



Jurnal Teologi (JUTEOLOG)

Vol. 06 No. 01 (December 2025) hlm. 29 – 41

Jurnal Teologi (JUTEOLOG)

e-ISSN 2775-4006

<https://ejurnal.sttkadesiyogyakarta.ac.id/index.php/juteolog>

p-ISSN 2774-9355



<https://doi.org/10.52489/juteolog.v6i1.247>

A Theological Study of Jesus' Leadership and Management as the Foundation of Church Ministry

Maria Titik Windarti¹⁾ David Ming²⁾ Junio Richson Sirait³⁾

Sekolah Tinggi Teologia Kadesi Bogor, maria@sttkb.ac.id

Recommended Citation

Turabian 8th edition (full note)

Windarti et al., "A Theological Study of Jesus' Leadership and Management as the Foundation of Church Ministry." Jurnal Teologi (JUTEOLOG) 6, no. 1 (December 11, 2025): 29-41, accessed December 11, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.52489/juteolog.v6i1.247>

American Psychological Association 7th edition
(Windarti et al, 2025, p.1).

Received: 28 July 2025	Accepted: 04 December 2025	Published: 11 December 2025
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For more information, please contact maria@sttkb.ac.id

Abstract

This theological study explores the nature and implementation of Jesus' leadership and management as a foundational paradigm for church ministry. Utilizing a phenomenological methodology within a naturalistic paradigm and grounded in a qualitative research approach, data were gathered through observation, in-depth interviews, and comprehensive literature analysis. The findings reveal a significant disparity in the understanding and application of Jesus' leadership and management principles within ecclesial contexts. This discrepancy is primarily attributed to four interrelated factors: (1) insufficient comprehension of the foundational concepts of Jesus' leadership and management, (2) a lack of clarity regarding their intended purpose within ministry, (3) weak strategic alignment with Jesus' leadership model, and (4) the absence of Christlike character in the exercise of leadership roles within the church. Drawing upon theological frameworks and empirical insights, the study proposes a contextualized model for integrating the leadership and management of Jesus as a core foundation for effective and faithful church ministry. The research outcomes offer practical implications for local congregations in Indonesia and serve as a reference point for future theological and pastoral scholarship. All reflections and recommendations are ultimately directed toward the glorification of God.

Keywords: Jesus' Leadership, Management, Church Ministry, Theological Leadership, Practical Theology

INTRODUCTION

The topics of leadership and management remain central to contemporary discourse in both secular and ecclesial contexts. In the theological realm, Christian leadership and management are not merely institutional roles or administrative functions—they are spiritual callings. A Christian leader is someone chosen, appointed, formed, and commissioned by God to mobilize others toward the fulfillment of divine purposes using God-ordained means and for the glory of God (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011; Yukl, 2013).

Leadership, in its essence, refers to the capacity to influence and direct others toward shared goals (Windarwati et al., 2021). In Christian understanding, leadership extends beyond functional effectiveness; it is inherently spiritual, integrative, and redemptive. A holistic Christian leader does not merely function as an organizational head but embodies and models Christlike character, combining both spiritual authority and practical wisdom in scientific, social, and ecclesial domains (Banks & Ledbetter, 2004; Sanders, 2007).

Christian leadership can be defined as the Spirit-led integration of natural leadership gifts and theological convictions, grounded in dependence on God and aligned with God's redemptive will. Jesus Christ exemplifies this model par excellence. As both divine and incarnate, His leadership reveals a theocentric model that combines servant leadership, transformative vision, and sacrificial love (Greenleaf, 2002; Wright, 2010).

Furthermore, Jesus' role as the divine manager is evident in the cosmic order. Despite the fallenness of creation due to human sin, the universe retains its order and consistency, which testifies to the sustaining power and intricate management of God (Colossians 1:17; cf. Psalm 104). The doctrine of creation mandates human beings to reflect this divine order in stewardship, as articulated in Genesis 1:28–30. Here, the managerial responsibility entrusted

to humankind is grounded in divine image-bearing, thus integrating theology with praxis (Moltmann, 1985; Middleton, 2005).

