# Biblical Concept of Integrity as a Resource for Christian Political Leaders and Public Office Holders in Nigeria

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**Abstract**

Integrity, a rare commodity in Nigeria's leadership landscape, is considered the quintessence and application of character and an integral part of leadership on many levels. Scholars have discussed integrity and Nigeria's political leadership without linking it to Daniel's exemplary leadership in Babylon. So, there is still the need to interrogate the concept of integrity as it relates to leadership in Nigeria's political and public space, especially for Christian leaders. The paper intends to highlight God's expectations for political leaders and public office holders in Nigeria, who are Christians, with particular reference to Daniel as a political administrator cum public office holder in Babylon. The paper employs a documentation method for data gathering. Primary data is sourced from the Bible, while secondary data is sourced from published works on integrity and political leadership in Nigeria. Data will be content analysed within the ambit of the behavioural theory of leadership. Daniel's character was the basis for his actions. He defined his core values as being biblical- normed, communicated those values in private and public, and aligned his daily living with those biblically normed values. Therefore, the paper makes recommendations for Christianity-inclined political leaders and public office holders in Nigeria.

**Keywords**:  Integrity, Political leadership in Nigeria, Daniel in Babylon, Behavioural theory of leadership, political and public officeholders.

# INTRODUCTION

Integrity is considered the quintessence and application of character and it is an integral part of leadership on many levels. The lack of integrity in political leadership muddles national life. Integrity is a concept that is commonly used within formal and informal discussions of leadership and organisational theory, yet, it is not clearly defined and understood.[i] Integrity is a ubiquitous ideal in leadership. Thus, there is the need to conceptualise integrity from the biblical perspective for Christian political leaders and public office holders in Nigeria.

Scholars have considered integrity and leadership in Christian and political terrains outside of Nigeria.[ii] On the other hand, some scholars have x-rayed Nigeria's political leadership from theoretical,[iii] socio-economic[iv], regional[v], developmental[vi], and corruption-index[vii] perspectives, but without linking it to Daniel's exemplary leadership in Babylon. Hence, the need to interrogate the political leadership in Nigeria concerning integrity, especially in the context of Christianity-inclined political leaders and public officeholders.

As a concept, integrity is commonly used within formal and informal discussions of leadership without its clear definition and understanding. Therefore, the paper seeks to conceptualise integrity and to highlight God's expectations for political leaders and public office holders in Nigeria, who are Christians, with particular reference to Daniel as a political administrator cum public office holder in Babylon. Primary data are sourced from the Bible references to Daniel as a political administrator, while secondary data are sourced from published works on integrity and political leadership in Nigeria through documentation research method. Data are content analysed within the ambit of the behavioural theory of leadership.

The behavioural theory leadership focuses on the behaviours of the leaders as opposed to their mental, physical or social characteristics. Rooted in behaviourism, this leadership theory focuses on the actions of leaders, not on their mental qualities or social status. The behavioural approach focuses exclusively on what leaders do and how they act. This is different from the trait approach, which emphasises the personality characteristics of the leader and the skills approach, which emphasises the leader's capabilities.[viii] The behavioural approach reminds leaders that their leadership roles impact on others along task and relationship

dimensions. This resonates with the characterisation of Daniel's exemplary leadership in Babylon as a leadership template for Christians who hold political and political offices in Nigeria.

This paper is significant in that it establishes a nexus between religion (Christianity) and politics or between Christianity and state affairs. Christianity does not teach only about spiritual things, but also about one's life and actions in the world by encouraging ethical decisions and actions according to its moral principles.

## CONCEPTUALISING INTEGRITY

The word "integrity" evolved from the Latin adjective "integer", which means "working well, whole, complete, intact, entireness, integrated and uncorrupted".[ix] In Worden's words, integrity means "uprightness, truthfulness, authenticity, reliable consistency between word and deed and as such it describes a kind of wholeness."[x] In the context of this paper, integrity is considered the inner sense of "wholeness" deriving from qualities such as honesty and consistency of character. In essence, one can judge others as having the integrity to the extent that they act according to the values, beliefs and principles they claim to hold in consonance with the ideals of the society. Integrity in people is when there is no dichotomy between their public and private lives, between what they profess and what they practice, between their words and their deeds.[xi]To put it differently, "a person of integrity does not live a fragmented or dualistic life in which there is a separation between what they proclaim and how they act"[xii]

In essence, a person of integrity is not "two-faced" and is not guilty of compartmentalisation of life whereby there is a dissonance between behaviour outside and on the inside. Having integrity does not presuppose one will do everything right every time, but it does mean one intends to do right every time and own up when the case is otherwise. Also, integrity is not synonymous with perfection. People of integrity do make unintentional mistakes, but they admit them and own up to their mistakes.

