

From Scripture to Practice: Strengthening Religious Moderation through the Spiritual Competence of CRE Teachers at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga

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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Education in Indonesia carries a dual mandate: to transmit biblical knowledge and to nurture students' moral and spiritual formation within a context marked by cultural plurality and religious diversity. CRE teachers, therefore, are not merely instructors of doctrine but living witnesses whose integrity and spirituality shape students' worldview and foster harmony. Scriptural imperatives such as Micah 6:8, 1 Timothy 4:12, and Exodus 40:15 underscore that authentic teaching is rooted in holiness, justice, and generational responsibility. This qualitative descriptive study was conducted at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga, a public junior high school in North Sumatra representing Indonesia's pluralistic reality. Data collection combined literature review, in-depth interviews with CRE teachers, classroom observations, and documentation analysis of lesson plans and school records. Data analysis through data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing and complemented by a biblical-theological lens to evaluate how teachers' practices aligned with scriptural values. Findings revealed three dimensions of spiritual competence among CRE teachers: personal integrity, expressed through honesty, humility, and discipline; inclusive spirituality, fostering faith formation while cultivating respect for other religions; and transformative influence, inspiring students to practice honesty, respect, responsibility, and tolerance. These practices not only shaped student character but also aligned with Indonesia's national agenda of religious moderation. The study concludes that CRE teachers' spiritual competence functions both pedagogically and prophetically. By embodying biblical values and promoting moderation, they contribute simultaneously to faith development and nation-building, modeling Christian witness that is faithful to God and relevant to pluralistic society.

Keywords: *Religious Moderation, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Competence*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, Christian Religious Education is not merely an academic subject but a sacred vocation rooted in the biblical mandate to nurture faith and character. The dual mission

of CRE is evident in its responsibility to transmit biblical knowledge while simultaneously cultivating the moral and spiritual formation of students. Within the Indonesian educational landscape—marked by cultural plurality and religious diversity—this task becomes both a challenge and an opportunity. CRE teachers are called to embody Christian values in their teaching practices, demonstrating how faith can be lived authentically in the midst of diversity (Nainggolan, 2021). More than instructors of doctrine, they are living witnesses whose spirituality shapes students' worldview and fosters harmony within the wider community. The foundation of this responsibility is deeply biblical. In Micah 6:8, the prophet exhorts the people of God to “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.” This passage underscores the inseparability of faith and ethical practice, highlighting that true spirituality manifests in justice, compassion, and humility. Similarly, 1 Timothy 4:12 calls leaders and teachers to be examples “in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.” Here, the apostolic teaching affirms that effective leadership in the community of faith depends not merely on intellectual mastery but on lived testimony. In the Old Testament, the call of priests to be consecrated for service (Exodus 40:15) also reflects the generational responsibility of leaders to embody holiness in their daily lives. Together, these texts form a biblical foundation for understanding the spiritual competence required of CRE teachers: an integration of faith, character, and witness in their vocation. Spiritual competence, therefore, cannot be reduced to private piety or ritual observance. It involves the holistic alignment of belief, practice, and personal integrity (Hidayat, 2020). A spiritually competent teacher demonstrates consistency between words and actions, modeling Christian virtues in classroom interactions, decision-making, and relationships with students. This perspective echoes the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:16, which calls believers to let their light shine before others so that their good works may glorify God. In an educational setting, this light becomes visible through the teacher's ability to foster respect, justice, and compassion, thereby embodying the values of the Kingdom of God within a pluralistic school environment.