Therefore, the leadership and management of Jesus should not be viewed as optional ecclesial theories, but as foundational paradigms for church ministry. His life, teachings, and organizational wisdom offer not only a theological blueprint but a transformative model for how ministry should be shaped, sustained, and led in today's complex world.

The Church, in its institutional expression, inevitably functions within an organizational framework. As a divine mandate on earth, the Church requires order, structure, and administration to effectively fulfill its mission. These organizational elements—planning, governance, and resource stewardship—are necessary to ensure the Church operates efficiently and in alignment with its theological purpose as the representative body of Christ in the world (Bosch, 2011; Malphurs, 2013).

In the New Testament, the Church is referred to by the Greek term *ekklesia*, derived from *kaleo*, meaning "to call out." Thus, the Church is understood as a community of those "called out" from the world to belong to God. Another related term, *kuriakē* (from which the word "church" in English evolved), signifies "belonging to the Lord," emphasizing the Church's identity as God's possession (Kittel & Friedrich, 1985).

While the Church is fundamentally a spiritual organism—a communion of believers united in Christ—it also exists as a visible institution embedded within societal structures. From a sociological perspective, the Church functions as a social organization because it comprises individuals who live within a broader civic and cultural context (Weber, 1978; Durkheim, 2001). Therefore, ecclesial life is not isolated from social dynamics; rather, it reflects and engages with them.

This dual nature of the Church—as both *organism* (spiritual body) and *organization* (institutional structure)—requires theological reflection on how leadership and management are to be exercised in faithful obedience to Christ. Jesus, as the founder and head of the Church (Colossians 1:18), modeled leadership that integrated divine authority with servanthood, strategic oversight with spiritual intimacy, and visionary direction with organizational accountability (Frost & Hirsch, 2013).

Thus, understanding Jesus' leadership and management is crucial for framing how the Church—as both sacred community and institutional body—functions in fulfilling its redemptive calling in the world. It must be acknowledged that the contemporary Church is increasingly engaging with the rapid advancements of science and technology. While this openness offers many positive opportunities—especially in communication, administration, and outreach—there is a critical need for discernment to ensure that such innovations remain aligned with the truth of God's Word (Romans 12:2; Colossians 2:8). As observed in various church contexts, the impact of effective leadership and management is evident in both qualitative and quantitative growth. Churches that implement biblically grounded and structurally sound management practices often experience vitality, unity, and missional effectiveness.

Conversely, some congregations remain stagnant, not due to spiritual poverty alone, but largely because of inadequate leadership and organizational structure. In such settings, ecclesial activities are frequently reduced to ritualistic expressions of worship without strategic vision or administrative coherence. Leadership may become overly centralized in a single individual or closed group, lacking transparency, accountability, and systemic governance. As a result, decision-making processes often become subjective, and financial and administrative affairs fall entirely under the informal control of the pastor or senior leader, with minimal organizational checks and balances (Barna, 2020; Ott & Wilson, 2011). This paper seeks to address two core theological and practical concerns: 1) To highlight the critical importance of Jesus' leadership and management model as the theological foundation for church ministry. 2) To analyze, with objective clarity, the foundational principles, purpose, strategy, and character of Jesus' leadership and how they may be contextually applied as a sustainable model for contemporary church governance.

By returning to the leadership paradigm demonstrated by Christ—marked by humility, servant leadership, vision, relational accountability, and spiritual authority—the Church may recover a healthy ecclesiology that is both theologically faithful and organizationally effective. The model of Jesus offers a redemptive alternative to both authoritarianism and organizational chaos, enabling the Church to function as a faithful *ekklesia*—a community called out (*kaleo*) to embody the reign of God in every sphere of life (Matthew 20:25–28; John 13:13–17).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in a naturalistic paradigm, which seeks to understand phenomena within their natural and contextual settings. Given the objective of this study—to explore and interpret the theological understanding and practical application of Jesus' leadership and management as a foundational framework for church ministry—the research adopts a phenomenological method. Phenomenology aims to construct meaning from lived experiences, focusing on how individuals perceive, articulate, and act upon a particular reality based on their subjective interpretations (Creswell, 2013).

