

# **Jesus' Model of Leadership and the Integrity of Church Leaders in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

A scholarly integrity check on the leaders of the Church in Nigeria demands a study that would make the leadership model of Jesus a template for church leaders to emulate. The nature of the ethical standing of many leaders in the Church in Nigeria cannot escape authentic scholarship in the face of daily reports of terrible behavioural failures in the church today. It has been observed that as churches grow in Nigeria many of the leaders of these congregations have gone with the wind of moral laxity due to inability to model Jesus' leadership style. Hence, many church leaders in Nigeria have become gods on the Lord's heritage. This paper aims at evaluating the leadership model of Jesus and how this model has enhanced his integrity and the urgent need to adopt this model by church leaders in Nigeria in this contemporary time. The study also looks at leadership styles and models in both the human and business organizations as well as in the church. Methodologies employed for data collection and analysis include historical, contextual and phenomenological. Efforts have been made to emphasize the adoption of Jesus' model of leadership by church leadership in Nigeria as a way to enhance the integrity of both the leaders and the church. The work concludes by recommending an ethical commission to serve as checks and balances on the churches in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Leadership, Model, Integrity, Church.

## **Introduction**

The ethical demand of Church leadership in general and in Nigeria in particular and the anarchy that leadership has become makes the Jesus model of leadership a subject for research. Nigeria, South of the Sahara the most populous black nation in the world has an overwhelmingly Christian population of around 80 million persons belonging to various denominations. It is not hidden from the least observer that leadership in the Nigerian Church has failed woefully. The media is daily awash with news of terrible behavioural and ethical deficiencies of Church leaders in Nigeria even though there may be some exaggerations at times. These deficiencies tell strongly on the integrity of the leaders and their moral standing in the office of leadership. According to Rick Muchow, “We must be careful to guard well our integrity and reputation as we represent Christ and our Church.<sup>1</sup> There is a direct connection between Jesus and the church leaders. First, in the New Testament, Jesus appointed leaders and gave them instructions (Luke 9: 1 – 5). Secondly, Jesus trained the leaders he chose and enjoined them to model His leadership as a pattern. Thirdly, Jesus has untainted integrity, hence expects integrity from Church leaders (John 14: 30).

However, the appalling moral issues that bother directly on the integrity of Church leaders in Nigeria in our contemporary times are distantly far apart from the expectation of Jesus. This work shall, therefore, examine the concept of leadership as it relates to the Church, the definition of integrity as the only way to model Jesus; the Leader of leaders, as well as different leadership models in circulation in modern scholarship. The work shall also look at the distinct nature of Jesus' model of leadership, as well as discuss church leadership in Nigeria and the anarchy of integrity in the leadership. The paper concludes by presenting some recommendations to heal the cankerworm on leadership in the Nigerian churches.

## **What is Integrity?**

The word ‘Integrity’ is from the Latin adjective ‘Integer’ which means “Whole or Complete.” In other words, it is the inner sense of wholeness deriving from qualities such as honesty and consistency of character. Hopkin defines integrity as one of the very top attributes of a great leader.

According to him, integrity is a concept of consistency of actions, values, methods, measures, principles, expectations and outcomes. He continues: “It connotes a deep commitment, to do the right thing for the right reason, regardless of the circumstances. People who live with integrity are incorruptible and incapable of breaking the trust of those who have confided in them.”<sup>2</sup>

Emphasizing the importance of integrity in leadership, Enriquella Fiallo also declares: “There are many things you can lack and still steer clear of danger; Integrity isn’t one of them. Establish a set of sound ethical policies... And live by them.”<sup>3</sup> The concept of integrity is further highlighted to imply wholeness, a comprehensive corpus of beliefs often referred to as a world view, which emphasizes honesty and authenticity, requiring that one acts at all times following the individual's chosen worldview.<sup>4</sup> The direct opposite of integrity is hypocrisy.

Walker argues that the word ‘Integrity’ does not occur in the New Testament, but its equivalent may be seen in ‘Sincerity,’ ‘Truth,’ ‘The pure heart,’ ‘The single eye.’ Its original sense is said to appear in the Old Testament phrase *Letom* which means ‘Integrity.’<sup>5</sup>

In its plural Hebrew form *tummim*, it is one of the words on the breastplate of the High Priest as we see in Exodus 28: 30, Deuteronomy 33: 8, Ezra 2: 63 and Nehemiah 7: 65 and it indicates, ‘innocence’ or ‘integrity.’ A very close term to integrity in the New Testament is *Aletheia* which means ‘truth.’ Going further in the etymology of integrity, Brown, Driver and Briggs submit that there are three Hebrew words which relate to integrity. These are *tamim*, *tom* and *tam*. The Hebrew word *Tam* means complete, morally innocent, having integrity (Job 1: 1, 82: 3, 8; 20, Psalm 37: 37 and Proverbs 29: 10).<sup>6</sup> Having defined Integrity from various scholars’ point of view, it is safe at this point to discuss Leadership in the context of the church in Nigeria.

