



Fragility as Holiness and the Voice of Women in the Shadow of the Cross

¹Thelma Veronica, ²Marde C. S. Mawikere, ³Yohan Brek

^{1,2,3}Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Manado

Received: Revised: Accepted:	07 July 2025 16 July 2025 23 July 2025	Abstract <i>This article explores the concept of fragility within Christian theology, specifically examining how the vulnerability of women in church ministry is encountered through the lens of holiness and the sacrificial work of Christ. Utilizing a vulnerability theology framework, the study analyzes how women live out their spiritual calling amid patriarchal church structures that often marginalize their roles and voices. By engaging with theological discourse on fragility, this article seeks to offer a renewed perspective on how women may embrace their vulnerability as a sacred element of their ministerial vocation. The research employs a qualitative methodology, incorporating literature review and analysis of church documents. The findings suggest that fragility is not merely a sign of weakness, but a transformative space in which women may participate in the broader redemptive work of God.</i>
Keywords:		<i>Vulnerability, Holiness, Women in the Church, The Cross</i>
(*) Corresponding Author:		veronikathelma@gmail.com
How to Cite:		Veronica, T., Mawikere, M., & Brek, Y. (2025). Fragility as Holiness and the Voice of Women in the Shadow of the Cross. <i>International Journal of Education, Information Technology, and Others</i> , 8(3.B), 158-167. Retrieved from https://jurnal.peneliti.net/index.php/IJEIT/article/view/11810

INTRODUCTION

Fragility has long been a central theme in Christian theological discourse, particularly in its relation to the limitations and vulnerabilities inherent in the human condition. In many theological traditions, fragility is understood as an integral aspect of finite human existence—an existence perpetually suspended in tension between holiness and suffering. This concept is frequently linked to the recognition that human beings are fractured and flawed creatures, inherently vulnerable to various forms of suffering—physical, emotional, and spiritual. Human fragility reflects the reality that every individual faces limits in strength, knowledge, and resources. Uncertainty, loss, and pain are universal experiences that serve as constant reminders of life’s transient and fragile nature.

In this context, numerous theologians have argued that fragility is not merely a fact of life, but a means by which individuals come to a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationship with God. Importantly, fragility is not always regarded as negative or degrading. On the contrary, within many theological traditions, fragility is seen as a path through which one may participate in the suffering of Christ—an entry point into a deeper appreciation of God's holiness.

Fragility becomes a means of learning, reflection, and spiritual growth. In moments of surrender and pain, individuals may experience the presence of God more profoundly, embracing His love and comfort even in the most difficult life circumstances. Thus, fragility is not merely seen as something to be avoided but

as an opportunity for spiritual transformation. Theologians like Henri Nouwen (1979) and William Placher (1994) explain how, through fragility, one can find strength in weakness. Their works invite individuals to acknowledge and accept their fragility as part of their faith journey, facilitating a more authentic relationship with God and others. In this perspective, human fragility becomes a bridge toward repentance, forgiveness, and spiritual peace. Therefore, it is important to view fragility as an element that shapes how we interact with the world and understand who we are as beings created in the image of God.

Within the context of the church, this fragility is often faced by women, who are frequently marginalized in the patriarchal structure of the church. As an institution largely dominated by male leaders, the church tends to place women in weaker positions, making them more vulnerable to discrimination, particularly regarding authority and leadership. In many cases, women are not only ignored but also denied full opportunities to contribute to decision-making, teaching, and other strategic roles. This creates a culture that not only stifles women's potential but also silences their essential voices in shaping the faith community. This view is reflected in much theological thought that considers the role of women in the church as limited, even often disregarded (Chaves, 1997; Ruether, 1993).

