



“Christian Leadership and Stewardship in the Ecological Mission of the Church: A Theological Review of “Eco-Missional Stewardship”

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Abstract. *The global ecological crisis demands that the church reconsider its calling as a participant in the *missio Dei*, which encompasses the restoration of all creation. This study aims to examine the concept of eco-missional stewardship as a model of Christian leadership that integrates spirituality, mission, and ecological responsibility. Using a theological-descriptive approach, this study interprets biblical texts and contemporary theological literature to formulate a leadership paradigm oriented toward the care of creation. The results show that stewardship leadership positions Christian leaders as stewards of God's will, guiding the church to live in harmony with creation through love, justice, and sustainability. Leadership rooted in ecological spirituality affirms that caring for the earth is an active expression of faith. Thus, eco-missional stewardship becomes a theological paradigm that expands the church's mission from human salvation to the reconciliation of all creation. These findings contribute to the development of a contextual and environmentally friendly theology of leadership.*

Keywords: *Eco-Missional Stewardship, Christian Leadership, Church Mission, Stewardship, Ecology, Spirituality.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary ecological crisis has become a global issue that challenges all dimensions of human life, including the church (Sarimbangun & Talumepa, 2025). Climate change, soil degradation, water pollution, and the decline of biodiversity indicate that humanity's relationship with nature has lost its equilibrium. In a theological context, ecological destruction is not merely an ethical problem but also a spiritual one, reflecting humanity's failure to embody the divine mandate as the *imago Dei*, who ought to steward the earth with responsibility and love (Simatupang, 2025). As a community of faith that confesses God as Creator, the church is called to be an agent of restoration and reconciliation not only between humanity and God but also between human beings and the rest of creation (Yurniwati Waruwu & Abad Jaya Zega, 2025). The church's ecological responsibility cannot be separated from its spirituality, for worshipping the Creator God demands concrete action in caring for God's creation.

Christian leadership and stewardship play a crucial role in this context. A Christian leader is not merely a spiritual servant but also a responsible manager entrusted with the well-being of the congregation and the wider creation. The concept of stewardship leadership positions leaders as caretakers who guide the church to live in accordance with God's will (Ecclesiae & Amiman,

2018), particularly in sustaining the earth responsibly. Stewardship is not limited to administration or the management of church resources; it encompasses the awareness that everything water, soil, energy, and the environment belongs to God and has been entrusted to humanity to be cared for and used wisely. Therefore, the discussion on Eco-Missional Stewardship becomes relevant as it seeks to integrate ecological responsibility into the church's mission and today, embodying faith that works through love for all creation.

The central problem explored in this scholarly work is how Christian leadership can actualize ecological stewardship as an integral component of the church's mission. For too long, mission has been narrowly understood as evangelization or spiritual ministry, while ecological concerns are often neglected. Yet God's mandate for humans to "cultivate and keep the garden" (Gen. 2:15) demonstrates that God's mission encompasses the sustainability of creation (Riska, 2024). Authentic Christian leadership should direct the church to act as responsible caretakers of creation, not as rulers who exploit it. In the context of a global ecological crisis, the challenge for church leaders is to integrate ecological values into their vision, strategy, and ministerial practices so that the church may become a model of sustainable and ethical resource use.

The purpose of this study is to examine the theological and practical foundations of Eco-Missional Stewardship Christian leadership and stewardship oriented toward the care of creation as an essential dimension of the church's mission. This work is expected to offer theoretical contributions to the development of an ecological Christian leadership theology, as well as practical benefits for churches in formulating concrete directions and actions for environmental preservation. Thus, this reflection not only enriches theological discourse on leadership and stewardship but also encourages a transformation of church praxis that is more attentive to the suffering of the earth and more responsible for the harmony of all creation.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is guided by a qualitative, descriptive theological approach, with the aim of exploring and describing theological concepts of Christian leadership and stewardship in the context of the church's ecological mission. This approach was chosen because of its reflective and conceptual nature, focusing on understanding the theological meaning and principles behind ecologically oriented leadership and stewardship. Through this method, the research does not aim to test empirical hypotheses, but rather to interpret and develop a coherent theological framework for eco-missional stewardship as a paradigm for contemporary Christian leadership.

The approach used is normative theological, examining the normative foundations of biblical texts and Christian theological tradition. Primary data is obtained from biblical texts,

particularly those sections relating to the creation mandate and human responsibility for the earth. Meanwhile, secondary data comes from recent books and academic journals discussing ecological theology, Christian ethics, spiritual leadership, and church stewardship. Data will be collected through library research, examining relevant theological and scientific literature.