In the Indonesian context, the relevance of such competence becomes increasingly significant given the state's emphasis on *moderasi beragama* (religious moderation). This initiative, promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, aims to strengthen social cohesion by encouraging tolerance, mutual respect, and balanced religious attitudes (Kementerian Agama RI, 2020). For CRE teachers, the integration of biblical values with the ethos of religious moderation provides a unique opportunity to contribute not only to faith development but also to nation-building. Their role transcends classroom instruction, positioning them as agents of peace and dialogue within society. At the same time, the challenges facing teachers are formidable. Globalization and digitalization expose students to diverse worldviews, often accompanied by relativism and moral decline (Simanjuntak, 2020). The rise of individualism, coupled with social media's influence, makes it increasingly difficult for young people to anchor their values in faith traditions. In such circumstances, the credibility of teachers as role models becomes decisive. A CRE teacher whose life demonstrates holiness, integrity, and compassion provides students with a tangible example of faith in action, countering negative cultural influences and guiding them toward a life of balance and responsibility. This study, conducted at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga, seeks to explore how the spiritual competence of CRE

teachers contributes to strengthening religious moderation among students. As a public school located in a diverse urban setting, SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga represents a microcosm of Indonesia's pluralism. Within this context, the role of the CRE teacher is both complex and impactful: they must navigate their responsibility to nurture Christian faith while promoting attitudes of tolerance and cooperation among students of different religious backgrounds. By examining how biblical principles are embodied in the teachers' lives and pedagogical practices, this research aims to reveal the transformative potential of spiritual competence in fostering both faith formation and harmonious coexistence. This inquiry highlights the theological and pedagogical implications of grounding religious moderation in biblical spirituality. The research argues that the call to holiness and integrity, as emphasized in Scripture, aligns with the nation's broader efforts to sustain unity amidst diversity. In other words, when CRE teachers live out their calling as spiritual role models, they embody a biblical response to the challenges of pluralism, thus strengthening the moral and spiritual fabric of society. CRE in Indonesia operates at the intersection of faith and nation-building. Rooted in biblical imperatives such as justice, love, humility, and purity, CRE teachers' spiritual competence has the power to shape not only students' character but also the ethos of religious moderation in schools. This study at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga seeks to illustrate how Scripture moves from principle to practice through the lives of CRE teachers, providing a compelling model of Christian witness that is both faithful to God and relevant to Indonesia's pluralistic society.

METHODS

The research design was guided by two key methodological orientations: literature review and direct field engagement at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga. The qualitative paradigm was chosen because it enables researchers to capture lived experiences and contextual practices that cannot be fully understood through quantitative measurement alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive orientation provided the flexibility to examine the richness of teachers' daily practices and their theological grounding in Scripture. SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga, located in North Sumatra, presents a relevant locus because the school reflects Indonesia's broader reality of cultural and religious pluralism. Students come from diverse backgrounds, creating both challenges and opportunities for CRE teachers in shaping faith while nurturing tolerance. This context provided fertile ground to examine how biblical principles can be embodied in practical pedagogical settings. The literature review drew upon existing scholarship on spiritual competence, teacher professionalism, and religious moderation. For example, Astuti (2021) argues that the competence of religious educators is not only intellectual but also deeply spiritual, requiring teachers to embody values of integrity and humility. Likewise, the Ministry of Religious Affairs emphasizes *moderasi beragama* as a state-supported educational framework that fosters tolerance, balance, and justice in pluralistic societies (Kementerian Agama RI, 2020). These insights from literature provided a conceptual lens to interpret field findings and to frame the spiritual mission of CRE teachers within the wider national discourse. At the same time, the theological literature, particularly biblical exegesis of passages such as Micah 6:8 and 1 Timothy 4:12, offered a scriptural benchmark to evaluate the authenticity of teachers' practices (Nainggolan, 2021). The integration of empirical studies with biblical sources ensured that the research would remain both academically rigorous and theologically grounded. Complementing the literature review, direct field engagement

