

## Christian Morality and Social Inequality: A Contextual Study of the Crisis of Public Trust in People's Representatives

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this contextual theology-based study is to analyze the leadership character transformation embedded in Christian ethical values, particularly in preventing corruption, upholding justice, and building institutional trust. Through a qualitative study with philosophical textual analysis and selected case studies, this study reveals that persistent social inequality is often maintained by a system that exploits political power legitimation. Meanwhile, religious institutions, particularly churches, which play a crucial role in shaping the character of leaders with faith-based integrity, are still struggling with both internal and external challenges. The findings of this study showed that leadership transformation based on Christian morality should not merely focus on individual transformation but also systemic, which requires a reconciliation between Gospel values and contemporary democratic practices.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Social inequality has become a major issue in the development of social politics in Indonesia. The uneven economic growth situation, limited employment, disparities in access to education, and welfare are the sources of a crisis of public trust in the state, especially the people's representatives. One form of this dissatisfaction is a crisis of trust in the people's representatives, which is often associated with the perception of corruption, nepotism, abuse of authority, and the unresponsiveness of the people's representatives in responding to the needs of the people. This phenomenon is reflected in various national surveys that show that legislative institutions occupy a low position in the level of public trust compared to other state institutions, the Transparency International Indonesia report in 2024 states that public perception of corruption in parliament is still very high, with Indonesia's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score only reaching 37/100 points and ranked 99 out of 180 countries surveyed. Based on these figures, it shows the massive abuse of authority, power, collusion and social injustice in Indonesia.

Viewed from a religious perspective, Christian morality offers values such as responsibility, honesty, service, and justice that can be a benchmark for the formation of ethical public character. The Church as God's representative on earth has a strategic opportunity to respond to social inequality and restore public trust through moral and social development. A survey by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in February 2025 shows that the number of unemployed in Indonesia will reach 7.28 million people, amounting to 4.76% of the total labor force of 153.05 million people. This figure has increased compared to the previous period, although the labor force participation rate and the number of workers have grown. Inequality in income and employment opportunities also exacerbates public dissatisfaction. The average wage of workers of 3.09 million rupiah per month as of February 2025 shows that many workers still struggle to meet basic needs, especially for those who live in areas with a high cost of living.

This situation shows that there is an inequality between the ideal of morality and the religiosity of political actors. In political ethics, morality should be prioritized as the basis for public decision-making. However, in practice, many political actors are trapped in political pragmatism by only attaching importance to their personal and group interests. This condition triggers a big question: where should the role of moral values, especially Christian values, be the differentiator in guiding the moral direction of the nation's life?

This research is based on the assumption that the moral crisis that has hit the political world can only be overcome through character renewal that comes from Christian moral values. The recovery process requires not only institutional changes, but also profound transformations in the dimensions of the human heart and consciousness. In the framework of this theological study, it emphasizes the role of Christian morality as a prophetic force in responding to social disparities and the anxiety of public trust in the people's representatives. In particular, this paper illustrates how the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the Christian faith can encourage the active participation of the people in building a more just and civilized society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Social inequality has become a major issue in the development of social politics in Indonesia. The uneven economic growth situation, limited employment, disparities in access to education, and welfare are the sources of a crisis of public trust in the state, especially the people's representatives. Viewed from a religious perspective, Christian morality offers values such as responsibility, honesty, service, and justice that can be a benchmark for the formation of ethical public character. The Church as God's representative on earth has a strategic opportunity to respond to social inequality and restore public trust through moral and social development.

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a contextual case study design to explore the relationship between Christian morality and social inequality in the context of a crisis of public trust in people's representatives. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena through the interpretation of descriptive and narrative data. In addition, this study also integrates the literature study method by examining scientific journals and relevant documents that have been published previously to enrich the analysis and strengthen the theoretical foundation of the research. This documentation study approach is in line with the method proposed by Zaluchu, which emphasizes the importance of literature review as a secondary data source in social research to systematically examine the development of previous thoughts and findings.

## RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Christian Morality as the Foundation for Leadership Character Transformation*

Christian morality, in the biblical tradition, is not just a collection of ethical rules, but a living religiosity of faith and a communion with Jesus Christ that composes the structure of the human heart from within. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul states that believers are a "new creation" which means that their lives belonging to the social and political dimension must reflect a new life inspired by the Holy Spirit. From this perspective, morality is the fruit of the involvement of faith, not simply the result of a code of conduct. Yewangoe, a senior theologian from the Fellowship of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) emphasized that faith that does not move in the social space is a faith that dies in transformation. He called for the church to be present not only at the altar, but also in public spaces such as parliament, markets, and other strategic institutions as a witness to the values of the kingdom of God.

Today's crisis of trust in the people's representatives can be seen as a call for Christians to dare to step out of their comfort zone and take a proactive moral position. This courage is not a form of political ambition, but a form of realistic witness of faith by seeking truth, upholding justice, and rejecting corruption as a form of rejection of moral deception. Dr. Stephen Tong in one of his theological sermons affirmed that faith without social deeds is intangible faith. True faith will give birth to honesty and moral responsibility in every area of life, including politics.

In the midst of the Indonesian context which is still strongly influenced by religious values in social life, the value of faith should be a strong ethical foundation in carrying out social responsibility. Research by Ming et al, proves that Christian leaders in Indonesia often face intensive pressure from political dynamics, an economic system that is prone to corruption, and a culture of collusion that has been cultured in the social structure. However, the study also shows that the integrity that grows from a personal relationship with Christ and a deep commitment to the teachings of the Bible can form a service-based leadership style that in turn becomes a transformative force for the surrounding community.

Based on the findings of the study, Christian leadership with integrity not only rejects corrupt practices, but is also active in promoting structural justice and improving social welfare as a concrete expression of God's love in the public sphere. Thus, Christian morality is not limited to private space or personal religiosity but has a prominent social and political dimension, potentially becoming a transformative force in rebuilding public trust in state institutions and leaders. Furthermore, Siagian and Arifianto, emphasized that the revitalization of Christian values is not only a matter of applying religious teachings in a dogmatic manner, but also a deep understanding of the real political context. They emphasized that Christian ethics should be a guide for public policy and elect leaders who are not only popular but have the character of integrity. Thus, Christians are called not only to criticize from the outside, but to actively apply these values in local and national politics so that public trust in the people's representatives can be restored.

Thus, Christian morality becomes the epistemological and ontological foundation for the formation of dignified leadership character. When God's people live in honesty, discipline, and devotion to justice. They are planting the seeds of change rooted in social justice and empowered living. The Church must play the role of a center of ethical political education by strengthening the presence of the faithful through training in moral theology, public ethics, and political literacy so that every decision taken by a representative of the people is not based only on the calculation of power, but on the transcendental presence of the values of the kingdom of God.

### ***Biblical Theological Reflections and the Implications of Praxism for the Church***

The teachings of the Bible constitute an undeniable norm for a Christian's involvement in social and political affairs. Micah 6:8 states: "O man, it has been told you what is good. And what does the LORD require of you: besides being just, loving faithfulness, and living humbly before your God?". These three demands of God to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to live humbly serve as conceptual and practical guidelines for every faithful public leader. Justice demands a rejection of discrimination, structural inequality, and policies that oppress vulnerable groups. Loyalty requires every leader to be loyal to the public trust, not to personal interests or elite groups. Meanwhile, humility reminds us that leadership should not be rooted in ambition, power, or domination, but in mutual respect and voluntary service. In the plural Indonesian context, the presence of Christians in the public sphere is not a form of religious domination, but a form of transformative service for justice and social peace. When the people dare to be a light in the midst of darkness through an example of honest living, high integrity, and a commitment to justice, they are rebuilding public trust that has long eroded.

### ***Required Strategies***

In the context of shifting social values and declining public trust in political institutions in Indonesia, a systemic approach is needed that focuses not only on improving its structure, but also on restoring the moral and spiritual dimensions that are at the root of dignified public life. Based on an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of Christian leadership in the political sphere, as well as theological reflections on the church's involvement in the social world, a number of holistic and faith-rooted transformational strategies can be prioritized.

