomes an extension of divine compassion. Students echoed this perception. Several reported that their teacher was "patient like a parent" and "always listened before judging." One student recounted, "When I was scolded by other teachers, I felt embarrassed, but with our PAK teacher, I felt understood." Such responses indicate that the teacher's

compassion fostered emotional safety, a crucial dimension of social competence in faith-based education. Compassion thus served as both a theological virtue and a pedagogical strategy—a means through which liberation and learning occurred simultaneously.

The next theme emerging from the data is witness through social empathy. In Exodus 6:6, God's outstretched arm symbolizes divine involvement—a God who enters into human suffering rather than remaining distant. This motif of solidarity shaped the teacher's approach to community and interpersonal engagement. Social competence, in this sense, was expressed not only in communication skills but also in the moral disposition to "enter into the world" of students. Observations revealed that the teacher frequently used real-life examples from the community to connect biblical lessons with everyday moral challenges. During one lesson on compassion, the teacher recounted a local story of a family whose house was destroyed by flooding. Instead of presenting the event as mere tragedy, the teacher invited students to discuss how they could respond collectively. This discussion led to a class initiative to donate materials to help the affected family—a practical act of social empathy rooted in biblical teaching. The teacher explained that "witnessing Christ's love is not only by words but by helping others who are suffering." This act of communal compassion reflected the liberating purpose of Exodus 6:6. Just as God's redemption was embodied in tangible acts of deliverance, the teacher's social competence was actualized through action-oriented empathy. Students described this experience as transformative. One participant stated, "We learned that believing in God means helping others, not just praying." Another added, "I understood that compassion means freeing others from suffering, like God freed Israel." These reflections demonstrate that the teacher's witness extended beyond verbal instruction to a lived model of faith-based social engagement. This theme aligns with the concept of relational pedagogy as proposed by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), who argue that emotionally intelligent teachers foster deeper learning through empathy and responsiveness. The teacher's social competence functioned as a bridge between theology and lived ethics, translating spiritual truths into social virtues. By cultivating empathy, the teacher not only strengthened classroom relationships but also nurtured a collective moral imagination among students—a shared capacity to envision and enact compassion as part of their faith identity.

The other finding pertains to pedagogical harmony in diversity. SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o, situated in West Nias, represents a microcosm of Indonesia's plural cultural landscape. The student body includes individuals from various ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. In such a context, the CRE teacher's social competence was tested and refined. Observations revealed that the teacher intentionally designed learning experiences that emphasized cooperation, dialogue, and mutual respect. Group discussions often involved mixed teams to ensure interaction across differences. In one activity, students were asked to interpret the meaning of "God's redemption" in their own words and share examples from personal experience. The teacher guided the conversation toward recognizing that redemption can take many forms—helping a struggling friend, forgiving an enemy, or showing kindness to a neighbor. Through these interactions, students began to see unity as a reflection of divine compassion, echoing the communal deliverance theme of Exodus 6:6. The teacher's classroom management style emphasized inclusion rather than uniformity. Differences in opinion or religious