### **Church Leadership in Nigeria**

The entire history of God’s dealings with His people is God’s involvement with a particular person whom he used to accomplish His will. To emphasize the very importance of leadership in the church,

Montoya says Godly leadership in the local church is of inestimable value. But very saddening is the fact that it is often difficult to find men who exhibit this kind of leadership.<sup>7</sup>

In the words of Oderinde,

The expectations of God and the society for Ministers of the Gospel is very high, this is because Christianity is an ethical religion hence when Ministers of the Gospel, leaders from whom much is expected lack integrity and misbehave, the result leaves so much to be desired.<sup>8</sup>

To emphasize the unclean state of the Nigerian moral climate Oderinde explains further that the present state of the Nigerian nation could be a reflection of the state of the Nigerian Church where the lack of integrity has reached an alarming rate causing a high level of deterioration in the quality of Christians and the deplorable state of the Nigerian nation.<sup>9</sup> Even the non-Christian world has had many reasons to criticize the morality of the leadership of the Nigerian Church as seen in the works of Carson, France, Moyer & Wenham.<sup>10</sup> Different titles are assigned to leaders in the Church. Titles like: ‘Pastors,’ ‘Reverends,’ ‘Apostles,’ ‘Bishops,’ “General Overseers” or ‘Superintendents,’ ‘Prophets,’ ‘Elders,’ ‘Deacons,’ ‘Deaconess.’ These titles all convey the fact that the occupiers “are believed to be God’s representatives on Earth and Ambassadors of God’s kingdom.” Hence, such leaders are expected to be truthful in life and character and live the truth of the scriptures being taught and modelling Christ in a very sound and robust way that befits His calling.

To maintain the virtues of integrity is also emphasized by Oderinde when she said, “A person is said to have integrity if he or she is a complete and definite self and has the powers to resist disintegration in the face of temptation, suffering, peer pressure and other adverse moral influence.”<sup>11</sup> What this means is that a Church leader who has integrity is known to

maintain that integrity in the face of pressure to slacken or disintegrate the moral pillar of his or her leadership. This ability to withstand the pressure to slacken the pillar of integrity is seen in some leaders in the Bible out of which Jesus stands out as a leader of unshakable integrity. Have the Church leaders in Nigeria at all levels of leaderships epitomized the unshakable character and integrity seen in Jesus? The answer is No.

According to Oke, as cited in Oderinde,<sup>12</sup> the National Dailies are daily replete with stories and news of Prophets who dupe; engage in financial fraud and sexual immorality and a host of Holy Spirit tricksters who prowl about in priestly cassocks to rob their victims of money and household property worth of millions of naira.<sup>13</sup> Tanu likened the immoral acts of Ministers of God in Nigeria to the sins of the sons of Eli who desecrated the temple of God and the sacrifices of the people.<sup>14</sup> A very bold headline in one of the social media news platform reports that “an American teacher files lawsuits against a Nigerian Priest, claims he raped her in her home.” The reports quoted the victim as saying that “the incident had occurred in her home when the priest claimed he was there to drop a Christmas card for her.”<sup>15</sup> This incident shows that the moral disintegration of Nigerian Church leaders has been exported to other nations of the world. Another headline: “Nigeria Pastor, Wife arrested after starving son to death in 40-Day fast.” What a mess that integrity has become among Nigerian Church leaders to the extent that fasting that should be the power to hold the pillar of integrity was turned to a weapon to kill in the attempt to get the blessing from God. According to the victim, “It wasn’t the first time the family would be involved in a religious fast, that this was the longest.”