## STATE OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

According to Dion, political leadership represents but one of the many categories of leadership.[xiii] Morell and Hartley define political leaders as democratically elected representatives who are vulnerable to deselection, and operate within, as well as influence, a constitutional and legal framework; their source of authority is a mandate given by the electorate.[xiv] Political leaders bear the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources of an independent political entity.[xv]

Ejimabo and Agomuo point out that most of the public office holders in Nigeria are people who have not shown the capacity for leadership but have manipulated the people and their ways into various leadership positions through corrupted electoral processes.[xvi] As such Nigerian society has remained pauperised and the people wallowing in abject poverty. Political leaders are supposed to harness and maximize the available resources of a country for the greatest good of the people.

The history of political leadership in Nigeria reveals that Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership. All of Nigeria's problems have been summarised as leadership failure.[xvii] Political leadership in Nigeria uses power to its advantage rather than that of the people. This is why Mohammed and Ayeni declared that the only factor standing between Nigeria and greatness is simply leadership.[xviii] While Ebegbulem asserts that an analysis of the plethora of leaders in Nigeria's political landscape reveals selfish, mediocre, tribal leaders and opportunistic small money-minded people masquerading as leaders.[xix]

## INTEGRITY AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

Jurkiewicz and Giacalon established the direct relevance of integrity to the behaviour of leaders due to the importance of integrity as part of the framework in achieving workplace spirituality and its links to respect, justice, responsibility and trust in organisations.[xx] On his part, Fugiyo – Banine mentions four top areas where leaders need to exhibit integrity: dealing with money, opposite sex, different tribes, and enemies or opposition.[xxi] Competent political leaders, but lack integrity will inevitably abuse their positions of power in acts of self-aggrandisement and exercise patronage to non-deserving supporters or even extended family members.[xxii]

The question of political leaders shortchanging the electoral masses by saying one thing and doing another is one of the issues on the front burner of the complex spectrum of political integrity. Other issues on this wide spectrum of integrity in political leadership are outright corruption such as overt and covert bribe, political donations and lobbying, buying access to political power/positions, disclosure of funds raised and donors during political campaigns, among others.

It is no more a hidden fact that the political leaders produced by Nigeria's democratic system overtime have blighted the lives of Nigerians and left them in worse conditions through systematic mismanagement of the country's resources. This points to a lack of integrity in the political leadership in Nigeria. It takes people of integrity to produce good governance, which is imperative for a durable and viable democratic polity like Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is only a political leadership that exudes integrity that can lead to the socio-economic development of Nigeria because the endemic corruption matrix, which is the bane of national development, would have been drastically reduced to the barest minimum. Leadership is needed to create the enabling environment needed for development anywhere in the world, Nigeria inclusive. The important role that leadership plays in during the process of development is seen from the perspective of agenda-setting, resources mobilization and utilization as well as political action.[xxiii] The lack of integrity in Nigeria's political leadership is evidenced in the endemic corruption among the political class.

Adelakun has identified the various areas where the current political leadership in Nigeria has failed the integrity test.[xxiv] Primarily, superintending over public education when their children attend expensive and well –managed private schools both in Nigeria and abroad; allocation of meagre budgetary provisions to the health sector for millions of Nigerians while they use public funds to carry out medical treatment abroad; inaugurating public infrastructures that become bad in a little time with fanfare. And secondarily, the unresolved issue of farmers/herdsmen clashes; failed electoral promises; sloppy administration; corruption scandals in the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation; fuel subsidy fraud; disrespect for court orders and the President's advocacy for the abrogation of the rule of law; selection of

political associates with tainted character and alleged corruption cases, among others.

## DANIEL'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN BABYLON REGARDING HIS INTEGRITY

Daniel was one of the Jews taken from Jerusalem to exile in Babylon around 605 B.C. (Daniel 1:6) and historical research shows that Daniel was not more than 14years old at the time of his captivity.[xxv] He lived under imperialism in a foreign country. Daniel served at the highest levels of government during Israel's 70-year Babylonian captivity and he was close to the political establishment or leaders. This is evidenced by these Bible verses: "Then the king appointed Daniel to a high position and gave him many valuable gifts. He made Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon, as well as chief over all his wise men" (Daniel 2:48 NLT); "Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and princes. Because of his great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire" (Daniel 6:3 NLT).[xxvi] Daniel being made a great man implied the king gave him an honourable appointment and he was showered with gifts by the king to show the tokens of the royal favour.