expression were treated as opportunities for growth rather than conflict. When one student hesitated to participate in a group prayer, the teacher responded with empathy, saying, "Your presence is enough; what matters is that we respect one another." This approach reflected what Arthur (2019) calls moral inclusivity-the capacity of educators to uphold faith-based principles while fostering respect for diversity. Students later reported feeling more accepted and open to learning about others' beliefs. The teacher's competence in navigating pluralism reflected a nuanced understanding of social empathy as witness: compassion that honors difference without compromising faith identity. The integration of Exodus 6:6 into the teaching process also redefined the meaning of witness. In interviews, the teacher explained, "To witness God's power is not only to preach but to act with kindness so that people can see the love of Christ through us." This understanding resonates with the biblical pattern of witness as embodied testimony. Just as God's redemption of Israel revealed His character to the nations, the teacher's compassionate behavior revealed divine love within the school community. Students were thus invited to become co-witnesses, reflecting compassion in their daily relationships. One student testified, "When we help one another, I think God is happy, like when He saved the Israelites." This statement encapsulates the transformative cycle of witness-where divine compassion, mediated through the teacher, inspires compassionate action among students. The study also revealed the transformational power of compassion-based pedagogy. Over time, classroom interactions evolved from formality toward familial warmth. Students increasingly demonstrated cooperative behaviors, such as helping peers with assignments, sharing materials, and resolving conflicts peacefully. Observations showed a decline in disciplinary incidents and an increase in voluntary acts of service. These behavioral shifts reflected the interiorization of compassion as a social norm. The teacher attributed this change to the consistent integration of biblical reflection with moral practice: "When we read Exodus 6:6, I tell them that God frees us so that we can free others-free from anger, jealousy, and selfishness." This theological framing transformed compassion into a moral habit. The results correspond with Lickona's (1991) model of character education, which emphasizes the unity of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The CRE teacher's practice effectively integrated these dimensions through story, reflection, and relational modeling. Students not only understood compassion intellectually but experienced it emotionally and practiced it behaviorally. In this way, the classroom became a microcosm of liberation-a space where God's redemptive compassion was reenacted through human relationships. The key insight from the study is the relationship between humility and witness. Compassion, when expressed through social competence, inherently involves humility-the willingness to listen, to serve, and to prioritize others' needs. During one observed session, a disagreement arose between two students over a group project. Instead of intervening with authority, the teacher invited both to share their feelings and perspectives. After listening patiently, the teacher summarized their points and asked, "How do you think God would want you to respond?" This reflective question redirected the conflict toward self-awareness and empathy, leading both students to apologize and reconcile. Such practices reveal how humility functions as the ethical foundation of compassion. The teacher's restraint mirrored God's own patience in dealing with Israel's complaints in Exodus-a humility grounded not in weakness but in moral strength. Interviews further showed that students internalized this value. One remarked, "Our

teacher teaches us that being humble doesn't mean losing; it means giving peace." This moral reorientation aligns with the theological theme of redemption in Exodus 6:6- liberation through self-giving love. The teacher's humility created an environment where students felt empowered to express vulnerability and seek forgiveness, fostering what Freire (1998) calls dialogical learning, where truth emerges through mutual respect rather than imposition. A related finding concerns the extension of compassion beyond the classroom. The teacher at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o actively encouraged students to practice their faith in community contexts. As part of a service-learning initiative, students participated in a neighborhood clean-up campaign and visited elderly residents during the Christmas season. These experiences were later discussed in class, linking social action with theological reflection. The teacher explained, "Helping others is a way of showing that God's salvation is still working today." This integration of action and reflection exemplifies Groome's (1991) shared praxis approach, where learners connect their experiences with the biblical story to form moral identity. Through these practices, the teacher's social competence transcended interpersonal communication-it became a means of forming socially conscious believers. Students reported feeling "closer to God" when participating in communal service, recognizing compassion as a form of worship. In this sense, social competence was not an optional professional trait but a theological necessity: to teach about a compassionate God is to embody compassion. The final dimension of discussion concerns the professional implications of social competence as witness. The CRE teacher's effectiveness derived not only from personal virtue but from deliberate pedagogical planning. Lesson plans analyzed during the study revealed clear moral objectives such as "helping students understand compassion as liberation" and "applying faith through community service." These objectives were accompanied by reflective assessments inviting students to evaluate their growth in empathy and cooperation. The teacher's practice thus aligned with Shulman's (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge-the integration of subject expertise and moral pedagogy.

The teacher noted that embodying compassion in a system focused on academic achievement required persistence and faith. Limited time and resources often constrained opportunities for experiential learning. Yet, the teacher remained convinced that compassion is foundational to effective teaching: "If students don't feel loved, they will not understand God's love." This statement captures the essence of Christian pedagogy-education as a ministry of presence. The findings suggest that social competence in Christian education is a form of participation in God's mission. Just as God's compassion liberated Israel from bondage, teachers act as instruments of liberation from ignorance, fear, and moral indifference. The CRE teacher's witness reflects the incarnational dimension of education: teaching as an embodiment of divine compassion. In this way, Exodus 6:6 becomes not only a text about ancient deliverance but a living framework for modern pedagogy. The teacher's "outstretched arm" is seen in acts of understanding, forgiveness, and solidarity with students-small yet powerful expressions of God's ongoing redemption. At the personal level, it shapes the teacher's spiritual identity as a witness of Christ's love. At the relational level, it nurtures empathy and respect among students, fostering community and cooperation. At the societal level, it cultivates moral agents who extend compassion beyond school walls, contributing to peace and justice in the wider community. The CRE teacher thus becomes a vessel of