Cases of integrity failures in Nigerian Church leaders become more exposed when a one “Rev. King” of the Christian Praying Assembly, Lagos was caught in absolute immoralities. In the submission of a member of his Church who claimed that “Rev King” beat me to the unconscious state until my limbs were broken. I was admitted to the hospital.<sup>16</sup> The report of a supposed Church leader in Abuja, Nigeria did not escape the print media as it was reported that the said minister was arraigned for "having had carnal knowledge of two 14-year-old female members of his Church, one of whom had also aborted for him after lying

to the doctor that he was her father." Citing the Weekly Star of 2010, Oderinde submits: "The Cameroonian government has blacklisted Prophet T.B. Joshua of the Synagogue Church of all nations, Nigeria saying that he is an agent of Satan suspecting members of the public with diabolical miracles."<sup>17</sup> Another report was about two female Church leaders who sold a day old baby for Three Hundred Thousand Naira Only (₦300,000.00) at Aba, Nigeria. It was further reported that the criminals lied to the mother of the baby that her child died from a feigned sickness and went to the extent of threatening the mother not to ask for the baby again.<sup>18</sup>

Oshun lamented the deplorable state of Church leader behaviour in Nigeria saying that "Church Leadership" has brought disrepute into the body of Christ and to His name by getting involved in actions that are unthinkable, unmentionable and unprintable.<sup>19</sup> To highlight the moral diversion of Nigeria Church leaders from the core of their ministerial duties which is salvation, repentance and balanced attitude of Christians who are supposed to be salt and light of the world, Wotogbe-Weneka has written that the Church and the Church leaders have come under severe criticism of the public and members of the Church themselves as they have nothing more to talk about than money in all their preaching and other activities in the Church. He continues:

Electronic and print media today are awash with tales of woes on the corrupt practices in the Church of God such that men of God, priests, pastors, religious leaders of various ranks and files involving in shameful monetary dealings even to the embarrassment of God and His Church.<sup>20</sup>

Money has replaced God in the heart of some Church leaders in Nigeria prompting Benett to declare that: "Some Bishops have transited from being "men of God" and now act as "god of men," all because of (love of money)."<sup>21</sup> In effect, when we talk of financial integrity, the Church leaders have scored abysmally low.

Furthermore, the report of Chris Okotie, General Overseer of Household of God Church who sent his wife packing from their matrimonial home was in the news. Without any decorum or respect for the biblical injunctions he had preached for many years, he verbally attacked “his ex-wife during Sunday Service likening her to Jezebel in the Bible.”<sup>22</sup> The wife he openly castigated was his second wife according to Mary Ekah.<sup>23</sup> At the divorce of his second wife, a blogger questions the pastor saying, “Doesn’t the good book preach against divorce? Shouldn’t leadership be demonstrated by example?”<sup>24</sup> Another hot blow on Church leaders in Nigeria over the misconduct of some of them came from a Nigerian singer Timi Dakolo who took to his Instagram handle to call out Pastor of the Common Wealth of Zion Assembly (COZA), Abuja Biodun Fatoyinbo over his alleged sexual relationship with female Church members. The whistleblower had said: “Commonwealth of Zion Church is supposed to fix broken people and not crush people who show up in Church.”<sup>25</sup>

It was such a dent on the Church in Nigeria and Church leaders at any level or title of leadership. Narrating the ordeal in the hand of COZA pastor Walter Eze, a victim and a female member of the Assembly had alleged her sexual encounter with the Pastor in a hotel in Lagos. According to her, the pastor told her to feel at home and should not be shy. She alleged that he (the pastor) told her to order alcohol, feel free and order what you want.<sup>26</sup> By all these failures on the part of congregational leaders of the Church in Nigeria the God-based and revelational morality has been thrown to the waste bin. Ayantayo opines that God made man and created in him the sense of right and wrong.<sup>27</sup> This implies that man is enabled to distinguish between right and wrong and the inner strength not to disintegrate under the force of such wrongs that makes for integrity.

## Models of Leadership

This paper identifies major leadership models in Nigeria.

### Five major Styles of Models of Leadership used in Secular Institutions:

- i. **Autocratic or Authoritarian Leadership:** In this model, the leader ‘tells’ rather than ‘sells’ or ‘consults’ the subordinates in matters of organizational decision making
- ii. **Bureaucratic Leadership:** Where the leader sticks to fixed rules, authority and formal routines.
- iii. **Democratic Leadership:** It is where the leader is interested in working with the subordinates and motivates them to move the organization forward.
- iv. **Participative Leadership:** Where the leader and the followers take decisions together to move the organization forward
- v. **Laissez-Faire Leadership:** Where the leader sets the goals and gives guidelines for the subordinates who act accordingly.

### The Jesus’ Model of Leadership

Looking at Jesus' model in the context of Church leadership implies the attributes and virtues in the personality of Jesus, which reflects in His leadership and which portrays unbendable integrity in Him. It also implies that leaders in the Church in Nigeria are to be the picture, figure and exact image of Jesus' integrity in the Church. This means as well that Church leaders in Nigeria are to be an exact representation of Jesus when they are compared with Jesus in the school of moral integrity even in the face of pressure.