Sacred texts that are often used to support patriarchal views are understood selectively, without considering the broader social and historical contexts. For instance, interpretations of the role of women in the Bible often focus only on certain characters who are considered to align with traditional norms, while many other stories and contributions of women are overlooked. This phenomenon is highly relevant to discuss, as examining how theology perceives fragility in the context of gender can offer new insights into how women can find their calling amidst existing limitations. By exploring the fragility women experience in the church, we can begin to formulate strategies and approaches that are more inclusive and just. This might include the development of leadership training programs for women, the creation of policies that support women's involvement in leadership, and efforts to educate the entire church community on the importance of gender equality. Through deep reflection and open discussion on this fragility, it is hoped that church leaders and community members will recognize the importance of involving women in various aspects of church life. Additionally, this can spark positive changes in perspectives regarding the role and contribution of women within the context of faith, which will ultimately foster a healthier, more harmonious, and empowered church. By facilitating constructive dialogue and encouraging active participation, the church can undergo a transformation toward greater inclusivity, valuing every individual regardless of gender, and opening opportunities for all to serve and contribute in meaningful ways.

However, the understanding of women's fragility in the church should not be viewed merely from the standpoint of weakness or the denial of their authority. In this context, it is important to delve deeper into the meaning of the fragility experienced by women, especially when we consider the advances in feminist

theology and disability theology. Both of these schools of thought offer valuable perspectives and encourage us to understand fragility not only as a negative aspect but also as a form of sanctity. Women's fragility in the church can be understood as an integral part of participation in the suffering of Christ. This is not just about acknowledging weakness or limitations but about how these experiences can bring healing and renewal, both for the women themselves and for the church community as a whole (Creamer, 2009; Brown, 2012).

In this context, we need to view fragility as a space where women can find strength in their helplessness and develop profound spiritual resilience. Disability theology, as articulated by Eiesland and Saliers (1998), proposes a challenging perspective on bodies that are considered weak and marginalized. These bodies are often seen as symbols of weakness in societal views, but in the perspective of disability theology, these experiences can become a space for deeper theological reflection on God's love and holiness.

In this sense, fragility is not only recognized as a fact but also celebrated as part of a spiritual journey that can bring individuals closer to God. Furthermore, it is important to realize that the fragility of women in this ecclesiastical context also serves as a reminder for the church community to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of vulnerable members. By acknowledging and embracing this fragility, the church can build a safer and more supportive space for women and individuals with disabilities, where everyone can contribute and be treated with respect. In this regard, the church becomes not only a place for healing fragility but also an agent of social change that reflects values of love, equality, and justice. Fragility in this context is not the end of a journey, but the beginning of a larger transformation in the lives of believers and in the body of Christ as a whole.

Afandi (2023), in his theological study on *hesed*, a term referring to loyal love with healing power and potential for restoration, profoundly describes that fragility also has an important spiritual dimension. This dimension enables individuals to experience God's love in a very personal and intimate way, which often contrasts with the external world's emphasis on strength, dominance, and perfection. In this context, fragility is not something to be avoided or concealed but rather an aspect that holds deep value and meaning. Therefore, women involved in church ministry can be given a broader understanding of their fragility. They need not view it as an obstacle or weakness but, on the contrary, as an inherent part of their divine calling.

Within this fragility, there is an opportunity to voice the truth and bring the presence of God through the personal experiences and limitations they have. In their faith journey, these women are invited to embrace fragility as a means to build a closer relationship with God and inspire those around them. As women, they are not only called to be recipients of grace but also as active agents of change, playing a role in bringing God's voice into a world that often appears indifferent or even refuses to listen. As emphasized by Reynolds (2008) and Black

(1996), the injustice and limitations often faced by women in society and the church should not prevent them from fulfilling their mission and ministry.

