Analytical study of the influence of church institutionalism using an intergenerational approach and Jürgen Habermas's communication theory

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Abstract: This article explores how institutionalism in the church creates a generation gap, consolidates power, and suppresses the creativity and active participation of church members. Church institutionalism is understood as a framework that influences every church practice not limited to the notion of church as an institution or organization. Whether we realize it or not, the church model that is increasingly reinforced by institutional patterns has a significant impact on the participatory inequality of each church member. when the discourse or let's say the line of church authority is dominated by one party for example by the elders or even by the youth, then what happens is discrimination and the strengthening of exclusivism in the communion together. therefore, an intergenerational approach is proposed to bridge institutionalism and communalism, emphasizing the importance of equal, participatory, and critical communication. This article emphasizes that by critically reflecting on the intergenerational approach and Jürgen Habermas's theory of communication, churches can strengthen intergenerational relations and create a more inclusive and emancipatory environment. By examining the phenomenon of church institutionalism, intergenerational theory and Habermas's communication theory, the discourse between these perspectives can be further explored. This discussion is expected to generate momentum for the creation of a more equitable and participatory communication model that bridges the emerging generational gap within the church community.

Keywords: church institutionalism, communalism, communication theory, exclusivism, intergenerational approach

1. Introduction

Essentially, the existence of the church as an institution is not a serious problem because the church does need structure, management, and organizational regulations to guarantee the rights of its members. The church as an institution only becomes a serious problem when it transforms into institutionalism. Church institutionalism is the domination of the institution over the layers of church life, involving authoritative, instructional, centralized, hierarchical power relations, and hegemonic discourse initiated by church leaders. Avery Dulles uses the term "clericalism" to

refer to the phenomenon of the centrality of church leadership that leads to passivity among church members.[1] Because it emphasizes structural issues and centrality, institutionalism in the church does not open space for collective creativity in various areas of life. Communication is one-way, and church members' participation in formulating ministry policies is highly dependent on organizational interests, not to mention strict regulations and church discipline.[2]

Church institutionalism also reinforces generational gaps among its members. Phenomena related to this are common in mainstream church institutions. Older generations, who dominate church leadership, tend to belittle or even ignore the position and role of younger generations in actively participating in shaping the direction and movement of church ministry.[3] As a result, dualism between leaders as conceptualizers and youth as executors became inevitable. However, the church often proclaims that the younger generation is the pillar of the church, the successor to leadership, and the determinant of change, but in reality, the church has never given its youth the space to freely express their idealism. In the research and observations conducted by Merensiana Hale and colleagues relate to the issue of generational gaps between older and younger generations in the context of the *Gereja Masehi Injili di Timor* (GMIT), where issues such as exclusivity between groups, emphasis on who has more authority, and limited opportunities for speech and expression are forms of strengthening institutionalism. Additionally, in the context of the *Gereja Protestan Maluku* (GPM), a similar experience occurs between the older and younger generations, where both generations focus solely on promoting the interests of their respective groups. A slightly different relationship between the older and younger generations can be seen in the Charismatic Church, particularly in the *Gereja Pantekosta di Indonesia* (GPdI), where the two generations collaborate with each other.[4]

On one occasion, when discussing the process of regeneration in the church where I serve, almost all of the church leaders were still optimistic about the vitality of young people, but their optimism was overshadowed by fears that young people were not mentally prepared to take up the leadership baton. In addition to the differences in perspective between the younger and older generations, another

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[1] Avery Dulles, *Model-Model Gereja*, 1st ed. (Ende: Nusa Indah, 1990), 41–43.

[2] Hironimus Janggu, "Gereja Dan Sistem Hierarkisnya Dalam Pemahaman Gereja Sebagai Institusional," Academia.edu, 2023, 1, https://www.academia.edu/94425093/GEREJA_DAN_SISTEM_HIERARKISNYA_DALAM_PEMAHAMAN _GEREJA_SEBAGAI_INSTITUSIONAL.

[3] Merensiana Hale, "Dasar Gagasan Pendidikan Kristiani Intergenerasional Dalam Gereja," *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 8, no. 1 (August 1, 2023): 148–69, https://doi.org/10.30648/dun.v8i1.947.

