Sermon on the Mount and Christian Leadership in the Era of the Internet of Things

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Abstract—**The Sermon on the Mount (SOM) is prominently known as an ethical foundation for the Church. That fact seems to imply that there is no direct implication of the SOM to Christian leadership. Using the perspective of the emerging ethical leadership theory, this article argues that the ethical values of the SOM could be translated into Christian leadership values that might equip and encourage Christian leaders in the era of the Internet of Things. This article elaborates further that the leadership values are multi-dimensional, which include: spiritual dimension, missional dimension, relational dimension, developmental dimension, and eternal dimension. Research Contribution: This research seeks to encourage and equip church leaders in their growing dependence to the internet due to the pandemic through offering a set of Christian leadership principles based on the reflection upon Jesus's Sermon on the Mount.**

Keywords—*christian leadership; ethical leadership; sermon on the mount; theology in the internet of things*

I. INTRODUCTION

The world has been interconnected more than ever, as experts forecast that by 2023, there would be 43 billion devices connected to the internet. Many communications in the era of the Internet of Things happen through algorithms without any real human interaction [1]. This transformation affects leaders from all kinds of organizations. The future seems to be progressing toward the growing dependency of those organizations on the network and digital infrastructure they are built upon [2]. The safety regulations that require physical distancing of the Church members during the Covid-19 pandemic made the Church opt for technology to conduct worship services. This option makes the Church even more dependent on the internet and technology. Even though the situation might lead to a deeper theological reflection, such as creating a dialogue between religion and geography and opening up the way to discuss the "embeddedness of worship" in space and place [3]; the situation has also led to multiple problems that the Church leaders have to address, such as managing the expectation of the congregation who are calling for a return to offline worship and critiques from some technologically savvy members who expect the Church to be more creative. The situation leads many church leaders to frustration and exhaustion. This context shows how the discussion related to theology and the Internet of Things should also aim at caring and encouraging pastors and Church leaders, not just the Church members [4].

The Sermon on the Mount (SOM) has been discussed widely since the period of the Early Church as a profound representation of Christian ethics [5]. Due to the enormous ethical implications of the SOM, its implication to Christian leadership is often neglected. However, the emerging theory of ethical leadership might enable Christian leaders to translate the principles found in the SOM into leadership values. Ethical leadership is closely related to "value-based" management; thus, ethical leaders are defined as those leaders who manifest moral values in their personal lives and practicing moral management to their followers by influencing them to be conscious of the ethical values and encouraging them to act accordingly [6]. The main argument of this article is that through the perspective of ethical leadership, the ethical values of the SOM could be translated as a set of values of Christian leadership that might equip and encourage church leaders at present. These leadership values are multi-dimensional, including spiritual dimension, missional dimension, relational dimension, developmental dimension, and eternal dimension.

II. METHOD

This article uses literature review as a research method. Literature review refers to a method of providing a comprehensive presentation of existing literatures related to a topic, then the prior studies are synthesized so the theoretical foundation could be strengthened [7]. This article attempts to synthesize ethics and leaderships through the theory of ethical leadership in order to translate the ethical principles of the SOM to the principles of Christian leadership. First, this paper will deal with the theory of ethical leadership; second, the spiritual dimension of the SOM; third, the missional dimension; fourth, the relational dimension; fifth, the developmental dimension; sixth, the eternal dimension; then conclude.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Ethical Leadership

The characteristic of an ethical leaders is shown through the way they place a deep concern on how their decisions might affect the well-being of others; they concern more about the greater good of their organization, employees, and of the larger society instead of their own self-interests [8]. This leadership style is proved to affect job satisfaction and the employees' commitment to the organization. Ethical leadership could give a psychological empowerment to the organization as a whole [9]. This enables the employee to share knowledge among them, thus increases the creativity of the employees that might directly lead to an organizational innovation [10]. Ethical leadership also has direct connection with the corporate social responsibility; in the last 58 years (1958-2016), there are at least 114 papers published discussing the relationship between the two [11]. Those positive impacts of ethical leadership approach are also applicable to the Church organizations. Christian leaders who are leading both inside and outside the Church context could use this approach to translate the ethical values of the SOM into leadership principles.

B. The Spiritual Dimension

The first ethical leadership value that the SOM might offer to Christian leaders is related to the spiritual dimension. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus exhorted the disciples to seek first the kingdom of God, and He opened the SOM by proclaiming blessings for those who are poor in the spirit (Matthew 5:3). He then proclaims blessings to those who hunger and thirst and also to those who are persecuted. Jesus's teachings on prayer and relationship with God are the centre of the SOM. That shows an emphasis on the state of being of the disciples. Damazio argues that one needs to be a good disciple who pursues a daily deepening relationship with Christ before one could lead well. The state of being of the leaders is so important, even more than the doing part [12]. Barna Research has confirmed that consistent spiritual practices that include prayer significantly affect vocational satisfaction and happiness with one's ministry and positively impact emotional and spiritual wellbeing [13]. Amid the pandemic, and as Christian leaders depend more on technologies, they might face more challenges and distractions from developing their spiritual dimension. Christian leaders are encouraged to attend more to their spirituality to endure this situation, not just the spirituality of their members. The internet might be a distraction from developing spirituality, but it can also be a means for Christian leaders to develop their spirituality from anywhere in the world. Many teaching materials, online worship services, and studies on the Word of God are much more accessible through the internet.