was carried out through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation review. Interviews were conducted with CRE teachers to elicit their personal reflections on spiritual competence, their biblical motivations, and the strategies they employed to instill moderation among students. This method allowed for a deeper understanding of the teachers' inner convictions and how these convictions translated into daily practice (Seidman, 2013). Classroom observations, meanwhile, provided opportunities to witness how teachers integrated prayer, moral reflection, and respect for others into the learning environment. Observational data were particularly important because they revealed not only what teachers claimed but also what they enacted in real-time interactions with students. Finally, documentation such as lesson plans, religious activity reports, and school records was analyzed to triangulate data, ensuring reliability and consistency of interpretation. This combination of methods strengthened the study's credibility by balancing subjective narratives with observable and documented evidence. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying them against both the literature and the biblical-theological framework. This process ensured that findings were not only empirically grounded but also aligned with the values articulated in Micah 6:8-acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God-and in 1 Timothy 4:12, which emphasizes living as examples in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. By combining a literature-based framework with direct empirical engagement, this study maintained a balance between contextual realities and theological ideals. The methodological design ensured that the exploration of CRE teachers' spiritual competence at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga was deeply reflective of both scriptural mandates and Indonesia's pluralistic educational environment. The integration of biblical interpretation with observed practice offers a unique contribution to scholarship, highlighting that religious moderation is not only a socio-political necessity but also a biblical imperative embodied in the lives of faithful educators.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga illuminate the multifaceted ways in which the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher demonstrates spiritual competence in daily practice. Spiritual competence was expressed in three interrelated dimensions: personal integrity, inclusive spirituality, and transformative influence on students. Each of these dimensions was not only observed in classroom and school life but also deeply rooted in biblical principles that offer theological grounding for educational practice. The discussion that follows elaborates on these findings and situates them within both the biblical framework and the broader educational discourse on religious moderation. One of the most striking results of the fieldwork was the consistent integrity displayed by the CRE teacher. Integrity manifested itself in concrete behaviors such as arriving punctually for lessons, treating all students equitably regardless of background, and practicing transparency in assessment procedures. Students and colleagues alike described the teacher as reliable, approachable, and principled. Such consistency created a classroom environment characterized by fairness and trust, where students felt valued and respected. This integrity resonates strongly with the exhortation in 1 Timothy 4:12, where Paul urges Timothy to be "an example to the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity." This verse underscores that credibility in ministry-and by extension

in teaching-is not grounded primarily in eloquence or intellectual prowess, but in lived holiness. In the case of SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga, the CRE teacher embodied this biblical principle by ensuring that speech and action aligned, thereby earning students' trust and creating an atmosphere conducive to moral and spiritual formation. As scholars have argued, integrity is the foundation of spiritual leadership; without it, teaching risks becoming a hollow transfer of knowledge rather than a transformative practice (Wiersbe, 2007). The integrity of the CRE teacher addressed contemporary challenges in education, particularly the widespread cynicism among youth toward authority figures. In many contexts, students perceive inconsistencies between what adults preach and what they practice (Santrock, 2021). By modeling honesty, humility, and discipline, the teacher countered this trend and demonstrated that Christian faith is credible when it is embodied in daily life. The evidence suggests that students were more receptive to moral and spiritual instruction precisely because they could observe its authenticity in their teacher's conduct. This finding aligns with Lickona's (1991) assertion that moral education is most effective when teachers serve as exemplars of the virtues they seek to instill. The dimension of personal integrity highlights that spiritual competence is not a matter of abstract knowledge but of concrete embodiment. For the CRE teacher, integrity functioned as the bridge between biblical principles and the lived reality of students, ensuring that teaching was rooted in credibility and authenticity.