[4] Meily Meiny Wagiu et al., "MISI DAN PEMURIDAN KRISTEN GEREJA PANTEKOSTA DI INDONESIA (GPDI) DI SULAWESI UTARA: TANTANGAN ATAU PELUANG DI ERA DIGITAL," *Manna Rafflesia* 11, no. 2 (May 1, 2025): 415, https://doi.org/10.38091/man_raf.v11i2.507.

challenge related to leadership regeneration is the rigid church structure and complex interpersonal relationships.[5] However, according to Seprianus L. Padakari, spiritually speaking, the younger generation places great emphasis on contextual and dynamic aspects.[6] Compared to the necessity of strengthening traditional values, the younger generation tends to require guidance from the older generatio to help them integrate Christian values into the context of changing times.[7] Such collaboration is precisely what shapes the character of the younger generation to become more mature and adaptive.[8] Ironically, this doubt about the youth's mentality is not accompanied by efforts to create effective training and capacity-building programs for leadership among the youth. This means there is a critical issue within the church's institutional structure—one that is invisible but actually has a significant impact on the church's adaptability to change—namely, the tendency to perpetuate the status quo of power and stability.[9]

The generational gap in institutionalism does not only occur between older and younger generations, but can also occur in reverse. Youth leadership does not fully guarantee that institutionalism can be overcome. Young people with progressive ideologies may implement policies that are less accommodating toward the older generation. In other words, the dominance of the young is not an ideal scenario, as, by definition, dominance, hegemony, and absolute authority do not recognize generational differences.[10] Whoever is in power, whoever the *stakeholders* are in the church, they are the ones who determine how social interactions between church members take place, whether it be discriminatory patterns that are maintained or emancipatory patterns that are promoted.[11] Therefore, an intergenerational approach is considered a bridge for church agencies to seek balance between the two poles of the church, namely institutionalism and communitarianism (fluid fellowship).[12] The

[5] Yuslina Halawa, Apia Ahalapada, and Jonidius Illu, "Membangun Kepemimpinan Gereja Yang Berkelanjutan : Menyikapi Tantangan Regenerasi Dan Konflik Sinode," *Jurnal Riset Rumpun Agama Dan Filsafat* 4, no. 1 (April 30, 2024): 582–93, https://doi.org/10.55606/jurrafi.v4i1.4979.

[6] Seprianus L. Padakari and Frengki Korwa, "SPIRITUALITAS KONTEKSTUAL: MODEL PENDIDIKAN IMAN KRISTEN DALAM MENJAWAB TANTANGAN GENERASI Z," *Imitatio Christo : Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 1, no. 1 (December 10, 2024): 17–19, https://doi.org/10.63536/imitatiochristo.v1i1.3.

[7] Razat Simarmata et al., "Tantangan Kepemimpinan Pastoral Dalam Pelayanan Gen Z Di Era Digital," *Jurnal Teologi Injili Dan Pendidikan Agama* 3, no. 2 (April 30, 2025): 176–85, https://doi.org/10.55606/jutipa.v3i2.533.

[8] Ferdinan Pasaribu, "TANTANGAN: MENGHADAPI MASALAH GEN ALFA KRISTEN DI ERA DIGITAL," *Jurnal Gamaliel : Teologi Praktika* 7, no. 1 (March 30, 2025): 53, https://doi.org/10.38052/gamaliel.v7i1.305.

[9] Dulles, *Model-Model Gereja*, 37–39, 176.

[10] Hale, "Dasar Gagasan Pendidikan Kristiani Intergenerasional Dalam Gereja."

[11] Janggu, "Gereja Dan Sistem Hierarkisnya Dalam Pemahaman Gereja Sebagai Institusional," 2.

[12] Justitia Vox Dei Hattu, "Homemaking: Model Pendidikan Intergenerasional Yang Berorientasi Pada Pengakuan Kehadiran Yang Lain Dan Penguatan Relasi," *Repository.Stftjakarta.Ac.Id*, Webinar Nasional Isu-Isu Pendidikan Intergenerasi Dalam Konteks Indonesia (Jakarta, 2021), 1, https://repository.stftjakarta.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Webinar-Nasional-PERSETIA-14-Oktober-2021-Dokumen.pdf.

question is, is an intergenerational approach sufficient to accommodate the full scope of issues surrounding church institutionalism? How effective is it in fostering an atmosphere of emancipation within the church?

There have been several previous studies that have addressed intergenerational issues in the context of the church. Costantinus Ponsius Yogie Mofun discusses the significance of intergenerational-based friendly leadership in challenging hegemonic church systems.[13] On the other hand, Marchelin Prisca Sarubang's research connects the concept of intergenerationality in the liturgical practices of the *Gereja Kristen di Luwuk Banggai* (GKLB).[14] I Wayan Agus Wiratama discusses the concept of intergenerational leadership according to Gary L. McIntosh's ideas.[15] Hale also discusses the concept of intergenerational in Christian education discourse[16] and his other research related to the concept of intergenerational ecclesiology.[17] Therefore, in this paper, the idea of intergenerational will be discussed with Jürgen Habermas' concept of communication to examine the relevance of intergenerational in issues concerning church institutionalism.

