

# **Biblical Model of Administration Integrity: The Gospels' Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

The issue of administering a Church organization by Christian leaders has received backlashes from the media, public and even religious followers themselves in recent times. Unfortunately, some leaders use leadership styles copied from the secular world to administer their organization. This evidently is a distraction and a stain on the integrity of the mission of the Church, which is to preach the everlasting gospel (Matt.28:19, 20) and be a light and salt of the world (Matt.5:13, 14). This paper search-lighted on principles on biblical model of Church administration that are often ignored by leadership in selected gospel text including Matthew 20:27, 28; Luke 22:59-62; John 13: 29; Luke 6:31; John 3:30 and Matthew 16:13-16. It encourages complete reliance on biblical principles rather than a merger of men's philosophy and biblical ideas. This study uses the descriptive method using selected case studies in the gospel books. This includes considering the direct actions and teachings of Jesus Christ as a model for leading with integrity. The Bible is the main research resource for this study. Integrity in Church administration is exemplifying servitude in leadership, admittance of weakness, making a stand for financial purity, applying the golden rule, observing terms of office, and allowing for criticism. This study recognizes the fact that though these principles might look unpopular even among religious followers, yet its

application will show to the world the model of integrity expected from Church leadership and the Church.

**KEYWORDS:** Church Administration; Integrity; the Gospels; Christian Leadership

## **Introduction**

The present Christian Church exists in a world where it has been difficult for administrators to effectively manage the affairs of the followers without controversies. It is either members of a Church denomination are making public protests because of their leadership (something common with secular and public leadership) or recurring divisions within the rank and files of the Church body. In recent times, religious leaders have daily received backlashes from the public eye on issues bothering on mismanagement, unfaithfulness to the call of ministry and utter lack of integrity in carrying out their leadership roles and responsibilities.

There is the possibility that many Church leaders see “leadership as some mystical mantle placed on a person, anointing that individual with superiority, authority, or infallibility.”<sup>1</sup> Sometimes as well, the business of Church operations is seen simply as business rather as a ministry.<sup>2</sup> This perception brings about leaders who exhibit characters, inimical to leadership with integrity. An author explains it this way:

Hypocrisy, dishonesty, duplicity, and corruption are the opposites of God's call! When we carry out these evil traits or do not keep our word, we are misrepresenting Christ's good name and are defiling Him with our feeble words and/or excuses. Hypocrisy gives people a false impression of God and His Church! Insincerity gives people a false impression of who we are called to be; it nullifies integrity and character!<sup>3</sup>

The question that readily comes to mind is, “can there be integrity with Church administrative leadership?” How effective is the juxtaposition of secular administrative principles in the light of full biblical principles for Church organizations? The vacuum created because of the dearth of spiritual administrative principles remains one of the focuses of this paper.

## Conceptual Clarification

### Definition of Administration

The word administration does not have one definition and its meaning varies from one location to another and from one field to the other.<sup>4</sup> Administration is defined as “an activity or process mainly concerned with the means for carrying out prescribed ends.”<sup>5</sup> This indicates that administration includes two major key factors – achieving a prescribed goal and being concerned about a means of achieving the goal.<sup>6</sup> There is a possibility that many administrative processes are constructed with goal-focused ideas while the means of achieving such goals are undefined.

Another definition presents administration as “a process of systematically arranging and coordinating the human and material resources available to any organization for the main purpose of achieving stipulated goals of that organization”<sup>7</sup> This definition portrays more definitively the means of achieving a set goals in an administrative process, which are managing the human and material resources. Managing these two resources do create integrity challenges and finding the appropriate principles could be tasking.

### Church Administration

The spiritual gift of administration is highlighted among other spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Paul uses the Greek word *kubernete* for administration which interprets as “to guide or to steer as a pilot of a ship.”<sup>8</sup> Church leadership and administration is not only a skill acquired but a spiritual gift and a calling.

