

Theological Education and Leadership: A Response to Leadership Challenges in Africa

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Abstract

Africa needs leaders with integrity to overcome the numerous challenges that its nations and churches face. Unfortunately, many leaders both in politics and in the Church do not serve with integrity. This article defines Christian leadership with integrity. Next, it demonstrates the need for leaders who are ready to serve those they lead, particularly by demonstrating integrity. Finally, it suggests some ways that theological institutions can train leaders to exercise integrity.

Introduction

Every social group requires effective leadership to achieve its goals. In the family, children look for fathers who will guide, protect, and provide for them. In business, shareholders and employees clamor for leaders who will increase profits. In politics, voters look for leaders who will be true to their word and move the society forward (Blackaby 2001, 1-10). The Church looks for leaders who will obey God's Word and maintain the Gospel mission. In every case, people need leaders who will give the right direction without selfish ambition.

Africa, my context, has a special need for men and women whose leadership is grounded in integrity (Oke 2005, 20). Sadly, most leaders lack integrity, especially in Africa. Speaking about Nigeria's problem with poverty and corruption at a graduation ceremony, Deji Ayegboyan asked whether any rescue can come from the Nigerian Church (Ayegboyan 2009). If Nigeria's – and Africa's – evils are to be eradicated, the Church must teach leadership integrity in all aspects of human life (Oshun 2010, 7-8). Most especially, the Church's theological education institutions must not turn a blind eye to society's problems. Instead, theological institutions must form leaders who model integrity as they serve the African community.

As much as African theological institutions attempt to raise men and women who serve with integrity and live decently, the challenge has been that some turn out well, and a few turn out badly. The few bad ones often spoil the situation. The question we may ask is, to what extent are men and women who are set apart unto

God themselves guilty of all kinds of misconduct? How can African theological institutions better equip students to act with integrity to grow as leaders so that their communities will prosper? The challenges globally and in the African context are the major concerns for this writer. This article explores these questions.

What is Leadership Integrity?

John C. Maxwell defines leadership simply: “Leadership is influence” (Maxwell 1998, 17). It includes the capacity to inspire, direct, encourage, or mobilize others toward a common goal. The purest form of leadership is influence through inspiration; importantly, inspiration is the opposite of intimidation and manipulation (Akanni 2003, 42). Leadership is impossible without a guiding vision that generates passion for accomplishment in the leader and in the people s/he leads. The fact that leadership means influence is one of the reasons why leadership courses sometimes do not yield good results. Often, such courses only teach managerial skills, not vision. But a good leader must maintain the goals and standards of the organization, community, or country s/he is leading, as well as manage practical activities (Janvier and Thaba 1997, 2-3).

Leadership also has contextual elements that are often embedded in an organization’s structures. In years past before the present global influence, Africans were known to be

modest, compassionate, sensitive to people; relatively Charismatic/ values-based, team-oriented and self-protective; those who act independently viewed least effective; leaders should be inspirational, collaborative and not excessively self-centered; autonomously are not effective. This style will make African leaders models of integrity in politics, economics, and religion. (House, 2004)

Early Africans were known for lifestyles of faithfulness and truthfulness; now, as Africans have become exposed to global challenges, wrong models are impacting Africans. Ayankeye, in his speech to the graduating class of 2020 at the Baptist College of Theology, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria laments how Africans no longer value decency but rather pursue recognition and services. He calls all to shun cravings for money, power, and position and to focus on God and learn contentment in God (Ayankeye 2021, 2-10). By implication, he means that leaders should be “logical, analytical, technical, controlled, conservative and administrative” (Bennis 1989, 102). This behavior will make African leadership more relaxed, holistic, and sensitive to the plight of others, as it used to be, compared to the present killings and destruction of property. Similarly, S. Ademola Ajayi calls graduates to see the training they have received as the seedbed for renewal of churches, ministries, missions, and unity (Ajayi 2021, 45-68).