2. Research Method

In this paper, the author uses qualitative research methods with a literature review approach. In relation to the theoretical study in this paper, the author explores several writings that discuss Habermas' theory of intergenerational communication. Furthermore, in the theoretical discourse, the author refers to concrete data found in previous studies in the context of churches in Indonesia (not limited to one church). This method aims to analyze and evaluate the influence of institutionalism in church life using Jurgen Habermas's theory of communication and critical discourse. The literature review approach was chosen to explore theoretical concepts from books, journals, and online literature relevant to the topic, such as church institutionalism, intergenerational approaches, and Habermas's communication theory. The sources used include theological literature, academic writings on Habermas' communication theory, and studies on social structures in religious organizations, particularly those related to the church.

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[13] Costantinus Ponsius Yogie Mofun, "KEPEMIMPINAN YANG BERSAHABAT," *TEOLOGIS-RELEVAN-APLIKATIF-CENDIKIA-KONTEKSTUAL* 3, no. 1 (April 26, 2024): 3–22, https://doi.org/10.61660/track.v3i1.119.

[14] Marchelin Prisca Sarubang, "MENUJU GEREJA INTEGRATIF," *Educatio Christi* 5, no. 2 (July 31, 2024): 219–36, https://doi.org/10.70796/educatio-christi.v5i2.139.

[15] I Wayan Agus Wiratama, "Signifikansi Paradigma Kepemimpinan Intergenerasional Menurut Gary L. McIntosh Bagi Revitalisasi Pelayanan Tim Kemajelisan Gereja," *Skenoo : Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 4, no. 1 (June 20, 2024): 51–72, https://doi.org/10.55649/skenoo.v4i1.72.

[16] Hale, "Dasar Gagasan Pendidikan Kristiani Intergenerasional Dalam Gereja."

[17] Merensiana Hale, Tabita Kartika Christiani, and Leonard Chrysostomos Epafras, "Eklesiologi Intergenerasional," *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 9, no. 1 (July 25, 2024): 190–211, https://doi.org/10.30648/dun.v9i1.1312.

The author not only analyzes and interprets existing theories but also evaluates their application in the context of the contemporary church. This analysis is conducted by comparing theoretical concepts with real phenomena occurring in the church, such as generational gaps, for example, among age or occupational categories, the dominance of structures related to discourse hegemony, and the lack of active participation from church members. A comprehensive discourse of the study of the intergenerational approach and Habermas' communication theory leads to an integrated analysis in order to address the issue of institutionalism in the church, the impact of which on fellowship and church life is often unrecognized. Through this approach, the author also seeks to formulate practical solutions in the form of an intergenerational approach strengthened by Habermas' communication theory, to minimize the negative impact of institutionalism in the church and promote more equitable, inclusive, and constructive communication between generations.

3. Results and Discussion
The Influence of Institutionalism in the Fields of Fellowship and Church Ministry

Institutionalism does not necessarily refer to institutions in the sense of agencies or organizations, but can be better understood as a framework of thinking that serves as a reference for the practice of church life.[18] Church life practices include fellowship, Christian education, and diaconia. In the area of fellowship, the church is seen as a community of faith for people of all generations to experience growth and development in their faith through equal, substantial, and holistic social interaction.[19] The dimension of church fellowship was indeed a primordial form at the beginning of its emergence. The Book of Acts clearly describes how the early church was actually more of a movement of Christ's followers than a formal and strict organization. As a movement of followers of Christ, the early church community lived together in a spirit of close collectivity where they shared, cared for one another, and developed a strong social awareness. Individual well-being became a communal vision that was pursued together without relying on institutional authority.[20]

However, as the number of members grew, identity politics strengthened, social class differences emerged, and the authority of the apostolate became more established, the pressure to form an organizational system became an inevitable reality. The pattern of alliance gradually began to erode as the movement shifted toward an institutional pattern. The communal vision that had been the spirit of the early movement began to be replaced by competition to defend ethnic group interests

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[18] Janggu, "Gereja Dan Sistem Hierarkisnya Dalam Pemahaman Gereja Sebagai Institusional," 3.
[19] Hale, "Dasar Gagasan Pendidikan Kristiani Intergenerasional Dalam Gereja."
[20] Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 1186.

and the pursuit of power, which gradually undermined the shared commitment to caring for one another. As a result, the welfare of members became entirely dependent on the centrality of authoritative leadership.[21] Luke portrays how the distribution of power carried out by the apostles through the election of deacons to ensure the welfare of church members, especially the poor, widows, orphans, and other marginalized communities, did not actually reflect a solution that fully resolved the issue. Instead, the distribution of power was used by the powerful apostles to silence social problems concerning injustice against marginalized communities, especially those who were mostly from the diaspora. By appointing deacons who also came from the diaspora, the powerful apostles sought to "pacify" the situation while securing their status quo. However, the politics of power sharing, categorization, and social class differences only sharpened the dividing lines within the church community. This division became evident in the conflict between Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians, which underlies most of the writings of the Apostle Paul.[22]