3. DISCUSSION

Christian Leadership as Stewardship Leadership

The concept of Christian leadership in the light of service is rooted in the teachings of Jesus, who emphasized that the essence of leadership is not power, but humility and devotion. In Matthew 20:26-28, Jesus reversed the worldly paradigm of leadership, which is synonymous with domination and hierarchical status, by stating that whoever wants to be greatest must be your servant. This principle finds concrete expression in John 13:14-15, when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, a symbolic act illustrating servant leadership. Here, authority is not measured by position, but by the willingness to serve and care for others as a form of obedience to God. Thus, Christian leadership positions itself as an extension of God's hand in managing creation, including ecological responsibility. True leaders not only direct and organize the congregation but also serve as examples in living out liberating and nurturing love, both for humans and for all creation. This pattern affirms that service-oriented leadership is a concrete form of divine stewardship, where leaders participate in God's work of nurturing life and renewing the earth.

Christian leaders are understood as servants and stewards of God's mandate, accepting the responsibility to care for all creation as an active manifestation of faith. From a biblical perspective, this mandate is rooted in Genesis 1:28 and 2:15, where humans are called to "dominate" and "till and keep" the earth, not in the sense of exploitation, but rather responsible stewardship under the authority of the Creator. Christian leaders, with Thus, it is not merely about leading the congregation, but also about being a steward who maintains fidelity to God's will in all areas of life, including ecology. This leadership task is representative, meaning the leader acts as God's representative, channeling love, justice, and care for creation (Sitiana et al., 2025). This means that a true leader must integrate spirituality of service with ecological responsibility, recognizing that every church, economic, and social decision has implications for environmental sustainability. Therefore, Christian leadership is not a position of honor, but an ethical calling to sustainably manage God's gifts for the well-being of all creation.

The integration of spiritual character and ecological responsibility is at the heart of true Christian leadership. Within a theological framework, spiritual character concerns not only personal piety but also an awareness of the interconnectedness between humanity, God, and all creation. True spirituality always leads one to a harmonious relationship with the earth, for God himself is present and at work in creation (cf. Psalm 24:1; Colossians 1:16-17). Therefore,

ecological responsibility cannot be separated from the formation of a church leader's spiritual character. A leader rooted in love, Humility and gratitude to the Creator will allow us to view nature not as an object to be exploited, but as a partner in glorifying God. In this context, spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and service acquire an ecological dimension, as they guide people toward a simple, just lifestyle and a concern for the sustainability of creation. Thus, spiritual and ecological leadership demonstrates the unity of faith and action, where environmental stewardship becomes part of spiritual growth and a manifestation of God's love for the world.

A leadership model that fosters ecological awareness in congregations is rooted in transformational and participatory principles (Baskoro, 2021), where leaders not only guide but also shape new perspectives on ecological responsibility, which is an integral part of the Christian faith. Such leaders serve as spiritual educators and agents of ecological change, integrating ecotheological values into church life. Through sermons, congregational education, and environmentally friendly liturgical practices, leaders can instill an awareness that caring for the earth is a tangible form of worship and love for God. For example, churches can develop liturgies that acknowledge the earth's plight, policies on the use of renewable energy, and recycling and reforestation programs within their congregations. With a leadership style that exemplifies a simple, energy-efficient, and environmentally conscious life, leaders become witnesses to the full Gospel, a Gospel that restores humanity's relationship with God, others, and creation. This leadership style not only fosters ecological awareness but also deepens the spirituality of a faith community that views the earth as its shared home (*oikos*).

Eco-Missional Calling

The church's ecological mission can be understood as the active participation of God's people in the ongoing and ongoing work of restoration of creation by God Himself. From a theological perspective, mission is not merely the activity of proclaiming the Gospel to humanity, but rather a comprehensive involvement in the *missio Dei*, God's mission that encompasses all of creation (cf. Colossians 1:19-20). The church is called not only to save souls but also to restore the broken relationship between humanity and nature caused by sin, which gave rise to greed and exploitation. Thus, the ecological mission is an expression of faith that acknowledges God as Creator and Redeemer of the entire cosmos. The church's participation in this mission includes concrete actions to care for the earth, fight for ecological justice, and cultivate ecological spirituality within the congregation. The restoration of creation is not a secular agenda, but an integral part of the salvation God accomplished through Christ, who redeemed not only humanity but all creation, which groans for redemption (Romans 8:19-22). Therefore, the ecological mission affirms the church's calling to be a sign and instrument of God's reconciliation with the

world, bringing His love and justice to life through wise and sustainable stewardship of the earth. The expansion of mission from the salvation of souls to the reconciliation of all creation marks a significant shift in the understanding of contemporary mission theology. For centuries, the church's mission was often limited to a soteriological dimension focused on individual salvation from sin, while the cosmic aspects of Christ's work received less attention. However, the Bible itself reveals that Christ's redemptive work is comprehensive, encompassing the restoration of the relational order between God, humanity, and all creation (Colossians 1:19-20). Thus, Christian mission can no longer be understood solely as evangelism but also as participation in God's universal reconciliation. In this light, care for the earth, social justice, and ecological balance become integral parts of missionary ministry. The church is called to bear witness to God's healing kingdom, not only spiritually but also ecologically, by rejecting consumerist lifestyles and promoting sustainable practices. This expansion of meaning does not diminish the importance of personal salvation, but rather affirms that true salvation involves restoring all creation to the harmony that God originally intended. Building on Colossians 1:19-20 and Romans 8:19-23, the church's ecological mission finds a solid theological foundation in the work of Christ, who not only redeemed humanity but also reconciled all creation to God (Purwanto, 2021). Colossians 1:19-20 emphasizes that redemption has a cosmic dimension, encompassing the universe as part of God's work of reconciliation. Meanwhile, Romans 8:19-23 reveals the suffering of creation as it awaits "the manifestation of the sons of God," the moment when all creation will share in its freedom from destruction. These two texts affirm that salvation does not end with humanity but extends to the restoration of the relationship between humanity, creation, and the Creator. Therefore, mission theology must be rooted in this cosmic vision, viewing the earth not as an object of exploitation but as part of the body of creation that is being saved.

