

# The Contribution of Sociology to Church Leadership: Promoting Social Justice and Unity in the Christian Community

**Bobby Kurnia Putrawan**

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: [bkputrawan@gmail.com](mailto:bkputrawan@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** This article explores the contribution of sociology to church leadership, particularly in promoting social justice and unity within the Christian community. Sociology plays a crucial role in understanding the social structures, relationships, and dynamics that exist within a church, and how these influence leadership practices. The purpose of this research is to examine how sociological principles can be applied to enhance church leadership, fostering an inclusive environment where justice and equality are central. The research employs a qualitative approach using library research, analyzing theological and sociological texts, with a specific focus on the role of sociology in leadership practices within the church. The findings show that sociology helps church leaders understand social interactions and group dynamics, enabling them to address social inequalities and promote unity within the congregation.

**Contribution:** This article contributes by highlighting the significant role of sociology in enhancing church leadership, particularly in fostering social justice and unity. It offers insights into how sociological principles can be applied to address social issues and improve relationships within the church community.

**Keywords:** sociology; church leadership; social justice; Christian community

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership within the context of the church plays a crucial role in guiding the congregation toward a life that aligns with Christ's teachings. Church leadership is not just about managing religious activities but also involves how a leader can create a harmonious and loving social environment. According to Arifin,<sup>1</sup> leadership is a process that involves influencing group members to achieve common goals within an organization. These goals are not only related to administrative management but also

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<sup>1</sup> Syamsul Arifin. *Leadership Ilmu Dan Seni Kepemimpinan*. (Jakarta: Mitra Wacana Media, 2012), 45.

encompass deep spiritual and social aspects.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, church leaders must understand how sociology plays a role in shaping social dynamics within the church.<sup>3</sup>

Sociology, as a discipline studying society and social interactions, plays a significant role in shaping church leadership systems. Kamanto<sup>4</sup> explains that sociology focuses on understanding social structures, norms, and relationships between individuals within a social group. In the church context, sociology helps church leaders understand how relationships among the congregation and other social factors influence leadership performance and effectiveness. Through this approach, the church can strengthen social bonds among its members and treat everyone fairly, regardless of their social status.

Moreover, the concept of social justice, an integral part of church leadership, cannot be separated from sociology.<sup>5</sup> Babbie<sup>6</sup> argues that sociology provides tools for analyzing social inequality and finding solutions to address these disparities within society. In the church, social justice is translated through inclusive leadership policies that support not only specific individuals but the entire church congregation, irrespective of their social or economic background. Thus, sociology helps church leaders identify the differences within their community and respond appropriately to these issues.

A concrete example of applying sociology in church leadership is managing social relationships among congregational members from diverse backgrounds. Bekker<sup>7</sup> emphasizes that in the context of Christian leadership, it is essential for leaders to understand the social roles of their congregation and the group dynamics that can affect their interactions. Therefore, church leaders need to develop strong social skills to maintain harmonious relationships and address conflicts that may arise due to social differences.

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<sup>2</sup> Miftah Thoha. *Kepemimpinan Dalam Manajemen*. (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2007), 14-18.

<sup>3</sup> Yakob Tomatala, *Kepemimpinan Yang Dinamis* (Jakarta: YT Leadership Foundation, 1997), 9-12.

<sup>4</sup> Sunarto Kamanto, *Pengantar Sosiologi*. (Jakarta: Lembaga Penerbit Fakultas Ekonomi, Universitas Indonesia, 2004), 72.

<sup>5</sup> O.K. Deborah, "Strategic Leadership: Its Integration with the Church Leadership." *Journal of Sociology, Psychology & Religious Studies*, 1, no. 1 (2018): 31-40.  
<https://www.stratfordjournals.com/journals/index.php/Journal-of-Sociology-Psychology/article/view/230>.

<sup>6</sup> Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Centage Learning, 2013), 119.

<sup>7</sup> Corne J. Bekker, "Towards a theoretical model of Christian leadership." *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, 2, 2 (2009): 142-152.

Additionally, sociology helps church leaders understand how social change impacts the church and how the church can respond to these changes. According to Banks et al.,<sup>8</sup> social changes often introduce new challenges within organizations, including the church, which require leaders to adapt quickly to these changes. Church leaders who understand these social dynamics can manage the church more effectively, respond to social changes with relevant and wise policies, and ensure the church remains relevant to the evolving society.

On the other hand, one of sociology's main functions in church leadership is to create unity among the congregation. In increasingly polarized societies, unity presents a unique challenge. Copeland<sup>9</sup> argues that ethical and authentic leadership is crucial to maintaining social cohesion within an organization, including the church.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, church leaders who apply sociological principles in their leadership can create a more inclusive environment where all members feel valued and accepted, regardless of the existing differences.