*First*, it is necessary to program the development of Christian character that is consistent and sustainable, not only in the form of weekly services, but within the framework of tiered moral education. Intensive theological retreats, Bible-based public ethics classes with thematic approaches (e.g., social justice, honesty in government, management of power), as well as discipleship programs that include critical discussions of everyday political realities, are able to form solid moral insights. The key is to transform faith from a mere personal experience into a concrete ethical commitment, one that encourages the faithful to be courageous in action, even when it involves social or institutional risks.

*Second*, ecumenical and cross-sectoral collaboration must be enhanced into a systemic strategic partnership. The Church, regardless of denomination, must be a bridge between the universal values of Christianity and progressive social movements, involving academics, anti-corruption NGOs, non-profit media, and civil society organizations. This collaboration not only strengthens partiality towards justice, but also creates an independent, transparent, and morality-based public oversight mechanism. A joint forum such as the "Christian Public Integrity Consortium" can be a strategic forum for evaluating public policy, voicing the needs of the people, and pushing for ethical institutional reform.

*Third*, the liturgy of the church must be renewed as a space for a lively moral narrative and social criticism. Worship should not only be a formal ritual, but a medium of structural confession, intercession for the persecuted, and the experience of faith practiced. Worship-raising themes for social service such as "Service as a Covenant with God" or "Justice as Holiness" can be a bridge between personal holiness and social responsibility. Liturgy that touches on social realities also creates a space of collective regret, where the church acknowledges its role in allowing corruption to flourish in the local environment.

*Fourth*, practical learning is needed through a Christian ethical political school curriculum that teaches democratic mechanisms, regional budget-making processes, local legislation implementation procedures, and participatory advocacy skills. The congregation does not need to be officials, but must be aware, critical, and empathetic citizens. With this training, they are not just passive voters, but actors in the public decision-making process.

*Fifth*, the church's public audit forum must be used as a micro-democracy space. Local churches serve as centers for ethical information and transparency, providing access to representative performance data, organizing hands-on question-and-answer sessions, and encouraging community participation in policy oversight. This affirms the principle of *servant leadership* in a practical form.

*Finally*, it is necessary to build a moral measurement and evaluation system based on real social indicators such as a decrease in corruption reports at the village level, an increase in public satisfaction with public services, and an increase in citizen participation in supervisory forums that are openly published by the church as a form of moral commitment.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From a theological perspective, the success of faith-rooted social transformation is determined not only by structure, but by the doctrine of man being created in the image of God (Lev. 1:27) and the task of his work in the world (Gen. 2:15). The crisis of public trust is not only a matter of policy or institution, but a crisis of our collective faith that we have forgotten that government is a service, not a possession. Christ, the lowest Leader, holds the principle that "whoever wants to be first must be servant of all" (Mark 10:44). Therefore, Christian value-based leadership is not about power, but about sacrifice, justice, and respectful relationships. We are not fighting for "power in the name of God", but moral influence born of sincerity of faith.

From the point of view of spiritual theology, the church is called not only to save the soul, but also to save the world in a figurative and concrete sense by becoming a community that becomes the presence of God's love in the public sphere. The silent church not only ignores the call, but also supports a corrupt system. Moral renewal cannot be delayed; It is a form of theological obligation. When Christians are united in consistent ethical action, they become living witnesses of faith, demonstrating that the values of Christ are not just spiritual idealism, but the practical foundation for a just and civilized national life.

The strategic implication of this is that the entire existence of the church from worship, education, to social activities must be part of the process of social transformation. Without it, the church is only a place of worship, not a community of change. We don't need to be a political party, but we need to be a community that rebuilds trust in institutions by showing how strong faith is in public life.

In the end, the hope for this nation is not only in the system, but in a change of heart that can only begin with personal repentance, expand to collective courage, and form a moral culture that grows from a relationship with God. If these strategies are carried out consistently and sustainably, Christians have the potential to become conciliatory agents, guardians of integrity, and peacemakers in the midst of a chaotic order. And in a world that often blurs value with power, that is the most civilized courage: holding on to the truth, even without power.

### **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

Still conducting further research to learn more about Christian Morality and Social Inequality: A Contextual Study of the Crisis of Public Trust in People's Representatives

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