In this understanding, fragility is no longer seen as a limitation but as a strength that accompanies them. This strength enables them to carry out their ministry with full empathy and sincerity amid the gender inequality that still exists in many places of worship. By promoting this perspective, women in church ministry are expected to grow in faith and believe that their fragility is part of a greater plan. They are reminded that the difficult experiences and challenges they face can become sources of strength and wisdom, which, in turn, help them become more sensitive to the needs and suffering of others. In this way, fragility not only becomes a personal identity but also a bridge connecting them with the presence of God in the lives of others. Through courageous and loving steps, women in church ministry can bring real transformation, not only in their own lives but also in their communities and the wider world. Hermawati (2024) adds that with this understanding, women are increasingly empowered to embrace their roles, ready to answer the challenging divine call, and become a voice for those who may not have the opportunity to speak.

Through this article, the author aims to explore how women in church ministry can understand and embrace their fragility as part of their divine calling and holiness, and how the church can create space for women to express their calling without being bound by the existing patriarchal structures. A deeper understanding of this fragility will open new possibilities for women to view their ministry as a journey of faith that is not apart from sacrifice but also full of hope and healing found in the holiness of Christ.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a literature review method. The primary sources used include theological works, books, and journal articles relevant to the theology of fragility and women's ministry in the church. Key references include Afandi's (2023) research on disability theology and fragility, as well as works by Creamer (2009) and Reynolds (2008) on disability theology and the church. Additionally, this article refers to relevant feminist theories, such as those proposed by Ruether (1993) and Schüssler Fiorenza (1992), who offer alternative views on the place of women within church structures and theology.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that the fragility of women in the church, often perceived as weakness, can actually become a means to experience holiness and a deeper knowledge of Christ. This fragility invites women to acknowledge their limitations and participate in God's redemptive work, challenging the common view that associates fragility with failure. Moreover, the theology of fragility has the potential to deconstruct the patriarchal structures of the church, encouraging a reorganization of women's roles in church leadership and recognizing the equal value of women in ministry. This fragility serves as a reminder that all humanity,

regardless of gender, has an equal role in serving God. Acceptance of fragility paves the way for a more inclusive, just, and loving church, bringing transformation to church structures toward greater equality.

Fragility as an Opportunity to Experience Holiness in Ministry

The research findings indicate that the fragility of women in the church is not merely viewed as a weakness. On the contrary, this fragility can become a valuable means to draw closer to God and experience the holiness that is often sought after. In this context, it is important to understand that fragility should not be hidden or viewed as shameful, but rather as part of a spiritual journey that can lead individuals into a deeper relationship with a loving Creator.

In alignment with Afandi's (2023) perspective, which views fragility as a space for individuals to experience God's love more deeply and tangibly, women involved in ministry can understand their fragility as an integral part of a larger process of sanctification and salvation. Through the fragility they experience, women are not only guided to recognize their limitations but are also invited to realize that within every weakness, there is strength through which God works in extraordinary ways. Strong faith often does not reside in invulnerability, but in the ability to accept and surrender in a vulnerable state, without shame.

This highlights that weakness is not an obstacle but a means of participating in God's greater work. By allowing themselves to be open and vulnerable, women can experience significant spiritual growth and deepen their relationships, both with the church community and with God. In a supportive environment, fragility can become a gateway for mutual support, solidarity, and the creation of a more inclusive and loving atmosphere. Such an environment enables every individual, regardless of the size of their contribution, to participate in ministry in a meaningful way.

Amid the challenges of fulfilling roles as women in the church, fragility can become a learning tool. When women share their experiences and struggles, they not only strengthen each other but also enrich the church community as a whole. Open discussions on fragility can foster mutual understanding, empathy, and support among church members. This not only positively impacts individuals but also the group as a whole, creating a more peaceful and harmonious atmosphere.

Thus, the fragility of women in the church, which is often overlooked or underestimated, can actually be a constructive force. When women in the church are willing to accept and embrace their fragility, they not only strengthen themselves but also build a firmer foundation for the larger faith community. In this context, fragility is not just an individual matter; it is a means of fostering broader and deeper change among the faithful. Ultimately, it reminds us all that God works through our fragility to create miracles in our lives and in the wider community.