The church, in light of this understanding, is called to be an agent of ecological justice and a bearer of the earth's spirituality. As the body of Christ, the church not only calls for spiritual repentance but also actualizes it through concrete actions that uphold justice for all creation, including the earth, which has suffered as a result of human greed. Earth spirituality guides the church to live in harmony with the values of God's kingdom: justice, peace, and the preservation of life. Thus, the church's role extends beyond liturgical worship to advocacy, education, and the transformation of the congregation's lifestyles to be more environmentally friendly. The church, which participates in this ecological mission, is truly living out its calling as a witness to Christ, reconciling and restoring all of God's creation.

Eco-Missional Stewardship: Integrating Leadership and Ecological Responsibility

The concept of eco-missional stewardship emphasizes that Christian leadership is not only oriented toward spiritual service and shepherding of the congregation, but also toward

stewardship of creation as an integral element of God's mission in the world. Within this framework, humans, especially church leaders, are called to be responsible stewards of the earth as God's (Psalm 24:1). Eco-missional leadership understands that God's mission (*missio Dei*) encompasses efforts to restore the entire creation order damaged by sin, including the ecological crisis. Therefore, preserving the environment, protecting natural resources, and building the congregation's ecological awareness are not merely social activities, but rather forms of participation in God's cosmic work of redemption. Leaders who practice eco-missional stewardship emulate Christ as the Shepherd who cares for and gives life to all creation and guide the church to live in harmony with the earth as the common home of all creatures.

The practical dimension of eco-missional stewardship requires the church to implement the values of ecological stewardship in concrete, sustainable actions. Energy and water management is a first step in encouraging efficient resource use (Madonna, 2016), such as utilizing renewable energy, reducing electricity consumption, and harvesting rainwater for non-domestic needs. Churches also need to cultivate a culture of waste reduction through zero-waste policies, recycling, and the use of environmentally friendly materials in worship and social services. Furthermore, ecological use of church land, for example through prayer gardens, food gardens, or green spaces, can be a concrete manifestation of ecological spirituality that affirms the connection between faith and the earth. This dimension must be supported by systematic ecological education for the congregation, so that awareness of preserving creation grows into a habitus of faith. Thus, the church not only teaches the theology of creation theoretically but also practices it as a witness of faith amidst a world experiencing ecological crisis.

Ecological spirituality as a basis for leadership action affirms that true Christian leadership stems from an inner awareness that all creation belongs to God and that humans are entrusted solely to manage it with love, respect, and responsibility. This spirituality does not stop at prayer or contemplation of nature, but leads to concrete ethical practices: acts of care, restoration, and solidarity with all creation. Leadership rooted in ecological spirituality views the earth not simply as a resource, but as a shared home (*oikos*) that must be cared for for the sustainability of life. A church leader with this awareness will emulate Christ, who came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28), including in loving and restoring the damaged order of creation. Thus, ecological spirituality becomes the moral and theological foundation for every strategic decision the church makes regarding resource use, social services, and the direction of its ecological mission.

Reality demonstrates how anthropocentric and institutional paradigms are deeply embedded in church life, placing the salvation of human souls at the center of the mission, while

the ecological dimension is neglected. Ministry patterns oriented toward physical development or congregational growth often neglect ecological responsibilities, such as excessive energy use, poor waste management, and indifference to environmental degradation. Theologically, this indicates an imbalance between faith and practice, as God's mission (*missio Dei*) encompasses the reconciliation of all creation (Col. 1:20). The church needs to deeply reflect on its liturgy, policies, and ministry programs to align them with the ecological calling. This evaluation is not intended to condemn, but to guide the church toward a renewed spirituality and a more ecological ministry structure a step toward truly participatory leadership in God's work of restoring the earth.

4. CONCLUSION

True leadership, in the light of Christian theology, is not only about managing human beings but also encompasses stewardship of all creation. The church is called to carry out its ecological mission as a concrete manifestation of its obedience to faith and love for God. In this context, the paradigm of eco-missional stewardship becomes a new leadership model that unites mission, spirituality, and ecological responsibility. The theological call born of this reflection affirms that caring for the earth and all its inhabitants is an integral part of worshiping God the Creator, which requires the church to live, lead, and serve sustainably in faithfulness to His will.

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