The phenomenological approach is particularly suitable for theological and ecclesiological research, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of beliefs, leadership practices, and ministerial behaviors within specific church communities. The core of this method lies in capturing the essence of informants' experiences through direct engagement and interpretative inquiry.

As articulated by Moleong (2019), qualitative research is characterized by several key features: 1) Conducted in natural settings; 2) The researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument; 3) Employs qualitative data gathering methods; 4) Utilizes inductive data analysis; 5) Theoretical development is grounded in the data (grounded theory); 6) Findings are presented in descriptive form; 7) Emphasizes process over outcome; 8) Data collection is guided by a clearly defined focus; 9) Ensures validity through specific credibility criteria; 10) The research design remains flexible and adaptive; 11) Conclusions are negotiated and confirmed collaboratively with participants.

In alignment with the ethnographic method proposed by James Spradley (1980), this study follows twelve systematic steps to ensure comprehensive and culturally sensitive analysis: 1) Selection of key informants; 2) Conducting in-depth interviews; 3) Recording ethnographic fieldnotes; 4) Asking descriptive questions to elicit rich narratives; 5) Performing ethnographic interview analysis; 6) Conducting domain analysis to categorize meaning units; 7) Asking structural questions to reveal internal relationships; 8) Conducting taxonomic analysis to group domains hierarchically; 9) Asking contrast questions to explore differences; 10) Conducting componential analysis to identify attributes; 11) Discovering underlying cultural themes; 12) Writing a coherent and interpretive ethnographic narrative.

Through these methodological steps, the research aims to uncover both the conceptual and practical dimensions of Jesus' model of leadership and management as it is interpreted and embodied within contemporary church ministry. The integration of theological inquiry with qualitative phenomenology ensures that the research remains both theologically grounded and contextually relevant.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

One of the critical findings of this study reveals a theological deficiency in the understanding of leadership and management among church leaders. In many contexts, leadership and organizational administration are mistakenly perceived as solely the result of human effort, skill, or charisma. However, from a biblical and theological standpoint, true leadership—particularly within the Church—is grounded in the sovereign initiative of God.

Leadership and management in the Christian context must be understood not as secular constructs, but as divine callings. God is the originator of leadership; He calls, appoints, shapes, and equips individuals for the task of guiding His people. As emphasized in the biblical narrative, it is God who raises leaders, burdens them with a holy responsibility, and provides both spiritual and material resources necessary to fulfill their calling (Exodus 3:10-12; Jeremiah 1:5; Ephesians 4:11-13).

This theological understanding aligns with the concept of vocational stewardship, wherein leadership is a sacred trust, not a personal achievement (Keller, 2012). According to Wright (2010), Christian leadership is rooted in the *missio Dei*—the mission of God—where leaders serve not as autonomous agents, but as stewards of God's purpose in redemptive history. Thus, leadership in the Church is not to be commodified or politicized but understood as a divine entrustment, given by grace and accountable to God.

Moreover, the theological anthropology of Scripture affirms that humans are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), and this includes the capacity for leadership. However, that capacity must be exercised within the framework of divine calling and submission to Christ's lordship. As Jesus exemplified in His earthly ministry, leadership is not about dominance or personal gain but about servanthood, accountability, and faithful execution of God's will (Mark 10:45; John 13:14-15).

The implication is clear: a robust ecclesiology and healthy church governance must begin with the foundational conviction that leadership and management are divine in origin,

vocational in nature, and accountable in execution. Churches that disconnect leadership from divine calling risk operating within purely human systems, often leading to dysfunction, disunity, and spiritual stagnation (Barentsen, 2011; Van Gelder & Zscheile, 2011).