Sociology contributes to understanding and addressing social issues that arise within the church. Dhiman and Roberts<sup>11</sup> state that church leaders must have a thorough understanding of social dynamics and how these influence the lives of their congregation. For example, the church may face issues such as social discrimination or inequality, and leaders who are sensitive to these social issues can lead more justly and support inclusivity. Through the application of sociological principles, the church can become a more just and harmonious place for all its members.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method, aimed at understanding and analyzing the contribution of sociology to church leadership,

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<sup>8</sup> George C. Banks, Kelly Davis McCauley, William L. Gardner, & Courtney E. Guler. "A meta-analytic review of authentic and transformational leadership: A test for redundancy." *Leadership Quarterly*, 27, no. 4 (2016): 639. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.006>.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Kay Copeland. "The impact of authentic, ethical, transformational leadership on leader effectiveness." *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics*, 13, no. 3 (2016): 84. [https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/business\\_facpub/38](https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/business_facpub/38).

<sup>10</sup> Maureen Miner & G. Bickerton. "A New Model of Christian Leadership: Insights from the Job Demands-Resources Model and Trinitarian Theology." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 48, no. 4 (2020): 276-291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091647120908010>.

<sup>11</sup> Satinder K. Dhiman & Gary E. Roberts. 2023. "Prolegomenon." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Servant Leadership*. Edited by Satinder K. Dhiman and Gary E. Roberts. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan), xvii.

particularly in promoting social justice and unity within the Christian community. According to Sugiyono,<sup>12</sup> qualitative methods focus on the collection of descriptive and inductive data, aiming to explore the underlying meaning behind existing social phenomena. This study also uses the analysis of theological and sociological texts related to church leadership, social interaction, and relevant sociological theories. Furthermore, this approach allows the author to delve deeper into the application of sociological principles in church life, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of social dynamics in the context of church leadership. Therefore, this method is ideal for exploring a complex and interdisciplinary topic, as discussed in this study.

As part of this methodology, the author uses data collection techniques through library research to seek relevant sources, including books, articles, and academic journals discussing sociology and church leadership. In this research, references used include works such as *Introduction to Sociology* by Kamanto,<sup>13</sup> which provides a foundational understanding of sociology in society, as well as other works discussing leadership theory in a Christian context.<sup>14</sup> Data collection is conducted by exploring various literature related to church sociology, spiritual leadership, and social influence within the church. Through document analysis, the author categorizes and reduces the data to identify patterns relevant to the research goal, namely how sociology can support church leadership in creating a more just and harmonious community.<sup>15</sup>

## RESULTS

### Sociology and Church Leadership

This section provides an in-depth understanding of sociological theories relevant to church leadership and social interaction within the Christian community. According to Soekanto,<sup>16</sup> sociology is the study of relationships between individuals and society, as well as the interactions between social groups within society. In the context of the church, sociology helps map the social dynamics between congregants and the role of church

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<sup>12</sup> Sugiyono. *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif, Untuk Penelitian Yg Bersifat Eksploratif, Enterpretif, Interaktif Dan Konstruksi (MPK)*. (Bandung: Alfa Beta, 2022), 38.

<sup>13</sup> Sunarto Kamanto, *Pengantar Sosiologi*, 60.

<sup>14</sup> Bons-Storm, Maria. *Apakah Penggembalaan Itu?* (Jakarta: Gunung Mulia, 1982), 93; Godwin A. Etukumana. "Servant-Leadership as a Model for Christian Community: A Subversive Rhetoric and Ideology in Luke 22:23-27" *Religions*, 15, no. 4 (2024): 391. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040391>.

<sup>15</sup> Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 121.

<sup>16</sup> Soerjono Soekanto, *Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar*. (Depok: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2017), 15.

leaders in fostering harmonious relationships.<sup>17</sup> Sociology plays a key role in exploring how social interactions within the church can contribute to the formation of positive social values such as social justice and unity. Therefore, sociological studies provide a strong foundation for church leaders to better understand and manage their communities more effectively.