At its core, beyond the ability to inspire, manage details, and be sensitive to context, leadership must include integrity. Integrity is the steadfast adherence

to a strict moral or ethical code. Leaders with integrity have established a set of boundaries that they refuse to cross (Obalade 2005, 11). Integrity is the ability to do the right thing even when one has the opportunity to do what is wrong (Babarinde 2005, 4). Robert Clinton writes,

At the heart of any assessment of biblical qualification for leadership lies the concept of integrity, that is, uncompromising adherence to [a] code of moral, artistic, or other values that reveals itself in sincerity, honesty, and candor and avoids deception or artificiality. The God-given capacity to lead has two parts: giftedness and character. Integrity is at the heart of character. (Clinton 1988, 58; quoted in Okoroafor 2005, 17)

God commissioned leaders like Moses to care for His people with integrity (Janvier and Thaba 1997, 2). Oluwaponmile Adetunji argues that integrity was essential to Moses's character as a leader (Numbers 12:3) (Adetunji 2010, 69-71). Moses's behavior defines integrity as having several traits. First, it is a humble recognition that God has lifted one from obscurity to honor (Exodus 33:12-16). This recognition results in service to God and His people rather than the pursuit of selfish interests. Such leaders use their gifts to develop the Church, not to benefit themselves. Second, integrity is dependence on God through prayer (Exodus 34:29-35). Like Moses, such leaders seek God's guidance so that they can guide others. Third, integrity is humble obedience to God through truthful words and actions (Exodus 32). Fourth, Moses-like leaders are zealous for God's righteousness no matter the circumstances. Thus, they glorify God, edify the Church, and enhance the Gospel. Such leaders are men and women who walk with God. Like Moses, leaders must always be conscious of God. This is pure integrity.

Leaders' behaviors affect organizations' success or failure. Much later in the Old Testament, God judged Judah by removing upright leaders and thereby slowly destroying Judah's society (Isaiah 3:1-8, 12). In God's design, communities rise or fall depending on their leaders' integrity (Heward-Mills 2002, 2). The recent END SARS crisis in Nigeria could be one example. That scenario revealed how some African leaders are treating their followers without compassion and dignity. END SARS was a protest by Nigerian youth against the killings of innocent Nigerians (Olukoya, Ayodele, Godwin, 2020). It started as a peaceful protest but was not managed very well by the Nigerian leadership. It became bloody, and many young people were killed. The government addressed the situation only after much destruction. Many who belong to the church were affected because their children were killed. This situation demonstrates the need, therefore, for African communities and their leaders at all levels to do what is right. While some African leaders live purely, others act in ungodly ways that hurt the entire nations. If the trends toward bad leadership are not checked, Africa's future will be in danger.

Lack of Integrity in Politics & the Church

Africa's lack of leaders who guide with integrity is severe. Personal standards are crumbling in a culture that pursues personal pleasure and shortcuts to success (Oke 2005, 21). Oppression, injustice, intimidation, and corruption have become the bane of African nations (Heward-Mills 2002, 3). Africa needs leaders of integrity so that significant change will happen, and theological education must respond to this need because, in Christ, theological education is uniquely positioned to form Moses-like leaders who walk in integrity. Biblical models of integrity and godly lifestyles are what Africans should embrace in politics and the church if a significant change will be visible in all areas of life. In addition, Africans should learn from history, from past leaders who have led well.