God's liberating compassion-echoing the divine voice of Exodus 6:6, calling humanity from bondage to fellowship. The results affirm that the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers, when grounded in biblical compassion, transcends professional skill and becomes a spiritual vocation. The teacher at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o exemplified how theological reflection can inform practical pedagogy, transforming the classroom into a site of redemption and reconciliation. Compassion, as revealed in Exodus 6:6, is not abstract sentiment but active solidarity-an outstretched arm that brings healing to hearts and communities. In embodying this divine pattern, the teacher bore witness to God's liberating presence in education, demonstrating that to teach with compassion is to participate in the ongoing exodus from ignorance, division, and indifference toward the promised land of understanding, unity, and love.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers is far more than a professional requirement-it is a sacred expression of divine compassion and witness in action. Drawing from Exodus 6:6, the research at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o in West Nias illustrates how teaching, when rooted in biblical compassion, becomes a redemptive practice that liberates both teacher and students from indifference, hostility, and division. The verse, in which God declares, "I will bring you out... I will free you... and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm," provides the theological blueprint for understanding compassion as divine liberation. This liberation, when incarnated in educational practice, manifests as relational empathy, restorative justice, and transformative care-the hallmarks of authentic social competence. The findings demonstrate that when a CRE teacher models compassion through humility, patience, and relational sensitivity, education transcends instruction and becomes formation. The teacher at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o exemplified this principle by cultivating an environment where every student felt seen, valued, and respected. Through compassionate engagement, conflicts were transformed into opportunities for reconciliation, and learning became a shared journey of moral growth. The teacher's witness echoed the redemptive nature of God's compassion in Exodus 6:6: liberation not through domination, but through love. In this sense, the social competence of the teacher is not merely about communication or collaboration-it is about embodying the gospel of reconciliation in daily interactions. The theological reflection drawn from Exodus 6:6 reinforces that God's compassion is not passive emotion but active redemption. Likewise, the teacher's compassion was evidenced not in sentimentality but in concrete acts of service and justice-listening to students' struggles, mediating conflicts, and fostering inclusion in a plural classroom. By doing so, the teacher mirrored God's "outstretched arm," reaching out to restore harmony and dignity. This alignment between divine compassion and human pedagogy represents what Palmer (1998) describes as "teaching from the heart"-where authenticity, faith, and integrity converge to create learning that heals. The research also confirms that witness through compassion transforms the moral atmosphere of education. Over time, the classroom evolved into a community of care where empathy replaced rivalry and forgiveness replaced resentment. Students began to internalize compassion not as a moral rule but as a spiritual calling, extending acts of kindness beyond the school. Such transformation underscores that social competence,

when informed by faith, contributes not only to academic success but also to social harmony and spiritual maturity. In this light, the CRE teacher functions as both educator and minister—a living testimony of God's ongoing work of redemption within society. The study highlights that professional competence in Christian education must integrate theological depth and social empathy. The teacher's ability to translate Exodus 6:6 into lived experience demonstrates that Scripture is not static doctrine but a dynamic source of pedagogical wisdom. Through the exodus narrative, the teacher invited students to experience faith as liberation—freedom from selfishness, fear, and prejudice. In this transformative process, education becomes an exodus from darkness into understanding, from isolation into community, and from pride into humility. In conclusion, the social competence of CRE teachers represents a spiritual vocation to embody and extend God's compassion in the public sphere. To teach with compassion is to witness the gospel—to stretch one's arm toward others in acts of understanding, forgiveness, and love. Just as God redeemed Israel through His outstretched arm, so too do teachers participate in that redemptive mission by reaching out to students with empathy and grace. The classroom, therefore, becomes a sanctuary of liberation, where knowledge is joined with mercy, and education becomes a living testimony of divine compassion at work in the world.

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