According to Robert Sloan, it is not difficult to see that Jesus clearly understood Himself to have an assigned mission from His father. We can, therefore, look at the behaviour (or integrity) of Jesus as indicating the various models and strategies He employed for accomplishing the will of His father.<sup>28</sup> It is the models Jesus utilized in accomplishing the will of His Father that leaders of the Church in Nigeria must step into in



accomplishing the will of Jesus who sent them as the Father sent Jesus, (John 20: 21). In effect, looking at the leadership models of Jesus is the same thing as looking into the leadership styles and principles of Jesus all of which invariably are distinct from everyday business or organizational styles, principles or model. His models are different and compliant with His mission on Earth. In the words of Katola and Nyabwari, reading through the New Testament and especially the Gospels, one is impressed by the leadership styles of Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup> This is why they went further to argue that Jesus was the greatest leader who ever walked on the Earth.<sup>30</sup> The point should be stressed that leadership in the kingdom of God is different from leadership in the world. Those who lead in the kingdom of God look very different from those who lead by the world's standards. Kingdom leaders are people who lead like Jesus. They act differently from leaders trained by the world. Buttressing the points made by Katola and Nyabwari, Ajayi notes that the life and teaching of Jesus have revealed to us His style of leadership; the qualities which have made this model of leadership a unique one. He itemized this style as:

1. **Sacrificial Leadership:** Jesus is recorded as demonstrating sacrificial leadership through His sacrificial living to make life better for His followers. He paid the highest sacrifice on the cross as He died for the world.
2. **Humble Leadership:** Jesus demonstrated humility through his call-to-serve attitude. By this, arrogance and pride were far from him, thus making him an example to follow. And he declared that in the kingdom, greatness belongs to the servant, who has child-like humility, (Matt. 18: 4).
3. **Leadership as Mentorship:** Jesus reproduced several leaders through mentorship to carry on the work after his ascension.<sup>31</sup>
4. **Visionary Leadership:** In the observation of Michael, Jesus was not considering the implication of His teaching on the immediate situation but the ultimate effect it would have on the Church. By this, he had created a lasting legacy that will be a foundation for a generation of leaders in the Church who "will build their pattern of leadership."<sup>32</sup>
5. **Honest Leadership:** The leadership model of Jesus is a demonstration of honesty and empathy for others.<sup>33</sup> The story of

the raising of Lazarus from the dead attests to this. Also, Jesus showed empathy to His followers when he requested that they be fed, thus the miracle of the 5,000 who were fed with fish and bread.

6. **Character-Based Leadership:** Jesus has been observed to teach the disciples that in the kingdom they were not to lead people like those in the world. They were not to command and control nor acquire status and power. The leadership model of Jesus was not about techniques and method but to grow character.<sup>34</sup> To the disciples, Jesus pointed them to leaders in the world whose model portray maximizing the benefits gained from “human resource,” and he says, “It shall not be so among you,” (Matthew 20: 26).

### **Jesus’ Model of Leadership and Church Leaders’ Integrity**

This section shall be divided into the principal parts of integrity to compare Jesus' model of leadership integrity and the anarchy that leadership has become in the Church in Nigeria. Practically, financial integrity is demonstrated in Jesus' leadership through a high moral standard of integrity. As compared to the commercialization of Christian Ministry in Nigeria through the sale of anointing oil, mantles, handkerchiefs, holy water, holy rosary and other emblems of Christian worship. Jesus did ministerial work and demonstrated financial integrity by healing and setting the captives free only by his Word. While there have been serious cases of fraud and misappropriation of Church funds by leaders in Nigerian Churches as already discussed in this paper, Jesus lived above financial disintegration. Rather than keep the purse and squander funds, he appointed Judas Iscariot to be the treasurer of His Ministry. He taught His disciples the principle of handling money and possessions.

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone

else's property, who will give you property of your own, (Luke 16: 10 – 12) (NKJV).

As a leader, Jesus admonished rich people of His day: Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there is your heart will be also (Matthew 6: 19 – 21). Such admonition is lacking in the Church in Nigeria today, where leaders and preachers alike encourage, their followers to be prosperous and wealth conscious. To this extent, many prosperity teachers have systematically 'redefined' biblical words, phrases and even whole paragraphs within the context of scripture to fit within the cultural contours of prosperity message. The intrusion of this mindset has pushed many Christian leaders into the abyss of a financial mess. One of such was the report in 2013 of a prominent Church leader, late Bishop Lanre Obembe who was dragged to court in Lagos by his business partners for fraud in a crude oil deal.

The bishop's partners alleged that the cleric cheated them with a huge amount of cash after some prospective investors offered \$9 million for an oil deal. The bishop who had been working on perfecting ways he would swindle his partners had in December 2010 filed a lawsuit where he accused his partner of forgery.