Administration, especially in the Christian Church has been defined as a “spiritual service to the body of Christ which involves the wise stewardship of God’s resources for the accomplishment of the work of ministry.”<sup>9</sup> From this definition, some salient points should be noted which include, Church administrators’ recognition of administration as;

- a spiritual service and that things of the spirit should be conducted in the way of the spirit;
- a wise stewardship which involves recognizing that God owns His Church and leaders must account for it comprehensively.

- They should recognize that God knows everything about the work even more than them;
- managing God's resources that have been placed in their care; and
  - the edification of God's Church and the accomplishment of the gospel call.

### **Definition of Integrity**

Integrity has been described as ideal characters expected in leadership because "citizens clamour for it from politicians, employees desire it from their managers, religious faithful expect it from the clergy, and stockholders demand it from corporations."<sup>10</sup> Many scholars have suggested that there is no single acceptable working definition of integrity because of many definitions.<sup>11</sup>

Integrity has been defined in many forms, such as wholeness, which makes it multifaceted; consistency of words and actions with regard to social behavior; as an unchanging behavior in the face of adversity or temptation; being true to one's own conscience and also as moral or ethical attitude in accordance with socially acceptable behavior.<sup>12</sup> In essence, integrity has also been seen as the "characteristics of an individual that is consistently considerate, compassionate, transparent, honest, and ethical. The characteristic feature of trust is closely associated with integrity."<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, it is obvious that integrity in persons or leaders means that they "will not twist facts for personal advantage; they are willing to stand up for and defend what is right; they will be careful to keep promises; and they can be counted on to tell the truth."<sup>14</sup>

### **Integrity among Christian Leaders**

Church leadership and administration had been in the limelight in recent times for the negative reasons. The reasons include lack of integrity, that is, an inability to be consistently considerate, transparent, and ethical. This, as suggested, occurs among religious leaders when in administrative responsibilities they put the love for office and its privileges above the love for the responsibilities of the office. It is simply about elevating self above the progress of the Church organization.<sup>15</sup>

Lack of administrative integrity can be seen in the issues of maladministration and misappropriation in the guise of administering God's church. Some of the outcomes may include leaders becoming people-pleasers for self-advantages; the manipulation of people in other to retain administrative responsibilities and elevate themselves for bigger positions, and sometimes leaders often use a 'divide and rule' style of leadership. Such leadership creates cliques and eventually scatters the fold to retain leadership.<sup>16</sup>

### **Principles in the Gospel Model**

The membership of Christian churches expects much from their religious administrative leaders. They expect religious leaders to "align professional knowledge and skill with religious commitment and *moral integrity*, emphasizing the integrity of professional practice in clergy identity."<sup>17</sup> The gospel books present model of integrity through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ which religious leadership can imitate.

### **Integrity is Exemplifying Servitude in Leadership**

Jesus exemplified servant leadership in Matthew 20:27, 28 when He said, "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Integrity among religious leaders involves being able to see administrative positions as an opportunity to serve, not to be served. It involves seeing the position as a responsibility in transit and not for permanence. Jesus came not to be ministered to but to minister selflessly to others. He became a leader among his disciples and other people, with people unable to differentiate between him and the people he led.

In another instance in John 13, Jesus led by example by washing the feet of his disciples, a most disgusting level of ministration which was dedicated to only the extremely low in the society. Leadership and administrators should bring themselves down to the level of those being led, just as Jesus humbled Himself by giving his life to death, even on the cross. This attitude of leveling up with those being led in all areas will surely create trust for ease of administration.

The relationship between integrity and servant leadership has been highlighted as the ability to be "true to oneself and to one's own

moral principles” and, to be consistent with a strong servant leadership style is the beginning of integrity in leadership. It as well helps the administrator’s “ability to influence the behavior of others towards desired organizational goals.” It provides “open exchanges between [administrators] and followers, the ability to display genuine concern for others, as well as leaders’ steadfastness not to compromise.”<sup>18</sup>

The servant leadership style of every administrator must be compatible with integrity; such that can be seen by others, such that will make great impact upon the followers’ lives and such that will smoothen or ease administration. Such was the example Jesus set for his disciples by being a true example of servant leadership with integrity.