Theology of Fragility as a Tool for Deconstructing the Patriarchal Structure of the Church

Fragility also plays a crucial role in deconstructing the patriarchal structure that has long been embedded within the church. In this context, an approach that centers fragility becomes a significant challenge to traditional views that often consider women as less capable in church leadership. In many cases, the stigma emerging from patriarchal thinking reinforces the idea that only men possess the necessary qualifications and ability to occupy strategic leadership positions. However, it is essential to note that the theology of fragility can serve as a key to reversing this paradigm. By affirming that women, just like men, have the right and capability to participate in church ministry, this approach creates space for a new, more inclusive perspective (Dachi & Manao, 2021).

Through a deeper understanding of fragility as an integral part of the human experience, we begin to see that true strength does not merely lie in resilience, dominance, or the ability to overcome challenges without pain. True strength also includes the ability to understand, feel, and empathize with weaknesses, both within ourselves and in those around us. By acknowledging our fragility, women can take significant steps to remove the barriers that have long hindered their recognition as legitimate and competent leaders within the church context.

Furthermore, this recognition of fragility not only paves the way for women to be acknowledged as leaders but also enables them to make valuable contributions in creating a more inclusive, diverse, and supportive church community. In such an environment, every individual, regardless of gender, can function optimally in their respective capacities, making every voice heard and valued. This approach calls church leaders to reconsider the true meaning of leadership, including a deep reflection on how to create an environment where each individual can thrive and contribute their best, free from the gender norms that have long dominated.

By embracing principles that honor fragility, the church can not only broaden its definition of leadership but also contribute to a larger social transformation, building a more sustainable and just community for all its members.

Fragility as a Recognition of Equality in Church Ministry

This study also reveals that fragility should be viewed as an integral part of God's salvific work, not as a sign of incapacity. In a broader context, fragility can be understood as an aspect that touches the very core of human nature; it reflects the limitations and imperfections inherent in every individual. As created beings, both women and men have their weaknesses and challenges, and it is this shared fragility that connects us in our spiritual journey. In this light, fragility serves as a reminder of the equality between women and men in church ministry. By acknowledging and accepting our fragility, we open the space for more constructive and collaborative dialogue within the church community. This also brings to the forefront the awareness that every member of the congregation, regardless of gender, plays an important role that should be recognized and valued.

In this understanding, fragility is no longer seen as weakness but as a strength that can strengthen the bonds among church members, helping them support one another in their ministry tasks. The recognition of fragility leads to a more inclusive understanding of the role of women in the church. This involves emphasizing the importance of women's voices in decision-making, ministry implementation, and active participation in all aspects of church life. Consequently, recognizing their ability and capacity in ministry becomes crucial. Women should not only be allowed to contribute but also encouraged to take initiatives and play roles in various areas, including teaching, leadership, and mission.

By removing the stigma surrounding fragility and viewing it as part of God's larger plan, the church can move towards a more just ecosystem that embraces diversity. Within this framework, a balanced and just ministry structure will emerge, ensuring that every individual, whether female or male, can contribute maximally to the church's mission (Placher, 1994).

Fragility as a Reminder of Human Limitations in Relationship with God

Fragility is a condition that can awaken our awareness of how vulnerable we are as humans in navigating life, especially in our relationship with God. In Christian theology, fragility is not a sign of weakness to be avoided, but rather an invitation to draw nearer to God. When we are in a fragile state, we are reminded to rely entirely on Him, for it is in our fragility that we can experience His presence and love in a deeper and more intimate way. Human limitations, which often become most apparent in times of crisis or sorrow, serve as a reminder that we cannot rely on our own strength. Instead, when we face challenges and difficulties, we are given the opportunity to build a stronger faith.

This limitation also helps us understand that God is present in every aspect of our lives, both in times of joy and in times of hardship. In this context, fragility can actually become a source of profound spiritual strength, because when we surrender our burdens and concerns to God, we open ourselves to receive His grace and guidance. The importance of understanding fragility in Christian theology leads us to a greater spiritual depth. When we recognize that we are imperfect and in need of God, our faith can grow in transformative ways.