Sociology focuses on observing the social structures present in society, including those within the church. According to Kamanto,<sup>18</sup> social structure refers to the patterns of relationships that exist within a social group, in this case, the church. Structuralism in sociology assumes that each element in society plays a specific role that is interconnected, and a change in one element can influence others. Therefore, church leaders must understand the existing social structure in order to lead wisely, direct positive change, and resolve social tensions that may arise among congregants. Both formal and informal social structures within the church play a significant role in creating harmony and justice within that community.<sup>19</sup>

According to Babbie,<sup>20</sup> social interaction is at the core of sociology, focusing on how individuals and groups relate to one another. In the church, social interaction between leaders and congregants is crucial for creating an atmosphere conducive to spiritual and social growth. Healthy social interactions between church leaders and members can strengthen relationships and reduce potential conflicts. Furthermore, social interaction within the church also involves good communication, which can promote transparency and a deeper understanding of the social justice principles upheld in Christ's teachings. Therefore, church leaders who understand the dynamics of social interaction can create a more inclusive and harmonious community.

Sociology also studies social changes that occur within society, which is highly relevant in the context of the church, which often faces challenges in adapting to changing times.<sup>21</sup> According to de Sousa and van Dierendonck,<sup>22</sup> social changes in society can

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<sup>17</sup> Fredian Tonny Nasdian, ed. *Sosiologi Umum*. (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2015), 5-7.

<sup>18</sup> Sunarto Kamanto, *Pengantar Sosiologi*, 72.

<sup>19</sup> Scott C. Whiteford & Natasha M. Ganem. 2015. "Is There Such a Things as 'A Sociology of Leadership?'" *Work in Progress*, October 27, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 55.

<sup>21</sup> J.B.A.F. Mayor Polak. *Sosiologi Suatu Buku Pengantar Ringkas*. (Jakarta: Ichtiar Baru, 1979), 121.

<sup>22</sup> de Sousa, Milton Jorge & Dirk van Dierendonck. "Servant leadership and engagement in a merge process under high uncertainty." *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 2, no. 6 (2014): 878, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-07-2013-0133>.

impact social organizations, including the church, and require leaders who are adaptive and responsive to these changes. The church, as a social institution, cannot avoid the social changes occurring in its surrounding society, whether in structure, norms, or values. Church leaders who understand and wisely respond to these social changes will be able to maintain the church's relevance in societal life and strengthen the congregation's commitment to Christ's teachings.

### **Social Justice for the Church and Unity within the Christian Community**

One important concept in church leadership is service, which can be understood through the sociological approach to leadership that focuses on service. Etukumana in his research shows that servant leadership emphasizes empowering others and involves caring for their needs and well-being.<sup>23</sup> This concept is closely related to Jesus' teachings, who came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45). Therefore, church leaders who adopt the principles of servant leadership will be more successful in creating a church community that is caring and loving, as well as promoting social justice for all members of the congregation, especially those who are marginalized.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of church leadership, social justice is an aspect that must be given significant attention. According to Dhiman and Roberts,<sup>25</sup> social justice refers to the fair distribution of resources, rights, and opportunities for all members of society, regardless of social, economic, or cultural background. In the church, leaders must play the role of agents of change who can address injustices and advocate for the rights of the marginalized. Therefore, church leadership should not only focus on spiritual matters but also on social issues within the congregation. Church leaders who are sensitive to social injustice can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all members of the church.

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<sup>23</sup> Godwin A. Etukumana. "Servant-Leadership as a Model for Christian Community: A Subversive Rhetoric and Ideology in Luke 22:23-27", 390-392; Andrey V. Shirin. "Is servant leadership inherently Christian?" *Journal of Religion and Business Ethics*, 3 (2014): a13. <http://via.library.depaul.edu/jrbe/vol3/iss1/13>.

<sup>24</sup> Jonar T.H. Situmorang. *Eklesiologi, Gereja Yang Kelihatan Dan Tak Kelihatan: Dipanggil Dan Dikuduskan Untuk Memberitakan Karya Penyelamatan Kristus*. (Yogyakarta: Penerbit ANDI, 2016), 20-24; Hwa Yung. *Leadership or Servanthood? Walking in the Steps of Jesus* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2021); Andrey V. Shirin. "Is servant leadership inherently Christian?" *Journal of Religion and Business Ethics*, 3 (2014): a13.

<sup>25</sup> Satinder K. Dhiman & Gary E. Roberts. "Prolegomenon", xvii.

According to Whiteford and Ganem,<sup>26</sup> sociology also helps in understanding social problems that arise within the church, such as internal conflicts or social tensions between members. These social issues often arise due to differences in viewpoints, social status, or inequality in the distribution of power. Therefore, church leaders who are knowledgeable in sociology can be more effective in resolving these conflicts with a just and wise approach. By understanding the root causes of social problems in the church, leaders can provide appropriate solutions to maintain unity and harmony within the congregation and promote social justice in church life.