Inclusive Spirituality

A second major finding concerns the inclusive nature of the teacher's spirituality. Classroom observations revealed that the CRE teacher integrated prayer, Bible reflection, and faith-based discussions into everyday instruction. At the same time, the teacher cultivated a climate of respect for students of other faiths. By framing Christianity as a faith rooted in love and justice, the teacher provided students with a framework for understanding their identity as Christians while simultaneously valuing the dignity of others. This approach is deeply consistent with Micah 6:8, which calls believers to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Walking humbly with God entails not only personal piety but also relational justice and compassion toward others. The CRE teacher operationalized this principle by ensuring that spiritual practices did not become exclusive rituals but instead became occasions for dialogue and mutual respect. In classroom discussions, students were encouraged to reflect on biblical values while also learning to appreciate the perspectives of their peers from other religious traditions. This inclusive spirituality reflects a theological understanding that Christian faith is both particular and universal. While firmly grounded in the gospel of Christ, it also recognizes that God's love extends beyond boundaries of culture and religion. Theologically, this approach echoes the Pauline vision in Galatians 3:28, where distinctions of ethnicity, status, and gender are transcended in the unity of Christ. Educationally, it embodies the spirit of *moderasi beragama* as articulated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, which defines moderation as a balanced, just, and compassionate approach to religious diversity (Kementerian Agama RI, 2020). The CRE teacher's practice also resonates with educational theories of intercultural pedagogy, which argue that schools must be spaces where students learn to respect and collaborate across differences (Banks, 2008). Rather than presenting Christianity as a closed system, the teacher framed it as a faith that flourishes in dialogue and service. This inclusive spirituality not only nurtured Christian

identity but also equipped students with the relational skills necessary to thrive in Indonesia's pluralistic society. Importantly, inclusive spirituality did not dilute the teacher's Christian convictions. Instead, it deepened them by showing that fidelity to Christ involves love and justice toward neighbors of all faiths. By embodying both firm commitment to the gospel and openness to others, the teacher demonstrated that Christian education can serve as a bridge-builder in plural contexts, offering a living witness of peace and reconciliation.

Transformative Influence on Students

The third dimension of spiritual competence observed was the teacher's transformative influence on students. Interviews and observations indicated that the teacher's holy example inspired students to cultivate honesty, respect, and responsibility. Instances of dishonesty, disrespect, and apathy reportedly declined as students mirrored the teacher's attitudes and behaviors. The teacher's influence extended beyond cognitive instruction to shape students' character and interpersonal relationships. This finding aligns closely with Bandura's (1997) social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of modeling in human learning. According to this theory, individuals learn not only through direct instruction but also by observing and imitating role models. In the SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga context, the CRE teacher functioned as a moral and spiritual model whose behavior students emulated. The consistency of the teacher's conduct provided a reliable reference point for students navigating the complexities of adolescence in a pluralistic society. This transformative influence can be linked to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." The teacher's life became a light that inspired students to live in ways that reflected Christian virtues. Importantly, this influence extended to fostering tolerance and mutual respect. Students testified that they learned to respect peers of different religions not because of abstract lectures but because they saw their teacher practicing respect and fairness in daily interactions. This demonstrated that religious moderation is best learned through lived example rather than theoretical instruction. The transformative influence also resonates with the Old Testament principle in Exodus 40:15, where the consecration of priests was intended to be a perpetual ordinance for future generations. The CRE teacher's holy example served a generational purpose: by shaping the character of today's students, the teacher indirectly influenced future families, communities, and churches. Such influence underscores the transgenerational nature of spiritual competence, where the witness of one faithful teacher can ripple through society across time.

The findings collectively suggest that the spiritual competence of the CRE teacher at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga is both pedagogical and prophetic. Pedagogically, it shapes how students internalize faith, morality, and tolerance. The teacher's integrity and inclusive spirituality provided students with concrete models for living as Christians in a diverse society. Prophetically, the teacher's life bore witness to the holiness and justice of God, offering a countercultural model in the midst of moral decline and pluralistic tensions. From a biblical-theological perspective, the integration of personal integrity, inclusive spirituality, and transformative influence demonstrates that the call to holiness is inseparable from