### **Integrity is Admittance of Weakness**

Peter set as a model of a leader who is willing to confess his weakness and repent immediately after a spiritual fall (Luke 22:59-62). A writer once wrote:

All are fallible, all make mistakes and fall into sin; but if the wrong doer is willing to see his errors, as they are made plain by the convicting Spirit of God, and in humility of heart will confess them to God and to the brethren, then he may be restored; then the wound that sin has made will be healed. If this course were pursued, there would be in the church much more childlike simplicity and brotherly love, heart beating in unison with heart.<sup>19</sup>

Such was the character of integrity exemplified by Peter during his fall as a leader. The world is faced with a daunting task of admitting mistakes during a moral fall immediately it occurs just as Peter admitted it instantly. Such fears of admitting instant mistakes as an administrator or a leader could be due to the spiral effects these will bring upon the followers and the work. “When people step into a leadership role, they are usually handed much more than a heightened sense of responsibility. Leadership often comes with an elevated regard, which can lead to a false perception, from both yourself and others, that you must always get things right.”<sup>20</sup>

Integrity in administration involves recognizing one’s weaknesses and mistakes, admitting it, and making amends to reposition one towards a better life in office. If an administrator fails to admit a mistake or falls, two things are at stake, “they will try to cover up the mistake, or find a

way to pass the blame.”<sup>21</sup> Confucius said, “If you make a mistake and do not correct it, this is called a mistake.”<sup>22</sup>

Every Church leader will exemplify integrity when such like Peter, will “[go] out, and [weep] bitterly” (Luke 22:62 KJV), an example of genuine repentance, restitution, and a call for joyful restoration. This is integrity per excellence in leadership.

### **Integrity is Making a Stand for Financial Purity**

In John 13: 29, the scripture says, “For some *of them* thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, buy *those things* that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor (John 13:29 KJV). The text indicates that Jesus, being the leader of the evangelistic team never keeps nor expends directly from the purse of the group. The text affirms another important administrative principle that upholds integrity, i.e., the leader should avoid handling or tampering with the financial bag of his organization.

According to global missions’ researcher, David B. Barrett, an estimated \$16billion was embezzled by the world’s Christian churches in the year 2000, with an estimated \$75 billion embezzled between 1980 and 2000.<sup>23</sup> The issue of fraud in religious organizations is becoming a problem and leadership should refocus on setting the best biblical principle to safeguard this trend.

The first principle is for administrators to separate themselves from issues that have to do with handling, borrowing, transacting personally from the money of the organization. Many leaders are victims of financial misappropriation. The church funds are meant for mission alone. Many have been caught in the web of meeting their personal enrichment goal aside from the organizations’ mission’s fund rather from the stipulated wages approved for the position.

Jesus has set an example of complete sacrifice, but the contemporary Christian leaders have inculcated the worldly culture of satisfying their personal needs from the purse of the mission. This practice is seen in John 12:6 which says, “This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.” Most Christian leaders of our generation are currently practicing what Judas did. Jesus’ attitude to the purse of the Church should be best practice for every religious administrator.

## **Integrity is Applying the Golden Rule**

When Christian administrators apply the golden rule in Luke 6:31 as an integrity nugget, they will be safeguarded against maladministration. The scripture says, “And as ye that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31 KJV). Matthew added a different face to it in Mat 7:12 “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

When using the analogy of a shepherd who invests into the care of his flocks and reaps a productive flock, so is the Christian leader who will do a thing that will prosper the spiritual lives of his congregation. Respect and honor to the followers give birth to respect and honor to the leadership. When leadership is sincere and committed to ministering to the lives of the believers, there will be a sincere love reciprocated to the leadership.