In the context of the contemporary church, institutionalism manifests in the church fellowship primarily through the concept of categorical ministry. In fact, the concept of categorical ministry aims to address the specific needs of each age category. Its basic idea is somewhat inspired by the early church's pattern of dividing interests, but in practice, the pattern of age-based categorical ministry has led to social disintegration between older and younger generations. Age-based categorization widens the relational gap between parents and young adults, young adults and teenagers, teenagers and children, children and parents, and so on. The widening relational gap makes it increasingly difficult for each generation to work together in worship, social interaction, and even communication.[23] Categorical patterns further exacerbate the culture of social hierarchy, resulting in constant awkwardness in encounters between generations. Over time, this awkwardness forms individualistic desires that evolve into identity exclusivism. This is familiar in the slogan "Everyone minds their own business," where people live under the same roof but encounters feel foreign.

The issue of institutionalism also has an impact on Christian education in church life. The Christian education model generally used by churches is the instructional approach. The instructional approach is one-way and tends to be *top down*. The source of knowledge lies with the educator, while the members of the congregation being educated function only as passive recipients. Educators are authoritative church leaders such as pastors or presbyters who are considered to possess substantial truths such as church teachings (doctrine), biblical knowledge,

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[21] Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco, Ca: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 1183.

[22] Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 1259–63.

[23] Hale, "Dasar Gagasan Pendidikan Kristiani Intergenerasional Dalam Gereja."

and theological understanding. The instructional approach does not provide much space for church members to participate in sharing their faith experiences or thoughts, resulting in a mentality of timidity in expressing opinions.[24] The community of faith approach in Christian education also needs to be strengthened, alongside the instructional approach.[25] In fact, amid massive digitalization and open access to knowledge, the church should be more aware of the need to promote a more inclusive, transformative, and participatory critical education model. A bottom-up approach is a strategic step to revive the quality of Christian education to make it more relevant and contextual.[26] The church also needs to open itself up to digital developments that accommodate creativity and innovation.[27] Although digital developments always present challenges for the older generation, awareness of the need to learn and be inclusive can overcome these challenges.[28]

The transition of Christian education from a traditional-instructional approach to an inclusive education model based on digitalization has not always been smooth. In fact, even in some churches that may have begun to adapt to the times, the instructional approach has never been completely abandoned. Rather, the transition process tends to be viewed negatively by church leaders whose position as holders of truth authority is beginning to feel threatened. As a result, extreme attitudes such as conservatism and fundamentalism emerge as a form of reaction or, one might say, as a defensive mechanism against the potential decentralization of truth authority.[29] Such extreme attitudes are certainly different from critical attitudes toward the development of digitalization in church life. Conservatism and fundamentalism, on the other hand, use certain discourses to perpetuate the status quo of power, while a critical attitude focuses on how to conduct constructive evaluations of digitalization so that its full potential can be maximized. Thus, the issue of institutionalism in Christian education is not only related to cultural issues or ways of thinking, but also to the nature of the discourses that are constructed.

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[24] Jack L. Seymour, *Memetakan Pendidikan Kristiani: Pendekatan-Pendekatan Menuju Pembelajaran Jemaat*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2016), 14–15.

[25] I Putu Ayub Darmawan, Maria Lidya Wenas, and Ruat Diana, "Intergenerational Education: Theological Foundations and Implementation on Modern Christian Education in Indonesia," *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis* 8, no. 1 (May 28, 2025): 60, http://www.gnosijournal.com/index.php/gnosi/article/view/293.

[26] Seymour, *Memetakan Pendidikan Kristiani: Pendekatan-Pendekatan Menuju Pembelajaran Jemaat*, 36.

[27] Elisasmita Natalia and Otieli Harefa, "Transformasi Digital Dan Komunitas Iman: Peluang Dan Tantangan Bagi Gereja Dalam Era Globalisasi Informasi," *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin* 2, no. 2 (June 12, 2025): 154, https://doi.org/10.62282/juilmu.v2i2.153-164.

[28] Dimas Sasono and Esti Regina Boiliu, "Pemanfaatan Teknologi Digital Bagi Efektivitas Penginjilan Dan Pemuridan Generasi-Z," *GRAFTA: Journal of Christian Religion Education and Biblical Studies* 4, no. 2 (2025): 44, https://grafta.stbi.ac.id/index.php/GRAFTA/article/view/79.

[29] Mohammad Asrori Alfa, "MODERNISME DAN FUNDAMENTALISME SEBAGAI FENOMENA GERAKAN KEAGAMAAN DALAM SOSIAL MASYARAKAT," *El-HARAKAH (TERAKREDITASI)* 8, no. 2 (January 23, 2018): 201–3, https://doi.org/10.18860/el.v8i2.4749.