C. The Missional Dimension

The second ethical leadership value is related to the missional dimension. A life oriented toward God and growing in a deeper relationship with God would lead to a God-glorifying life. God is the light and the source of light for the disciples of Christ. As Christian leaders grow deeper in their relationships with God, they would be enabled to shine God's light and become the light of the world. Jesus's teaching that the disciples are the "salt" and "light" (Matthew 5:13) shows that the spirituality of the SOM is both contemplative and active, listening and doing, attentive to both God and the neighbor. The fact that Christ has chosen a teaching method that is compatible to his audience shows how he cares for others [14].The spirituality that we foster inward through a deeper relationship with God will be expressed outward through being missional and caring toward our neighbors [15]. In the era of the Internet of Things, Christian leaders are competing with the world to influence people's lives and share the Good News. The challenges from fake news and hoax are everywhere in social media. If the Christian leaders are to live out Jesus's calling to be the salt and light of the world, they should live out the missional value of the SOM and see the advancement of technology as the means to promote the Gospel to the world.

D. The Relational Dimension

The third ethical leadership value is related to the relational dimension. In Matthew 7:12 (NIV), Jesus said, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." This teaching is related to the relationship issues written in the Law. Jesus's teaching is beyond the Jewish understanding of the application of the Law. For Jesus, hatred and anger begin in the heart and are somewhat equal to murder (Matthew 5:21-26); the same principle applies to adultery (Matthew 5:27-30). Bonifacio aptly states that people are valuable. Thus, it is essential to connect with people [16]. In the Internet of Things, social media has become a place of love or hate relationships, which explains why the term "followers" and "haters" are trending in the discussion on social media. If Christian leaders are to follow Jesus, they would choose love instead of hate and see the technology as means for them to connect with more people. A study indicates that emotional connection with others might diminish stress level [17], Christian leaders are encouraged to be connected more with people and talk about their struggle to do ministry amid the pandemic instead of keeping it to themselves.

E. The Developmental Dimension

In Matthew 5:38-41, Jesus challenges his disciples to achieve a higher standard and walk an extra mile even when one has to do only one mile. This challenge leads to the fourth ethical leadership value of the SOM, which is related to the developmental dimension. John C. Maxwell mentioned that good leadership develops daily, but not in a day [18]. Leadership abilities are dynamics, not static, and there is always a chance to progress. While many people are distressed and feel that they have failed to lead amid this pandemic, other people are learning new skills and attempting to grow their capabilities. While developing their capacity, Christian leaders should remember that the SOM calls them to rejoice in God

and not to let the circumstances distresses them [19]. The internet makes people exposed to more opportunities for learning and growing. The Christian leaders should remember that the goal of the Christian life is to be sanctified unto perfection, just like God the Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Furthermore, the fact that God often uses hardship to sanctify His people should encourage and motivate Christian leaders to keep developing their capacities.

F. The Eternal Dimension

As Jesus concludes his teaching by an exhortation to build something that will last, the fifth ethical leadership value of the SOM is related to the eternal dimension. Jesus's disciples are to heed and do His teaching (Matthew 7:24-27). Christian leaders are called to be faithfully live out Jesus's teaching because when they do, they are building a foundation that will last. Leading the Church amid the pandemic might be frustrating and exhausting, yet the SOM invites the Christian leaders not to focus on what is happening now but to fix their gazes to eternity. The belief that everything should be done for the glory of God would impacts how Christians live on daily basis. Life could be seen as an exciting journey with God toward the eternity [20]. Christian ministry is not just for the sake of today, but for the sake of eternity; in other words, doing ministry as a Christian leader is to build the foundation that will last. Only God alone and the eternal blessedness in His presence should be the ultimate motivation for Christian leaders to persevere in their spiritual callings. The eternal dimension of the SOM should remind every Christian leaders that they are citizens of the Kingdom of God [21].

IV. CONCLUSION

Ethical leadership could unlock the possible relevance of the SOM to Christian leadership. The ethical values that are so prominent in the SOM could be translated into leadership principles that might encourage Christian leaders amid the pandemic. Those principles are multi-dimensional, including spiritual dimension, missional dimension, relational dimension, developmental dimension, and eternal dimension. These leadership principles can be applied to equip and encourage Christian leaders who are struggling with doing ministry in the era of the Internet of Things.

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