In Nigeria, theological education dates from the arrival of 19th-century Western missionaries (Kafang 2009, 7-25; Anie 2006, 16). Missionaries established Bible schools, some of which became full-fledged theological institutions. Today, Nigeria's theological institutions still train believers to teach others to serve Christ (Kafang 2009, 26-32). Yet, even as Nigeria's theological institutions have grown, their programs matured, and their graduates multiplied, the challenge of integrity remains in Nigerian politics and the Nigerian Church. This is not because of weakness in training in theological institutions but because the situation globally is tense in matters of integrity (Faniyi 2021, 114-128). Sadly, Nigerians are not surprised when we hear about politicians diverting money and property for personal use. For instance, the Nigerian government established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to investigate leaders who have mismanaged public funds. However, recent reports have revealed that ex-governors, ministers, and others are blocking corruption trials (Oyedele 2010). These leaders – who have been accused of embezzlement and oil bunkering, among other things – use “frivolous applications by defense lawyers to either forestall or prolong their trial” (Oyedele). Another example is the open fight in the House of Representatives, a fight in which leaders tore each other's clothes. All those involved in the fight were immediately suspended.

Some men and women who lead in the Church are guilty of the same unethical acts. In a speech, Osadolor Imasogie said, “Look around, and you will discover bitterness, disunity, intrigue, blackmail, indiscipline, moral laxity both among the clergy and laity; dishonesty and fiscal fraud being perpetrated by layman and clergy in our corporate body” (Imasogie 1979, 1-9). Aghawenu (2017, 84- 96) also cites moral decadence. In some cases, people in Nigerian theological institutions have been accused of the following:

- Forging results from prior schooling.
- Stealing library books.
- Tearing pages from library magazines, journals, and books.
- Fraud, where some students manipulate situations.

- Sexual immorality.
- Cheating during examinations.
- Plagiarism (more students are becoming lazy in personal research).
- Indecent dress.
- Addiction to alcohol and drugs.
- Jealousy.
- Intimidation.

Let me reiterate here that this research does not present all African leaders as bad because numerous others are God-fearing, truthful, and loyal. Readers will accept that no matter how bad a nation or community may be, there will always be some who are clean in thought and practice. Those are our models. However, my research reveals weaknesses in some of our leaders, weaknesses that call for changes in lifestyle and character.

In my research, I sought to assess these problems. I sent 80 questionnaires to secular and religious leaders and faculty, and students at selected Nigerian theological institutions. 72 questionnaires were returned. Respondents demonstrated the attitudes outlined below.

Table 1: Leadership Problems Are Byproducts of Lack of Integrity

S/N		SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	Leadership in Africa actually poses challenges for theological education.	36%	40%	3.75%	1.25%	81%
2.	Most leadership problems result from leaders' lack of integrity.	71.25%	12.5%	1.25%		85%
3.	Theological education has failed to produce leaders with integrity.	17.5%	17.5%	37.5%	12.5%	85%

The table above reveals that 76% of respondents agree that leadership problems in Africa are also a problem for theological education. On whether leadership problems result from lack of integrity, 83.75% agreed. The statement that theological education has failed to produce leaders with integrity had 35% support, while 50% disagreed. This table demonstrates that theological education in Africa is not faring badly in training men and women with integrity. This result sparks hope that theological education can raise leaders with integrity. Those who teach in theological institutions should embrace the task of producing more leaders with integrity.

Table 2: Theological Education and Leadership Problems

S/N		SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	Lack of leadership integrity is not limited to secular leaders; religious leaders are sometimes guilty.	53.75%	22.5%	8.75%	-	85%
2.	Leaders in theological education are sometimes guilty of embezzlement, sexual immorality, bitterness, and other ungodly acts.	7.5%	20%	41.25%	17.5%	86.25%
3.	Leaders who teach virtues are sometimes guilty of lack of integrity.	18.75%	62.5%	16.25%	1.25%	98.75%

76.3% of respondents agreed that lack of leadership integrity is not limited to secular leaders but that some religious leaders also lack integrity. 81.36% affirm that leaders who teach virtues are sometimes guilty of lack of integrity themselves. However, on whether leaders in theological education are sometimes guilty of ungodly acts, only 27.5% agreed, while 58.8% disagreed. Those in theological leadership are seen as people who should be blameless, which may lead to a more positive result here. Yet the few who do not live with integrity spoil the context for everyone else. I, therefore, recommend that those who are defacing the integrity of leaders in theological education change and do what they know to be right.