Discourses that are often played out in the institutionalism of the church include obedience to church rules without protest. Rules are often seen as an impenetrable wall. Although rules are essentially a shared consensus, they are absolutized to such an extent—in order to protect organizational interests (which are, in reality, the interests of a select few)—that there is no room for re-examining these rules, let alone changing them.[30] In the context of intergenerational relationships, older generations always stereotype younger generations as inexperienced, unknowledgeable, and irresponsible when it comes to holding certain positions in the church. Conversely, younger generations are also stereotyped by older generations as unable to adapt to the times, rigid, and conventional. Such stereotypes are often held as norms of truth and therefore seen as normal in the implementation of every church policy or ministry.

Michel Foucault was critical of forms of discursive normality that were exploited by those in power to repress counter-discourses from minority groups or, let's say, marginalized groups.[31] John Collins[32] and Stephen Patterson[33] In their compelling work, Collins and Patterson challenge the discourse on slavery that continues to be upheld by Christians today. Collins and Patterson build their argument from a biblical hermeneutical perspective by thematically examining the discourse on slavery in the Bible and then comparing it with the reflections of liberation theologians who fought to free the poor from their oppressive rulers. The conclusion of Collins and Patterson's analysis is that in the Bible, the discourse and reality of slavery are perpetuated and, ironically, even today the discourse of slavery is still echoed by the church through an excessive emphasis on the concept of "servant of God." The concept of servant is used to silence protests and criticism of the church system. Since servants must be submissive and obedient, there is no room for critical discourse about the church system and its practices. Collins and Patterson's analysis reveals another side of the concept of servanthood, which should lead to a spiritual life of simplicity but is in fact vulnerable to being used to protect the stability of the system and the power of the church. The model of servanthood promoted by Dulles, namely a church that serves the world, has not always been successful in its implementation.[34]

Instead of being servants of the world, churches have become servants of rigid institutions and subject to exclusivism. The diaconal aspect that should be the essence

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[30] Janggu, "Gereja Dan Sistem Hierarkisnya Dalam Pemahaman Gereja Sebagai Institusional," 2.

[31] F. Budi Hardiman, *Kebenaran Dan Para Kritikusnya: Mengulik Idea Besar Yang Memandu Zaman Kita*, 1st ed. (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2023), 126.

[32] John J. Collins, *What Are Biblical Values? What the Bible Says on Key Ethical Issues* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 136–56.

[33] Stephen J. Patterson, *The Forgotten Creed: Christianity's Original Struggle against Bigotry, Slavery, and Sexism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 106–28.

[34] Dulles, *Model-Model Gereja*, 88–90.

of the early church has gradually begun to clash with the institutionalism of the church. The church tends to be comfortable in implementing charitable diaconia, which is prone to creating dependency. The church has become increasingly reluctant to encourage creativity and transformative empowerment among its members, let alone among those outside the church. Thus, the influence of institutionalism in the areas of fellowship, education, and church ministry should be minimized so that the church can maximize its potential for the common good.

Intergenerational Approach as a Bridge between Institutionalism and Communitarianism

The idea of an intergenerational approach first emerged in the context of the United States. According to Menconi, churches in the United States at that time were undergoing slow but fundamental changes. Advances in various areas of life led to a surge in birth rates and life expectancy, so that for the first time in history, five or six different generations were living side by side. The basic concept of the intergenerational approach is an intergenerational religious experience in which two or more age groups of people from a religious community learn, grow, and live in faith together through shared experiences, parallel learning, opportunities to contribute, and interactive sharing.[35] Allan Harkness explains that intergenerational strategies focus on integral efforts involving the role of religious communities to encourage interpersonal interaction across generations in order to create a sense of mutuality and equality among members. The intergenerational approach differs from several similar concepts such as the multigenerational and transgenerational approaches. The multigenerational concept does not touch on the level of equal dialogical interaction, but rather calls on the church to respect all generations and carry out joint ministry programs. Meanwhile, the transgenerational concept refers more to the dimension of awareness of generational diversity within the unity of the body of Christ.[36]

Furthermore, in their book entitled *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, Allan and Rose divide the intergenerational approach into three main emphases. The first is *intergenerational outlook*. This emphasis focuses more on seeing the potential of the intergenerational approach as a collaborative effort across generations to strengthen the church's potential to accommodate unity in fellowship. The second is *intergenerational ministry*. Intergenerational ministry emphasizes the role of the faith community in opening opportunities within the scope of church ministry so that all generations can communicate in meaningful ways, interact, serve, and worship

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[35] Hale, "Dasar Gagasan Pendidikan Kristiani Intergenerasional Dalam Gereja," 155.
[36] Hale, 153.

together.[37] The third emphasis is on *intergenerational experiences*. This emphasizes shared experiences in which each generation can participate actively, constructively, and contributively.[38]