Through these experiences, we learn that our weaknesses do not hinder our relationship with God; rather, they strengthen it. In this spiritual journey, we are invited to reflect and contemplate the meaning of our fragility, so that we can find wisdom and blessings behind every difficulty (Reynolds, 2008). Thus, fragility not only becomes part of the human condition, but also a bridge that connects us with God. This process enriches our understanding of faith and leads us to appreciate every life experience—whether joyous or challenging—as part of God's greater plan. Through fragility, we find the strength to grow, transform, and ultimately draw closer to God in a more sincere and profound way.

CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes that the fragility of women in the church is not a weakness to be concealed, but a spiritual strength that reveals the depth of the relationship with God. In the light of the theology of fragility, experiences of limitation become spaces for encountering God's saving and sanctifying love. Fragility becomes a means to experience holiness, foster solidarity, and build a supportive community. Furthermore, fragility serves as a critical tool to deconstruct the patriarchal dominance that has long restricted women's roles in the church. Through acknowledging human vulnerability, the church is urged to create a more just and inclusive structure, where women are recognized as equal in leadership and service.

Thus, the voices of women, born from fragile experiences, enrich the body of Christ and expand our understanding of true strength that comes from God. Ultimately, fragility reminds us that all humans, without exception, are finite beings in need of God's grace. From this, sincere faith and humility can grow. Therefore, the church is invited to embrace fragility not as an obstacle, but as a path toward spiritual transformation, gender justice, and the restoration of a more human and divine community of faith.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Afandi, Y. (2023). *Hesed* sebagai permenungan teologi keringkahan dalam perspektif disabilitas berdasarkan narasi 2 Samuel 9:1-13. *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristiani*, 8(1), 15–28. <https://doi.org/10.30648/dun.v8i1.1023>
- Adiprasetya, J. (2021). *Gereja pascapandemi: Merengkuh kerapuhan*. Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia.
- Aruan, D. V. (n.d.). Sakramen, cara Allah merengkuh kerapuhan manusia menurut Henry Nouwen [Makalah]. <https://www.academia.edu/>
- Beth Creamer, D. (2009). *Disability and Christian theology: Embodied limits and constructive possibilities*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press.
- Black, K. (1996). *A healing homiletic: Preaching and disability*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine domination*. Stanford University Press.
- Brown, B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. Gotham Books.
- Burta, F. S. (2018). Kepemimpinan perempuan dalam gereja menurut Gereja Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) Kotabaru Yogyakarta [Skripsi Sarjana, Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana].
- Chaves, M. (1997). *Ordaining women: Culture and conflict in religious organizations*. Harvard University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Dachi, B. T., & Manao, F. H. (2021). Kepemimpinan pendeta perempuan dalam budaya patriarkal gereja BNKP. *Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Kristen Sundermann*, 2(2), 45–58. <https://jurnal.sttsundermann.ac.id/index.php/sundermann/article/view/66>
- Dachi, L. O., & Manao, H. (2021). Peran pendeta perempuan dalam pelayanan di tengah budaya patriarkal. *Jurnal Sundermann: Teologi dan Misi Kontekstual*, 1(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.47554/sundermann.v1i1.66>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Eiesland, N. L., & Saliers, D. E. (1998). *Human disability and the service of God: Reassessing religious practice*. Abingdon Press.
- GMIM. (2021). *Tata Gereja GMIM*. Sinode GMIM.
- Hermawati, O. (2024). Makna panggilan dalam kepemimpinan pendeta perempuan pada lingkup lembaga Kristen di Indonesia: Pendekatan Grounded Theory [Disertasi, Universitas Pelita Harapan]. <https://repository.uph.edu/63641>
- Hermawan, I., & Hidayah, N. (2023). Toxic masculinity dan tantangan kaum lelaki dalam masyarakat Indonesia modern. *Jurnal Kajian Sosiologi*, 12(2), 171–182.
- Kimmel, M. (2022). Foreword. In *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lakawa, S. (2021). Kerapuhan. STFT Jakarta. <http://repositori.stfj.ac.id>
- Lopulalan, L. M. (2011). Perempuan dalam gereja Protestan Maluku: Studi tentang dinamika struktur dan identitas dalam konteks pelayanan pendeta perempuan di GPM [Tesis Magister, Universitas Gadjah Mada]. <https://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/penelitian/detail/51814>
- Moleong, L. J. (2019). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif* (Edisi Revisi). PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Nouwen, H. J. M. (1979). *The wounded healer: Ministry in contemporary society*. Image Books.
- Piri, T., Poluan, A., & Zetlight, J. (2022). Jabatan gerejawi dalam sistem presbiterial sinodal di GMIM. *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan*, 8(20), 15–20. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7229428>
- Placher, W. C. (1994). *Narratives of a vulnerable God: Christ, theology, and scripture*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Raphael, R. (2008). *Biblical corpora: Representations of disability in Hebrew biblical literature*. The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 445. London & New York: T&T Clark International.
- Reksa, C. (2021). Ketika dia menebus kerapuhan. <https://ignitegki.com>
- Reynolds, T. E. (2008). *Vulnerable communion: A theology of disability and hospitality*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press.
- Romeantenan, D. R. M., & Sianipar, T. S. (2018). Kepemimpinan pendeta perempuan dalam pelayanan Gereja Protestan di Indonesia bagian Barat