Table 3: Leadership Integrity Will Reduce Most Leadership Problems

S/N		SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	Leadership integrity can reduce Africa's problems.	63.75%	16.25%	1.25%	2.5%	100%
2.	Learning from Jesus Christ, the model leader, should be the focus of 21 st -century theological education.	67.5%	11.25%	5%	-	83.75%
3.	Emphasis on leadership integrity will resolve, reduce, and prevent most leadership problems.	52.5%	37.5%	1.25%	1.25%	92.5%
4.	Africa will experience liberation if all in theological education live as models of integrity.	60%	26.25%	3.75%	-	90%

On an appropriate response to leadership challenges, 80% agreed that integrity could reduce Africa's problems. 78.6% of the respondents agreed that learning from Jesus Christ, the model leader, is the proper focus of theological education. 90% supported the idea that theological education should emphasize integrity, with the hope that this emphasis will reduce leadership challenges. 86.3% of the respondents agreed that African nations would experience liberation if all in theological education live as models by displaying integrity.

The results above indicate that when all leaders maintain integrity, the problems of African nations will decline. This is true because leaders determine how societies function. If leaders are godly, they will promote godliness; if leaders act with integrity, their followers will do the same.

Despite their recognition that church leaders sometimes demonstrate a lack of integrity, respondents still see theological education as a valid way to develop leaders with integrity. With their answers, they implicitly call leaders to personal holiness and theological institutions to form such leaders. Obviously, leadership integrity begins with personal holiness. If students at theological institutions act corruptly while they are still only students, in a setting where they should most clearly be taught to exercise integrity, then they will not act with integrity once they graduate. To avoid this scenario, theological institutions have put in place several spiritual formation and disciplinary measures. Still, theological institutions must intensify their efforts to direct students to practice personal integrity. Otherwise, not only will society suffer, but the African Church itself will begin to disappear. As C. O. Oshun said, "The church Universal or the local church must continue to address the ills in the society (larger & immediate) if it must remain in its office as the respected, true, vocal voice of God" (Oshun 2010, 1-12). Unless its leaders demonstrate integrity, the Church will lose its voice in society – and, without the Church addressing it, society will continue to suffer. To strengthen the church, those who speak God's Word as leaders must be transformed by that same Word. They must be men and women who are not deceptive but who, shaped by the fear of God, will declare God's mind to others.

How May African Theological Institutions Instill Leadership Integrity?

In light of leadership problems in African society and churches, theological education is responsible for instilling leadership integrity. It should balance spirituality and academic excellence so that its graduates will be ready to respond to the problems they will face as leaders.

How may theological institutions form leaders who walk with integrity? First, people involved in theological education could convene to discuss the importance of continuous spiritual formation. With increasing lapses in morality among some pastors, more emphasis has been placed on spiritual formation

in theological education. In response to this need, the International Council for Higher Education West Africa released a book on spiritual formation among students and lecturers. The book has been adopted in many theological institutions and contributes to better lifestyles, personal growth, and spiritual reformation, according to the testimonies of users. The goal of the contents is to help all who pass through theological institutions become transformed to live with integrity. The book is rich in content for African users, for all who care to live rightly with God (ICHE Integrated Textbook Series on Spiritual Formation 2019, 1-189).

In addition to this effort, other plans include systematic discipleship, prayer programs, counseling, and spiritual retreats. African theological education would benefit from all of these.

Second, Victor Cole suggests a shift from the micro-curriculum to the macro-curriculum so that students will be prepared to meet the needs of the communities where they will serve (Cole 2001, 21-39).