The intergenerational approach opens space for the creation of balance between institutionalism and communitarianism. The intergenerational approach gives space to the experiences of church members as one of the fundamental elements in building equal and constructive relationships of fellowship. The reality of institutions is not simply abandoned, but modified in such a way that church members, as agents of relationships, are seen as subjects and actively participate in living out the spirit of church fellowship. Church members are free subjects who even transcend objective regulations. Church leaders are no longer the sole subjects who determine truth in forming hegemonic power; rather, truth itself is constructed in the active relationships of every subject involved in it. Thus, the truth that the intergenerational approach seeks to project is relational truth, where truth is formed as an accumulation of perspectives from every subject through dialogical interactions that complement and enrich one another.[39] The intergenerational approach undermines the discourse of centrality and uniformity of institutionalism and promotes an attitude of respect for diversity and difference. In this way, social segmentation among church members can be minimized because no one is excluded or discriminated against.

At first glance, the intergenerational approach attempts to loosen the rigid, hierarchical, and segmented influence of institutionalism by placing each generation in an equal and dialogical community where everyone can learn from and share their experiences, knowledge, and understanding of faith. However, the scope of the intergenerational approach is still limited to communities within the church, while it cannot be denied that the influence of the socio-cultural context outside the church also plays a part in shaping the experiences and perspectives of church members. Therefore, efforts are needed to integrate factors related to the socio-cultural context surrounding the lives of church members. Discussions on socio-cultural issues can help the church become more aware of its broader existence while opening up new horizons in responding to and detecting the roots of institutionalism.

The socio-cultural context can be equated with the concept of the *lebenswelt* (life world), which is the main locus of Habermas' theory of communication. Wilhelm Dilthey links the concept of the *lebenswelt* as the "context of life" (reflective experience) that underlies or provides the background for a social norm in the life of

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[37] Kukuh Purwidhianto, "Ibadah Intergenerasi Dan Motivasi Beribadah Di Tengah Tantangan Bergereja Secara Individualistik Dan Konsumeristik," *KAMASEAN: Jurnal Teologi Kristen* 3, no. 2 (December 20, 2022): 177, https://doi.org/10.34307/kamasean.v3i2.174.

[38] Hale, "Dasar Gagasan Pendidikan Kristiani Intergenerasional Dalam Gereja," 153.

[39] Hardiman, *Kebenaran Dan Para Kritikusnya: Mengulik Idea Besar Yang Memandu Zaman Kita*, 121.

a society.[40] Attention to the element of the *lebenswelt* in social phenomena can sharpen the discovery of more relevant social theories while reflecting the ability of *verstehen* because it is intersubjective. Hans Georg Gadamer uses the term "history of influence" (*wirkungsgeschichte*) to describe the dimension of the *lebenswelt* in the framework of historicity. Gadamer's emphasis on the concept of the *lebenswelt* is that humans as historical subjects are always within history and influenced by history.

The history imagined by Gadamer includes tradition, experience, perception, language, reflective understanding of social and cultural norms, ideology, and scientific narratives. The *lebenswelt* reflects the reality of everyday life where facts and norms intertwine.[41] When linked to the church and intergenerational relationships, the concept of the *lebenswelt* breaks down the barriers between the church and real life, where both young and old generations meet and interact to form awareness and norms. All these elements form a subjective mental horizon that will always influence a person's perspective in understanding something.[42] To summarize more simply and clearly, the concept of the *lebenswelt* brings institutionalism to a broader level, namely to a reflective construct that is not solely related to church institutions, but as a cultural idea that is lived by church members.

In the *lebenswelt order*, the intergenerational approach is limited to dialogical conversations that take place internally within the scope of theological discourse and church institutionalism, while missing the socio-cultural context dimension that is related to the mental horizon of the subjects, which also needs to be unraveled in order to achieve a complete understanding in order to address institutionalism issues related to fellowship, education, and church ministry. Therefore, Jürgen Habermas proposes the theory of communicative action and critical discourse in order to revitalize the *lebenswelt* of church life so that it can produce a more constructive and paradigmatic perspective in building emancipatory relationships and strengthening fellowship.

Habermas' Theory of Communication Action and Critical Discourse: Emancipatory and Intergenerational Conversation in Responding to Institutionalism

Jurgen Habermas puts forward two main theories, namely the theory of communicative action and critical discourse. Communication as imagined by Habermas is not an abstract or metaphysical model of communication, but rather a concrete model of communication that touches on everyday life, yet also contains

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[40] Hardiman, 91.

[41] Paulus Pati Lewar and Otto Gusti Ndegong Madung, "Demokrasi Sebagai Diskursus Dan Deliberasi Menurut Jürgen Habermas," *Jurnal Ledalero* 21, no. 2 (December 22, 2022): 152, https://doi.org/10.31385/jl.v21i2.315.150-161.