## **Integrity in Observing Terms of Office**

John the Baptist in John 3:30 recognized the limitation of his responsibility and the arrival of his successor in mission when he said this of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” A Christian leader must see himself beyond his current position and responsibility. Integrity from such demands that first, leaders must at all time, in action and speech, let God be the one leading the organization. Integrity in leadership demands that people must be led to God for salvation and worship. Leadership must not take for themselves source of salvation or worship from their fellow believers, as some do. A Christian author wrote, “looking in faith to the Redeemer, John had risen to the height of self-abnegation. He sought not to attract men to himself, but to lift their thoughts higher and still higher, until they should rest upon the Lamb of God.”<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, the need for integrity demands that every administrator must not at the expiration of the responsibility of office cling to the power of the office. Such attitude is common even among religious leaders where they find it difficult to allow successors work effectively and efficiently by not handing over properly (in some cases not at all) or frustrate every effort of the new leader to settle down in the new assignment.



John the Baptist recognized the timeline of his assignment and willingly referred to the one coming after him as worthy of all respect and honor in Mark 1:7, “There comes one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.” Such is a classic example of integrity for Church administrators.

### **Integrity is allowing for Criticism**

Elbert Hubbard has this to say about criticism, “To avoid criticism do nothing, say nothing, be nothing.”<sup>25</sup> A test of leadership integrity could be one as exemplified by Jesus where he requested for evaluation of his self through the perspective of the people and his disciples. In Matthew 16:13, 14, he asked his disciples, “who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” Then, he got the reply from the disciples saying, “some say John the Baptizer, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He further requested to know what his immediate associates think about his person in verse 15, 16, “But who do you say that I am?” to which Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Christian leaders sometimes might be tempted to listen to the voice of praise-singers only who extol their bright characteristics rather than those who present constructive criticism. Just as Christ absorbed whatever comments made against him and did not lose focus, Church leaders are expected to learn the skill of maximizing criticisms for the benefit of the work and ministry.

Leadership demand skills which include humility is to allow for constructive criticism. This implies not having a perfectionist attitude that does not see good in other sharing a different perspective. A leader’s response to criticism should be gentle and compassionate to allow for more views to be aired.<sup>26</sup>

### **Recommendations**

This paper seeks to suggest the following recommendations on the principles of integrity for religious administrators.

- Christian leadership should avoid a mixture of philosophies and godly ideas, but rather apply biblical principles alone for the

mission of God, even when it is unpopular. While management principles are good, they should have their limits in the execution of God's work and allow God's mission to be subjected completely to the word and guidance of the Owner of the work.

- Every Church administrative position with a term of office should be respected to give way for others. John the Baptist decreased while Christ increased. Jesus had to leave the stage having groomed disciples to carry on the work of mission.
- Christian leadership should be willing to make public, areas where they made mistakes in specific terms at the end of their term of responsibilities in office, so as to be a guide for successors taking after them. The Bible provides classic example in this regard since it does not try to hide the mistakes of even the patriarchs (e.g. Noah's drunkenness in Gen 10:21), prophets (e.g. Jonah's misbehaviors) and men and women of faith. When leaders make mistakes even during the term of their office, they should be willing to quickly admit their human weakness, request for prayer of restoration and move ahead. This will endear the followers to the leadership.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is an effort to examine the semantics of integrity from the perspective of being an administrator in a Church organization. While administrative principles gleaned from the secular world and philosophy might be enticing and logical, it is impossible to allow them to take the place of timeless biblical principles especially in proving integrity.

The gospel books present some models which include looking at Jesus and the way He handled the treasury of the organization, Jesus as a servant leader with integrity, Peter as a leader who admit his weakness, doing unto others as we expect them to do unto us, and leaders voluntarily decreasing while Christ and others increase. It also involves a leader's ability to absorb constructive criticism for maximum benefit of the mission of the organization.

Application of the above principles may sincerely limit the controversies which often derail administrative efficiencies of religious organization. This will, as well, help in achieving the mission of the Church.

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