The question is, What is the relationship between the Gospel Ministry and crude oil business? That is the extent to which financial integrity has been compromised by leaders in Nigerian Churches.

- i. **Marital and Sexual Integrity:** Another principal aspect of the leadership integrity of Jesus that stands out is marital and sexual integrity. Even though Jesus Christ did not marry because of the

nature of his mission on Earth, he was never found meddling with wives of other men. There were several women around him during His earthly ministry but no record of misdemeanour between him and any woman, married or single. This cannot be said of many Church leaders in Nigeria; many of whose reckless marital lifestyle, infidelity and demeaning acts have marred their leadership credentials. An example in point is that a bishop of the Sword of the Spirit Ministries Church in Ibadan who was reported to have had a sexual relationship with his female secretary. This led to his suspension by his church members for a considerable length of time but later pardoned and reinstated after he openly confessed and was forgiven by His wife.

- ii. **Speech and Communications Integrity:** Furthermore, the pulpit integrity of Jesus remains impeccable. Throughout his earthly preaching ministry, Jesus was never found in unguided utterances, arrogant statements and boastful displays. The Bible says, “If any man offends not in word the same is a perfect man,” (James 3: 2). This means integrity in speech is a major consideration when measuring leadership integrity portfolio.

The way some leaders of the Church in Nigeria use their tongues is another cause of concern when considering speech and communications integrity. It has been observed that placing curses on followers who do not agree with these leaders has become rampant. Such an attitude is not found in Jesus as a leader of his chosen disciples and several multitudes of His followers. It is also important to stress the fact that Jesus combined "being and doing" in His leadership. His speech and communications integrity are "doing and saying." That is why the book of Acts talks about Jesus was doing and saying (Acts 1: 1). The opposite is the way of life of some leaders in the Nigerian Church where there is external pronouncements, displays and not doing what they say, forgetting that being a leader is not just about what you say, but what you do, who you are and what you have gleaned from the integrity of Jesus, the model leader. "You influence people by your life as much, if not more than by your words. Eventually, what is in one's heart will come out."

## Conclusion

This study has examined the leadership model of Jesus, his integrity as a leader and compared with the integrity of church leaders in Nigeria. When placed side by side, leaders in the Nigerian churches have not measured up to the model of Jesus Christ by all standards. In the words of Olayinka Sule in an open letter to the Nigerian Church in the year 2009, he lamented that "some Christians have been disillusioned with the Nigeria church" because "all is not well with the Nigerian church" due to imbalanced relationship between the "sheep and shepherd," lack of "accountability and responsibility," lack of "unity in the church," "teaching of" compromised, adulterated and unwholesome doctrines and the lack of "social justice."<sup>35</sup> The atrocities of church leaders that daily confront Christians in Nigeria is an indication that many church leaders have not had an encounter with the leadership model of Jesus. Not only that, many of these leaders have not internalized the teachings of Jesus on how to lead God's people but have fallen into integrity – destroying lifestyles.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup>M.R. Hopkin, "Leadership and Integrity," <http://www.leadonpurpose.com>, (accessed June 4, 2019), 13.

<sup>3</sup>F. Enriques, "10 mistakes Leaders Should Avoid at all costs," in M. Hopkin, "Leadership and Integrity," <http://www.leadonpurpose.com>, (accessed June 4, 2019), 19.

<sup>4</sup>A. I. Belyaev, "Human Being: Integrity and Wholeness," *Journal of Liberian Federal University, Humanities and Social Science*, (2019): 34.

<sup>5</sup> W. L. Walker, "'Integrity,'" in *International Bible Encyclopedia*, [www.inter.standardbibl.com](http://www.inter.standardbibl.com), (accessed June 04, 2019), 4.

<sup>6</sup>F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. P. Briggs, *The New Brown Driver, Briggs Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with An Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 135.

<sup>7</sup>A. Montoya, "Godly Leadership," <https://www.bcir.org>, (accessed June 4, 2019), 5.

<sup>8</sup>A. O. Oderinde, "Ethical Misconduct among Nigerian Church Leaders in the Context of 1 Timothy 3: 1 – 7," in *Research on Humanities and Social Science* 4, no. 17, (2014): 27.

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- <sup>22</sup> M. E. Chris, "Okoke Verbally attacks Wife during Sunday service," <https://www.Pulse.ng>, (accessed June 17, 2019), 5.
- <sup>23</sup> Chris, "Okoke Verbally attacks Wife during Sunday service," 5.
- <sup>24</sup> Chris, "Okoke Verbally attacks Wife during Sunday service," 5.
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