Third, seminaries must plan spiritual activities beyond what happens in the classroom. For instance, as a member of a theological institution for close to three decades now, I affirm that the items in the list below help to form leaders with integrity:

- **Personal Bible application:** Reading the Bible only to teach and preach will not help leaders maintain their integrity. Christian leaders are to be guided to study Scripture with an emphasis on applying it to personal life. This single discipline is fundamental to addressing Satan's temptations and the lures of a degenerate society. Theological institutions should encourage more personal Bible reading.
- **Spiritual virtues:** Imasogie, citing the prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi, demonstrates that leaders should take the path of Christ by being instruments of peace, bringing union out of discord, replacing error with truth, and so forth. Rather than emphasizing numbers, theological institutions (and churches) should emphasize holiness and "commitment to the cause of Christ based on a clear understanding of Christian faith" (Oke 2009, 1-5). These could be achieved through several spiritual formation activities of Bible study, discipleship, prayers and many more.
- **Attentiveness to the Holy Spirit:** God still speaks clearly to those who will listen. Theological education should train leaders to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's daily promptings. For example, Oshun states that God sends prophecies to guide people, to avert His wrath (Oshun 2010, 10-11). Leaders need to be sensitive to these warnings and God's promises of forgiveness and love for repentant sinners.
- **Discipleship:** Young leaders need to learn virtues from those who have practiced them. Theological institutions should set up mentoring

relationships so that young leaders will be directed through older leaders to sit at Christ's feet and learn holiness. At the Baptist College of Theology, Oyo, Nigeria, several activities prepare students for a life of integrity: daily chapel devotions, daily prayer groups, weekly discipleship groups, spiritual retreats and revivals every semester, mission trips, church planting efforts, Langham preaching initiatives, preaching clubs, and many more. These are in addition to quality academic activities and programs.

- **Godly ethics:** While some seminary courses need to be purely academic, others need to appeal directly to students' lives. Seminaries now offer more courses that teach ethics. Furthermore, teachers of ethics must model godliness in their lives.
- **Institutional assessment:** Each year, African theological institutions graduate hundreds of students. Each institution should assess its success based on how its students live after graduation. This could be done through surveys, interviews, and questionnaires. In addition, all seminaries hold annual ministers' conferences, which could be opportunities to get feedback from alumni about how they are living.

All measures that theological institutions take should form leaders who have:

- Deep communion with the triune God, as demonstrated in humility, prayer, obedience, truthfulness, and love (see the example of Moses again).
- Relevance to their communities, as demonstrated by awareness of contextual issues and pursuit of relevant solutions.
- Ability to advocate on the Church's behalf with governments and NGOs, as demonstrated by bold speech supported by a clear conscience.
- Academic rigor, as demonstrated by intellectual skills equal to those of their secular counterparts.
- Mentoring the next generation, as demonstrated by attention to those older and younger than themselves.
- Promotion of others without preference for race, age, economic status, or gender but based on the commitment to Christ and gifting. (Hardy 2016, 20-50). Despite the degenerated situation, there are plans on ground today to remedy the situation by all stakeholders. This understanding has widened the curriculum of theological institutions in the areas of academics and spiritual formation.

Theological institutions should continue to train men and women who will serve as models in a rotten society that has made ungodliness fashionable. Theological institutions need to build leaders who can say no to ungodly trends, which can be trusted, who fear God, who only please God, who serve others without prejudice.

They need to form more leaders with integrity. These are the types of leaders who can transform society.

Conclusion

Globally and in recent times, many observers of theological education see a glaring problem with the quality of Christian leaders formed by that education. I do not mean to denigrate the efforts of many who have invested their time and energy in training men and women for ministry. However, theological education in Africa needs to recognize the pressing contextual need for leadership integrity, adapt to meet that need, and serve as a model to others. If Africa is to change for the better, those involved in theological education must first be transformed by God. Then, theological education should build on African virtues supported by Scripture so that leaders will know how to minister in their unique contexts with integrity. Such leadership will help to heal African society. The challenges we face could be addressed if those who claim to know the Lord put into use all that they hear, learn, teach, and preach to others.

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