Understanding the Purpose of Jesus' Leadership and Management as the Foundation for Church Ministry

The findings of this study reveal that the understanding of the purpose of Jesus' leadership and management as the foundation of church ministry remains fragmented and under-integrated. Many church leaders and members demonstrate a partial grasp of the theological purpose of leadership: some understand the truth cognitively but fail to embody it in practice; others act out religious functions without a clear grasp of their theological implications. This disconnect reflects a dual crisis of orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right practice).

The ultimate aim of Jesus' leadership is the glory of God, not the elevation of human status or institutional prestige. As the apostle Paul emphasizes, "whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). In this light, Christian leadership is not goal-oriented in the secular sense but is teleologically oriented toward God's kingdom purposes—executed with divine motives, godly intentions, and Christ-centered methodologies (Wright, 2010; Vanhoozer, 2015).

The dissonance between knowing and doing in church leadership stems from a lack of integration between theology and praxis. As Keller (2012) and Banks & Ledbetter (2004) argue, effective Christian leadership emerges when leaders align their spiritual convictions with practical obedience. Without this integration, the church risks reducing leadership to performance, rather than participation in God's redemptive mission.

Understanding the Strategy of Jesus' Leadership and Management as the Foundation for Church Ministry

The research also uncovers significant gaps in the formulation and implementation of strategic frameworks based on the leadership model of Jesus. Many churches lack a clear theological articulation of strategy, and as a result, fail to implement biblical leadership practices consistently and comprehensively. A major deficiency lies in the absence of total dependence on God, a core strategy exemplified by Jesus Himself, who often withdrew to pray and remained in communion with the Father (Luke 5:16; John 5:19).

The failure to cultivate this dependence can often be attributed to various human factors: educational background, socioeconomic status, leadership experience, and organizational culture. These realities may lead leaders to lean on human strength, pragmatism, or inherited models of control, rather than trusting in divine provision and guidance (Greenleaf, 2002; Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011).

Another neglected strategy is missional engagement with the world. Churches frequently focus inward—prioritizing internal order, tradition, and institutional maintenance—at the expense of external witness. Yet, Jesus' leadership compels the Church to go into the world, becoming "salt and light" (Matthew 5:13–16). This tension reveals a

strategic shortfall: readiness to engage the world is postponed under the pretense of “internal strengthening,” when in fact both internal health and external mission must operate in tandem.

Additionally, the strategy of networking and interdependence remains underdeveloped. Theologically, humanity is created for relational interdependence (*imago Dei* and Trinitarian community), and creation itself reflects a complex web of relational ecology (Genesis 2:18; Romans 12:4–5). The reluctance of churches to engage in collaborative ministry reveals a break from the very fabric of divine design, which calls for synergy and mutual support rather than independence (Van Gelder & Zscheile, 2011; Bosch, 2011).

Recovering a strategic model rooted in Jesus’ leadership means re-establishing the foundations of dependence on God, incarnational engagement with the world, and relational interconnectivity. Only then can the Church live out its identity as a missional and transformational body of Christ.

Understanding the Character of Jesus’ Leadership and Management as the Foundation of Church Ministry

A critical dimension of understanding Jesus’ leadership and management as foundational to church ministry lies in the recognition and embodiment of His character. Contemporary church leadership often suffers from a distorted grasp of true authority, replacing divine truth with contextual or cultural convenience. In contrast, the character of Jesus exemplifies absolute truth, not subject to cultural compromise or legalistic rigidity. As Jesus taught, honoring the Sabbath is meaningless without honoring the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27–28). This distinction exposes a deep weakness in church leadership today—one that prioritizes external forms over internal spiritual alignment.

One of the most challenging yet central characteristics of Jesus’ leadership is humility. Philippians 2:5–8 articulates this vividly: though being in very nature God, Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped but emptied Himself—becoming human, and ultimately a servant. This kenotic model of leadership (from the Greek *kenosis*, meaning “self-emptying”) stands in stark contrast to hierarchical or authoritarian styles often observed in ecclesial structures today (Greenleaf, 2002; Vanhoozer, 2015). Leaders who lack a clear understanding of Christ’s humility struggle to embody servant leadership, resulting in relational distance, pride, and control rather than empowerment.