[42] Hardiman, *Kebenaran Dan Para Kritikusnya: Mengulik Idea Besar Yang Memandu Zaman Kita*, 116–19.

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substantial principles and social values.[43] Therefore, Habermas' principle of concrete communication does not necessarily fall into pragmatism. With concrete communication, every social subject occupies an equal position in expressing their thoughts and is given the right to participate in the decision-making process.[44] Thus, Habermas' concept of communication is placed within the framework of deliberative democracy and the reality of intersubjective communication.

There are three main principles in Habermas' concept of deliberative and intersubjective communication, the first being the principle of deliberation. This principle asserts that before making a decision, it is necessary to conduct in-depth consideration with all relevant parties. It is this principle that prevents concrete communication from falling into mere pragmatism. The second principle is the principle of reasonableness. This principle means that in conducting joint deliberation, there should be a willingness to understand the other party. The principle of reasonableness is a manifestation of the concept of understanding (*verstehen*), whereby every communicating subject enters into a dimension of reflective understanding and mutual empathy. And the third principle is the principle of freedom. This means that all parties involved have the same opportunity to freely express their thoughts, considerations, and ideas.[45]

The three main principles underlying Habermas's idea of communication for the creation of ideal relations between social subjects must face two challenges, namely the challenge of language (*linguistic turn*) and systematically distorted communication. The first challenge concerns the issue of language. Habermas continues the tradition of post-metaphysical thought, which views the question of truth as being closely related to the question of language. His thinking resonates with post-structuralist thought, which views language as the shaper of reality.[46] Therefore, for Habermas, the effort to achieve *verstehen* requires a willingness to face the challenges of language. For example, in the context of the church, the composition of social subjects is very diverse, including educated people (academics), experts, office workers, entrepreneurs, government officials, traders, farmers, and so on, with different educational backgrounds. One can imagine the richness of language involved in the communication process.

Awareness of language and humility are necessary in order to understand each other's languages. Of course, elitist language cannot be easily understood by

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[43] Hardiman, 159.

[44] Dimas Rahman Rizqian, "PEMBERDAYAAN MASYARAKAT DALAM PERSPEKTIF TEORI TINDAKAN KOMUNIKATIF JURGEN HABERMAS," *Jurnal El-Hamra : Kependidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 8, no. 2 (June 30, 2023): 82–84, https://doi.org/10.62630/elhamra.v8i2.121.

[45] Muhammad Ersyad Muttaqien and Deden Ramdan, "Konsep Komunikasi Jurgen Habermas Dalam Ide Demokrasi Deliberatif Dan Tindakan Komunikatif," *Linimasa: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 6, no. 1 (2023): 56, https://journal.unpas.ac.id/index.php/linimasa/article/view/6067.

[46] Hardiman, *Kebenaran Dan Para Kritikusnya: Mengulik Idea Besar Yang Memandu Zaman Kita*, 160.

people who are accustomed to everyday language, so there needs to be a process of "negotiation" in which elitist language is simplified so that it can be understood by people who use everyday language. Meanwhile, in institutional patterns, formal and elitist languages become the primary reference, which is naturally difficult to access for those who do not live with or are accustomed to such languages. As a result, formal elitist languages are perceived as the language of truth, immune to criticism and challenge. Thus, the issue of institutionalism is not merely about generational differences based on age categories but also about the complexity of the language used. In addition to the complexity of language, Habermas also raises the issue of systematically distorted communication. Habermas links distorted communication with ideology. Ideology is still related to the influence of socio-cultural contexts and traditions.[47] For example, in communication between older and younger generations in the church, there are differences in ideology or perspective regarding forms of ministry or fellowship. Older generations tend to emphasize authoritative and rigid ways of thinking, while younger generations emphasize equality of roles and flexibility.

In fact, Marxism's idea of ideology is still relevant to the problem of institutionalism, where discourses on the centrality of power, absolute authority, strict regulation, uniformity, and formalism of language are prone to becoming ideologies that obscure the subject's view of the reality around them. A system of ideas or discourse that is accepted uncritically as truth, without the filter of rationality and critical thinking, transforms into ideology. According to Habermas, this ideology obstructs the subject's freedom to think, argue, and understand others as they truly are.[48] It is ideological problems such as these that operate in church life. When rigid and uniform institutional ways of thinking are accepted as absolute truth, they suppress creativity and diversity.