## DISCUSSION

### The Application of Sociology in Church Leadership

Church leadership plays a central role in shaping the social structure and culture within the Christian community. As explained by Kamanto,<sup>27</sup> sociology provides an understanding of how elements in society interact and form a structure that can influence the actions of individuals and groups. In the church, this social structure includes the relationship between leaders and congregants, as well as the dynamics among congregants themselves. Therefore, sociology is crucial for understanding how church leaders can manage and facilitate harmonious social relationships. Sociology provides tools to observe social interactions within the church and encourages the creation of fairer and more inclusive relationships.

Sociology focuses on how individuals interact within society and form the norms that guide their social actions. According to Babbie,<sup>28</sup> social interaction between individuals and groups in the church plays a vital role in creating social cohesion. These social interactions include communication between church leaders and congregants, as well as interactions between congregants. In this context, church leaders who understand social dynamics can be more effective in strengthening unity and mutual understanding among church members.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, applying sociological principles in church leadership will help create a more open and inclusive environment.

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<sup>26</sup> Scott C. Whiteford & Natasha M. Ganem. 2015. "Is There Such a Things as 'A Sociology of Leadership?'"

<sup>27</sup> Sunarto Kamanto, *Pengantar Sosiologi* (Jakarta: Lembaga Penerbit Fakultas Ekonomi, Universitas Indonesia, 2004), 71-74.

<sup>28</sup> Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 120.

<sup>29</sup> Hwa Yung, *Leadership or Servanthood? Walking in the Steps of Jesus*, 47-49.

## **Social Justice in the Church**

One of sociology's greatest contributions to church leadership is its ability to map social injustice that may exist within the church community. Dhiman and Roberts<sup>30</sup> revealed that social justice is not only focused on economic issues but also includes social issues related to the status and position of individuals within society. In the church context, this is reflected in how church leaders handle inequalities among congregants and ensure fair treatment for all members, regardless of their social background. Therefore, sociology can help church leaders detect and address social injustice and create a more egalitarian environment.

The role of church leadership in promoting social justice is critical, especially in socially diverse communities. According to Kessler and Kretzschmar,<sup>31</sup> the church must understand and appreciate the diversity within its congregation and respond to social injustice with policies that support equality. This includes giving special attention to marginalized groups, such as those from low economic backgrounds or those with different social status. Thus, church leaders must have a profound understanding of the principles of social justice that can be applied to create equality within the church.

## **Social Interaction and Congregational Dynamics**

Social interaction within the church plays a crucial role in creating an environment that supports harmony and unity. Sociology, as the study of human interaction, provides valuable insights into managing relationships among congregants.<sup>32</sup> Church leaders who understand these dynamics can encourage more positive interactions among congregants, both in worship and in other social activities. Moreover, good social interactions can strengthen the emotional and spiritual bonds between church leaders and congregants, which in turn will reinforce unity in the church.

As explained by Polak,<sup>33</sup> social interactions can also involve conflicts and tensions that occur within social groups, including the church. Therefore, church leaders who understand social interaction theories will be better prepared to resolve conflicts that may arise among congregants. For example, tensions may emerge due to differing

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<sup>30</sup> Satinder K. Dhiman & Gary E. Roberts. "Prolegomenon", xvi-xvii.

<sup>31</sup> Volker Kessler & Louise Kretzschmar. "Christian Leadership as a trans-disciplinary field of study." *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36, no. 1 (2015): 6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/VE.V36I1.1334>.

<sup>32</sup> Soerjono Soekanto, *Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar*, 30.

<sup>33</sup> J.B.A.F. Mayor Polak. *Sosiologi Suatu Buku Pengantar Ringkas*, 121.

opinions or preferences in worship practices, which require church leaders to manage these differences wisely. Church leaders knowledgeable in sociology can facilitate dialogue and reconcile conflicts, maintaining unity within the congregation without compromising the principles of social justice.<sup>34</sup>

### **Church Leadership Theory in a Social Context**

Church leadership is not only about spiritual aspects but also about how a church leader can influence social change within their community. Enns<sup>35</sup> states that leadership in the church should be seen as part of a larger social change, with leaders acting as agents of change. For example, church leaders can encourage the congregation to participate in social activities that support community welfare, such as poverty relief programs or educational development. Thus, church leadership must also encompass social aspects, aligning with Christ's teachings to serve others.

According to Judkins and Mundy-Judkins,<sup>36</sup> effective church leaders not only focus on managing the internal church but also play a role in shaping a better society outside of the church. Church leadership that addresses social issues will function more as agents of transformation within the Christian community. Therefore, sociology provides a strong foundation for understanding social change and how the church can engage in this process.