Another essential component of Jesus’ character is self-control, which governed His actions, especially in emotionally charged situations. Jesus demonstrated righteous indignation—such as when He overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple (Matthew 21:12–13)—yet He never lost mastery over His emotions. His firmness was principled, never reactionary. In contrast, many contemporary church leaders lack emotional discipline, often responding to criticism or stress with defensiveness, manipulation, or dominance. As Paul teaches in Galatians 5:23, self-control is a fruit of the Spirit and a non-negotiable characteristic of godly leadership.

Furthermore, a significant flaw observed in many church leaders is the tendency to lead by command and control, rather than through servant leadership—the hallmark of Jesus’ leadership (John 13:13–17). Jesus consistently modeled leadership as service, challenging worldly norms that equate greatness with dominance. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:26). In Jesus’ model, the needs of others—not institutional self-preservation—take priority. Servant leaders prioritize the flourishing of others, not merely maximizing productivity while minimizing their own sacrifice (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011).

Jesus also embodied a transformational leadership style, particularly in how He confronted corruption and religious manipulation. When Jesus cleansed the temple, He did not merely react emotionally—He prophetically dismantled a religious system that had become an instrument of oppression and exploitation (Matthew 21:12–17). The temple was no longer just a religious site but functioned as the epicenter of political, judicial, and financial control—serving as the executive seat of the High Priest, the legislative authority of the Sanhedrin, and the central bank of Jerusalem (Wright, 2010). Jesus’ actions were a direct challenge to a corrupt, centralized leadership system masked in religiosity.

Therefore, character transformation must be central in church leadership. Any organizational or managerial structure in the church that fails to reflect the character of Christ must be evaluated and, where necessary, reformed. This reformation is not optional—it is essential for aligning the church’s leadership with the will and Word of God. As Barna (2020) and Van Gelder (2007) argue, the greatest threat to the Church is not persecution from without but corruption within—when its leadership no longer reflects the character of Christ it claims to follow.

A Theological Study of Jesus’ Leadership and Management as the Foundation of Church Ministry: A Critical Academic Reflection

Following the in-depth field research on Jesus’ leadership and management as the theological foundation for church ministry, this analysis was structured based on four primary sub-focuses: (1) Understanding the foundational basis of Jesus’ leadership and management; (2) Understanding the purpose of Jesus’ leadership and management; (3) Understanding the strategic approaches of Jesus’ leadership and management; and (4) Understanding the character of Jesus’ leadership and management. The following academic analysis highlights critical weaknesses identified in each of these four dimensions through taxonomic, componential, and thematic analysis.

Interviews revealed several shared convictions regarding leadership origins in the church: leadership is ordained by God (Romans 13:1), rooted in divine sovereignty, and represents a divine mission entrusted to human agents. However, it was also evident that a comprehensive theological understanding of Jesus’ leadership foundation remains underdeveloped. Informants frequently referenced divine election and appointment but lacked integration of the dual theological framework of *opera ad intra* (God’s internal works) and *opera ad extra* (God’s works in the world). This theological gap leads to a fragmented

understanding of divine authority in church governance (Barth, 1958; Vanhoozer, 2015). The purpose of leadership in Jesus' model is fundamentally to glorify God. While respondents noted goals such as maturing the congregation, fostering discipline, and shaping Christlike leaders, these insights remained general and disconnected from practical theological execution. A limited grasp of Christocentric theology contributes to the partial application of these goals. Church leadership often fails to distinguish between moral, scientific, and divine truth. This leads to relativism and anthropocentric approaches rather than God-centered truth, neglecting that all truth is ultimately God's truth (Plantinga, 2002).