the call to love and justice. The teacher embodied Micah 6:8's vision of walking humbly with God while acting justly and loving mercy. At the same time, the practice of integrity and purity echoed 1 Timothy 4:12's emphasis on exemplary conduct. These scriptural foundations provided not only theological legitimacy but also practical direction for the teacher's role. From an educational policy perspective, the findings highlight the alignment between biblical principles and Indonesia's national agenda of religious moderation. The CRE teacher's ability to embody holiness while fostering respect across differences illustrates that Christian faith and religious moderation are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing. As scholars have noted, the cultivation of moderation requires educators who can integrate religious conviction with pluralistic engagement (Azra, 2019). The SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga case demonstrates that CRE teachers can fulfill this role effectively when grounded in spiritual competence. The findings also carry significant implications for teacher training and curriculum development. If the goal of CRE is not only to transmit knowledge but also to form character and nurture tolerance, then teacher preparation must prioritize spiritual competence alongside pedagogical skills. This requires a holistic approach to teacher education that integrates biblical formation, ethical training, and intercultural awareness. The example of the CRE teacher at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga shows that when teachers embody such holistic competence, they become agents of transformation in both faith communities and society at large. The prophetic dimension of the teacher's role suggests that spiritual competence has implications beyond the classroom. By living as a witness to holiness and justice, the CRE teacher offered a model of Christian identity that is both faithful and socially relevant. In a world marked by division and moral uncertainty, such witness is urgently needed. As Bonhoeffer (1959) observed, the church's credibility depends on whether its members embody the message they proclaim. In the Indonesian context, where pluralism and tension coexist, the prophetic witness of CRE teachers offers a pathway toward reconciliation and harmony. The results of this study at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga reveal that the spiritual competence of the CRE teacher manifested in personal integrity, inclusive spirituality, and transformative influence on students. These dimensions not only shaped the faith and character of students but also contributed to the broader goal of religious moderation. The findings affirm that spiritual competence is both pedagogical and prophetic, grounded in biblical principles and aligned with national educational goals. By embodying holiness, love, and justice, CRE teachers serve as bridge-builders who nurture faithful Christians while fostering harmony in pluralistic societies.

CONCLUSION

This study conducted at SMP Negeri 5 Sibolga demonstrates that the spiritual competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is not only a pedagogical requirement but also a theological mandate. The findings highlight that integrity, inclusive spirituality, and transformative influence form the threefold dimension through which CRE teachers embody and transmit biblical values. These qualities are not abstract ideals but lived practices that students can observe, internalize, and apply in their own lives. The biblical grounding in Micah 6:8 and 1 Timothy 4:12 reveals that holiness extends beyond personal piety; it embraces communal responsibility and contributes to building a society marked by justice, compassion, and peace. The conclusion underscores that Christian education must be understood as a holistic formation process rather than limited to cognitive or

doctrinal transmission. Students are not only receivers of religious knowledge but participants in a learning community shaped by the teacher's example. The consistency of a teacher's personal integrity creates trust and credibility, while inclusive spirituality equips students to navigate religious diversity with openness and respect. In this way, CRE teachers fulfill their dual vocation as educators and witnesses of Christ in a pluralistic world. Their teaching becomes effective precisely because it is grounded in authenticity and sustained by a biblical vision of holiness and justice. The study situates the role of CRE teachers within the broader context of Indonesia's national commitment to religious moderation. Far from diluting Christian identity, moderation emerges as a direct outworking of faith that seeks the flourishing of all. By embodying values of love, humility, and justice, CRE teachers act as bridge-builders who contribute to social harmony while remaining faithful to their theological convictions. This perspective affirms that Christian faith and national values are not opposed but can be integrated in a mutually enriching manner. This research calls for intentional investment in the theological and pedagogical development of CRE teachers. Training that deepens spiritual competence will better equip them to address contemporary challenges such as moral decline, cultural pluralism, and interfaith tensions. In nurturing students who are both committed to their Christian faith and respectful of others, CRE teachers shape future generations capable of living faithfully and peacefully in a diverse society. Thus, their role is not only immediate but generational, embodying the biblical principle that holiness is a witness that endures across time.

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