### **Service-Based Leadership**

Service is at the core of church leadership that aligns with Jesus' teachings, who came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45). According to Yung,<sup>37</sup> church leadership must be based on the principle of serving the congregation's needs holistically, both spiritually and socially. Church leaders who adopt the principle of servant leadership will be more effective in building a caring and supportive church community. This service extends beyond spiritual needs to include attention to the physical and social well-being

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<sup>34</sup> Michelle Oyakawa. "Racial Reconciliation as a Suppressive Frame in Evangelical Multiracial Churches." *Sociology of Religion*, 80, no. 4 (2019)P 496–517. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srz003>.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Enns. *Moody Handbook of Theology Revised and Expanded 1* (Malang: Literatur SAAT, 2019), 112.

<sup>36</sup> Bennett M. Judkins & Karen Mundy-Judkins. "Toward a More Socially Aware and Active Christian Faith." *Journal of Sociology and Christianity*, 11, no. 1 (2021): 57.

<https://sociologyandchristianity.org/index.php/jsc/article/view/117>.

<sup>37</sup> Hwa Yung. *Leadership or Servanthood? Walking in the Steps of Jesus*, 87.

of the congregation.<sup>38</sup> By applying sociological principles in service-based leadership, the church can create an inclusive and supportive environment for all its members.

Sociology also helps church leaders identify and understand the social needs of their congregants, which are often not immediately visible. According to Etukumana,<sup>39</sup> service-based leadership requires church leaders to have a deep understanding of the social challenges their congregants face. For example, church leaders must be sensitive to social inequalities that may exist within the church, such as discrimination or disparities in the distribution of church resources. Therefore, church leaders who understand these social dynamics will be more capable of providing fair and equitable service to all members of the congregation.

### **The Influence of Sociology on Unity within the Church**

Sociology also provides valuable insights into the importance of unity within the church.<sup>40</sup> According to de Sousa and van Dierendonck,<sup>41</sup> effective church leadership can create strong social bonds among congregants, which in turn strengthens unity within the church. This is especially important in increasingly polarized societies, where the church often becomes the only place where different social groups can meet and interact peacefully. With an understanding of sociology, church leaders can create a safe and inclusive space for all members, promoting unity among them without ignoring existing differences.

Effective church leadership, according to Whiteford and Ganem,<sup>42</sup> can also help address social polarization within the church and strengthen the bonds among congregants. Church leaders who understand sociological theories about social groups and interactions between individuals can guide the congregation to address existing differences, both in theological and social aspects. Therefore, church leaders who are sensitive to these social dynamics will be more effective in maintaining unity and

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<sup>38</sup> Andrey V. Shirin. "Is servant leadership inherently Christian?", a13.

<sup>39</sup> Godwin A. Etukumana. "Servant-Leadership as a Model for Christian Community: A Subversive Rhetoric and Ideology in Luke 22:23-27", 388-392.

<sup>40</sup> Maureen Miner & G. Bickerton. "A New Model of Christian Leadership: Insights from the Job Demands-Resources Model and Trinitarian Theology", 276-291.

<sup>41</sup> de Sousa, Milton Jorge & Dirk van Dierendonck. "Servant leadership and engagement in a merge process under high uncertainty", 878.

<sup>42</sup> Scott C. Whiteford & Natasha M. Ganem. 2015. "Is There Such a Things as 'A Sociology of Leadership?"; Yakob Tomatala, *Kepemimpinan Yang Dinamis*, 9-12.

harmony within the congregation and encouraging them to work together to build a more just and peaceful community.

## CONCLUSION

This article highlights the importance of applying sociological principles in church leadership, particularly in promoting social justice and unity among congregants. Sociology plays a role in understanding social structures, interactions between individuals and groups, and the dynamics of social change that affect the church as a community. By understanding these social phenomena, church leaders can create a more inclusive and just environment where every congregant is treated equally, regardless of their social, economic, or cultural background. Effective church leadership focuses not only on spiritual matters but also on social issues, considering the church as a place where social values such as love, justice, and unity should be realized in the lives of its members.

Through a sociological approach, the church can respond to various social challenges that arise within their community, such as social discrimination or inequality. Service-based leadership, as taught by Jesus, can better address these social issues. Church leaders who integrate an understanding of sociology into their leadership will be more capable of creating a harmonious community, resolving internal conflicts, and providing fair and equitable service to all members of the congregation. Therefore, the application of sociology in church leadership has great potential to strengthen the church's role as a social change agent that supports justice, unity, and peace within the Christian community.

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