The findings suggest that strategic applications are only partially implemented, revealing four critical weaknesses: (a) a lack of absolute dependence on God, as leadership practices often prioritize human capability, education, and institutional frameworks over total reliance on God (Romans 11:36), with prayer and Scripture not fully central in strategic decision-making (Tozer, 2011); (b) a failure to engage the world, as many leaders remain inward-focused despite Jesus' commission for the church to embody salt and light within society (Matthew 5:13–16; John 17:18); (c) insufficient communication and mobilization, where vision-sharing rarely results in concrete action due to weak internalization of the church's mission and lack of mobilization strategies, contrasting with Nehemiah's model of communal participation flowing from visionary clarity (Nehemiah 2:11–18); and (d) the absence of a networking strategy, as ecclesial leadership—though inherently relational and interdependent—often fails to foster partnerships with other churches, societal structures, and governmental institutions despite the theological imperative for collaborative kingdom work (Bosch, 1991).

Weaknesses in the Character of Jesus' Leadership and Management

Interviews identified several core traits associated with Jesus' leadership—love, faithfulness, readiness, composure, and integrity—yet also revealed gaps in spiritual maturity, including: (a) truth-centeredness, as some leaders substitute human wisdom or cultural norms for the eternal truth that grounded Jesus' leadership (Matthew 24:35), resulting in doctrinal inconsistency; (b) humility, since the kenosis of Jesus (Philippians 2:5–8) is seldom embodied by leaders who resist input from those with less status or education; (c) self-control, where deficient emotional regulation undermines crisis leadership despite its role as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23); (d) servant leadership, as certain leaders adopt authoritative models contrary to Jesus' example of service (John 13:13–17); (e) humility regarding praise, given that Jesus rejected insincere praise (Luke 18:18) while some leaders attribute success to personal ability rather than Christ; (f) inspirational leadership, which weakens when leaders' actions do not align with their words; (g) motivational impact, as leaders fail to motivate due to unrestrained speech or attitudes despite Jesus' ability to inspire without formal credentials; (h) transformational leadership, which falters when leaders who have not experienced inner renewal attempt to lead change; (i) mobilizational leadership, where lack of doctrinal unity hinders efforts to train and deploy disciples as Jesus did; and (j)

mentorship and pastoral care, which fall short when leaders—unlike Jesus who discipled the marginalized without bias—neglect mentoring due to time constraints or favoritism.

CONCLUSION

This theological investigation reveals significant shortcomings in the Church's appropriation and implementation of Jesus' model of leadership and management. Drawing on theoretical reflection and empirical analysis—including taxonomic, componential, and thematic evaluation—the study identifies uneven comprehension and insufficient internalization of Jesus' leadership as the foundational weakness, indicating the need for a comprehensive and continuous process of formation that deepens theological awareness, integrates Christ's leadership into ecclesial structures, and applies it contextually for the glory of the Triune God. Moreover, the Church has yet to fully embed Jesus' leadership within its life, as evidenced by weak foundational and teleological understanding, ineffective strategic execution—marked by inadequate dependence on God, limited engagement with the world, ineffective communication and mobilization, underdeveloped collaboration, insufficient integration of prudence and sincerity, and resistance to sacrificial decision-making—and a deficient embodiment of Jesus' character in truth, humility, self-control, servant leadership, freedom from vainglory, inspirational integrity, and various forms of developmental leadership. These deficits stem from a fragmented theological formation that fails to align ecclesial leadership with the mind of Christ, thereby undermining both the qualitative and quantitative growth of the congregation. Consequently, the Church must cultivate leadership formation processes that reflect the theological, strategic, and pastoral dimensions of Jesus' ministry through socialization, mobilization, doctrinal instruction, leadership training, missional commissioning, and pastoral mentoring. Given its substantial spiritual resources and redemptive potential, the Church is uniquely positioned to embody a Christocentric leadership and management model—one that revitalizes ecclesial life and witness and reaffirms the Church's identity as the Body of Christ, called to serve the world for God's glory and the advancement of His Kingdom.

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