In response to the ideological issues behind institutionalism, Habermas emphasizes the importance of establishing critical discourse in the context of communication so that dominant positions and discourses can be tested and dismantled together rationally. In short, Habermas proposes an effort to critique ideology.[49] Criticism of ideologies operating in every communication process occurs in layers. This means that the results of criticism of a particular ideology are not final and absolute, but continue to exist in the dialectical discourse process so that ideological balance is always achieved. If the results of ideological criticism are

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[47] Hardiman, 163–66.
[48] Hardiman, 163.
[49] Tri Harnowo, "Penerapan Teori Diskursus Habermas Sebagai Alternatif Penyelesaian Sengketa," *Mimbar Hukum - Fakultas Hukum Universitas Gadjah Mada* 32, no. 1 (February 15, 2020): 60, https://doi.org/10.22146/jmh.45145.

accepted as final and absolute, then this will actually give rise to a new ideology.[50] That is why the church has never completely abandoned its institutional image, nor has it ever been based solely on its communal dimension. The position of the church has always been in a dialectical relationship between institution and community. In the context of intergenerational inequality, ideological criticism allows older and younger generations to sit together in equal conversation to evaluate, critique, and correct each other's idealism regarding fellowship, service, or decision-making without being overshadowed by who is older, who is more powerful, or who is more experienced.

So, does Habermas' critical discourse tend to lead to relativism? Certainly not. It is at this point that Habermas takes a different position from Foucault. Habermas' goal of critical discourse is to liberate social subjects as communicators from the influence of systematic distortions on their view of reality. Foucault stops at this stage by describing how power works behind discourse and ideology in the socio-cultural context of society. However, Habermas goes further by determining the outcome of critical discourse, which is to produce consensus or mutual understanding regarding how the community understands reality. Mutual consensus must fulfill three claims of validity, namely the value of truth, the value of normative rightness, and the value of sincerity.[51] These three claims of validity are not understood as limitations on conversation, let alone regulations as imagined in institutionalism, but as directions that determine the quality of conversation and the consensus that is reached.

The values of truth, accuracy, and honesty in critical discourse provide opportunities for balanced, equal, concrete, and consensual communication. What about language issues? Language plays an important role in enriching the critical discourse that takes place among social subjects. Language is indeed susceptible to politicization or, as Foucault puts it, "harnessed by power." However, when language is used in a rational and mutually understanding shared conversational space, the intentions of power, ideology, and systematic distortions can be tested, exposed, and reconsidered.[52] In the context of the church, institutionalism that undermines fellowship, education, and church ministry needs to be minimized by promoting rational and emancipatory communication. Habermas critically seeks to create space for every social subject with diverse backgrounds, languages, educational levels, knowledge levels, and so on to actively participate in critiquing and evaluating

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[50] Hardiman, *Kebenaran Dan Para Kritikusnya: Mengulik Idea Besar Yang Memandu Zaman Kita*, 164.

[51] Harnowo, "Penerapan Teori Diskursus Habermas Sebagai Alternatif Penyelesaian Sengketa," 60–61.

[52] Anwar Nuris, "Tindakan Komunikatif : Sekilas Tentang Pemikiran Jürgen Habermas," *Al-Balagh : Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 1, no. 1 (June 8, 2016): 43, https://doi.org/10.22515/balagh.v1i1.45.

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institutional discourse, then find the best solution through consensus by considering three forms of quality, namely truth, accuracy, and honesty.[53]

The intergenerational approach opens up practical space for the active participation of every social subject in the church, and Habermas then complements this with his theory of communicative action and critical discourse to expand the realm of the *lebenswelt* in order to strengthen the potential of the church as part of the social community. The development of collaborative church leadership between older and younger generations can be a key point for building transformation in relationships.[54] Thus, the issue of institutionalism can be addressed through a holistic approach where practical and ethical-critical dimensions can collaborate to generate transformative and creative ideas.

4. Conclusion

The issue of institutionalism in the church is not only related to institutional issues in the sense of institutions or organizations, but also concerns issues of frameworks of thinking or paradigms. The institutionalist paradigm has eroded the areas of fellowship, education, and church ministry to such an extent that church members as social subjects are bound by a discourse of hegemony, hierarchy, authority, regulation, centrality, rigidity, and formalism. Therefore, the intergenerational approach attempts to revitalize the active participatory role of each age group in the church to build equal and constructive communication relationships. The intergenerational approach is further strengthened by Jurgen Habermas' theory of communication and critical discourse as an effort to counter the influence of institutionalism. Habermas' communication theory is based on a socio-cultural context or "*lebenswelt*" that is grounded in the principles of intersubjective and deliberative communication. By placing this communication within the framework of critical communication, the influence of institutionalism in the church can be tested, dismantled, and evaluated towards a shared consensus and constructive, rational, and transformative understanding.

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[53] Nuris, 64.

[54] Paskah Parlaungan Purba, "Dari Kesenjangan Menjadi Jembatan: Transformasi Kepemimpinan Kristiani Intergenerasional," *KURIOS: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 11, no. 1 (2025): 160–61, https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v11i1.860.

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