- (GPIB). *Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen Shan*, 4(1), 51–66.
<https://ejournal.uki.ac.id/index.php/shan/article/view/1539>
- Ruether, R. R. (1993). *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a feminist theology*. Beacon Press.
- Schipper, J. (2006). *Disability studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David story*. Library of Hebrew Bible Old Testament Studies 441. New York: T&T Clark.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (1992). *But she said: Feminist practices of biblical interpretation*. Beacon Press.
- Sihombing, R., Simamora, J., & Simorangkir, M. (2020). Kepemimpinan pendeta perempuan dalam pelayanan di GKPI Wilayah VI Silindung. *Jurnal Areopagus*, 2(1), 1–20.
<https://ejournal.iakntarutung.ac.id/index.php/areopagus/article/view/2342>
- Stålsett, S. J. (2023). A political theology of vulnerability. In *A political theology of vulnerability* (pp. 1–23). Brill.
- Stålsett, S. J. (2015). Towards a political theology of vulnerability: Anthropological and theological propositions. *Political Theology*, 16(5), 464–478. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1462317X14Z.000000000115>
- Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode penelitian kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Susanti, R. A. (2023). Rekonstruksi teologi berbasis gender dalam pelayanan pendeta perempuan. *Jurnal Pengarah*, 3(1), 10–25.
<https://journaltiranus.ac.id/index.php/pengarah/article/view/86>
- Sylvia, I. L. A. (2021). *Servant leadership: Kepemimpinan yang menghamba*. ADAB.
- Tata Gereja GMIM. (2021). *Tata Gereja dan Peraturan Pelaksanaan GMIM*. Manado: BPMS GMIM.
- Van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- VanGemeren, W. A. (1997). “Hesed.” In *New international dictionary of Old Testament theology & exegesis* (Vol. 2). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Wassar, N. (2021). Tinjauan teologis terhadap pelayanan perempuan dalam gereja. *Jurnal Teologi Kontekstual Indonesia*, 3(1), 15–30.
<https://www.ojs.hits.ac.id/index.php/OJS/article/view/14>
- Yong, A. (2017). *The hermeneutical spirit: Theological interpretation and scriptural imagination for the 21st century*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books.
- Zega, Y. K. (2021). Perspektif Alkitab tentang kesetaraan gender dan implikasinya bagi pendidikan agama Kristen. *Christian Education*, 2(2), 160–174.