By implication, Daniel 2:48 quoted above indicates that Daniel was a public office holder or a public administrator – supervisor of all the wise men of Babylon, which included magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers (Refs. Daniel 3:2; 4:9; 5:11). Also, "ruler over the whole province of Babylon" could likewise imply being made a "governor" Daniel provided a prototype of political leadership that was not influenced or altered by his surroundings or circumstances of life and his spiritual and moral integrity are unparalleled among the biblical heroes.[xxvii]

Daniel lived a consistent life from start to finish; he was willing to face any consequence within the framework of carrying out his assignments to please God and lift the outcomes to God; he maintained a good name and was above reproach (Daniel 1:20, 21; 5:11; 6:3, 5); he stood up for his belief in Yahweh as a Jew (1:8); he was not corrupt (6:4); he pursued excellence (6:3); he practised his faith (6:10, 20). Daniel's character was the basis for his actions. He was God – influenced and had a scripturally (Torah) controlled heart, which can be termed, in the New

Testament framework, a "repented heart" or "Christianity – inclined". This was the basis of his integrity.

Daniel kept his identity as a Jew in Babylon. He was given the name Belshazzar (Daniel 1:7). This is an act of assimilation, at the expense of loyalty to God and the Jewish nation, on behalf of the king, to make Daniel be like the Babylonians and integrate him into the Babylonian way of life, which was not in tandem with the Jewish religio-cultural categories. Daniel, which means "God is my Judge", is symbolically taken from him as Babylon attempted to corrupt his unwavering devotion to God. Despite losing his name, Daniel never lost his devotion to God – "But Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king (Daniel 1:8a NLT). He refused the king's food based on his religious convictions.

As explained by Ball, the Jews were forbidden by law from eating any unclean animals which included any meat that had been offered to idols.[xxviii] So, Daniel was faced with a decision to compromise his integrity before God and conform to the Babylonian ethos. In Daniel 6, when a law was introduced that discriminates against his faith, Daniel disobeyed the law by refusing to worship the state above God and being thrown into the lion's den against the king's wishes. Daniel takes sides with God consistently when everything is stacked on the other side. Daniel managed to walk the tight rope of partial assimilation without religious and moral compromise.

## LESSONS FOR POLITICAL LEADERS AND PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS IN NIGERIA FROM DANIEL'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN BABYLON

Outside of the Book of Daniel, Daniel is recognised as a man of righteousness and integrity (Ezekiel 14:14, 20). Even in Daniel 6:4, when his enemies were looking for a way to accuse him, it was reported that "they could find no grounds for complaint or any corruption because he was faithful and no negligence or corruption could be found in him". These aforementioned Bible verses point to Daniel as a man of integrity. Also, as a man of integrity, in the occurrence whereby he interpreted the King's dream (Daniel 2), he gives credit to God and acknowledged God as the source of the dream's interpretation.

Like Daniel, the politicians in Nigeria can drive the country and its people towards progress and prosperity. The lessons that political leaders and public office holders in Nigeria can learn from Daniel's political leadership in Babylon can be categorised into three parts: "know the walk"; "talk the walk"; and "walk the talk".

Concerning "know the walk", Daniel in Daniel 1:8, knew he was not to eat unclean animals or animals sacrificed to idols so as not to be defiled. Also, on different occasions, he always acknowledged God as his source and he referenced God in his various activities (Daniel 2:19-23, 27-28; 4:17-23; 6:21-23). Daniel operated as a political leader based on his faith foundation and experiential knowledge of God. Therefore, Christian political leaders in Nigeria should determine their core value as being biblical, both intrinsically and practically. This provides the framework for decision making that is God-glorifying and people- edifying, and for resolving ethical and moral dilemmas.

In another vein, Daniel "talked the walk". Daniel spoke consistently about his faith in God. He expressed the courage of his convictions and was willing to act and speak for or of what he knew to be right and godly. Christian political leaders and public office holders in Nigeria are to communicate those biblically – normed values in private and in the public.

Also, Daniel "walked the talk" Daniel sought and worked for the welfare of Babylon based on his scriptural conviction. He referenced the book of Jeremiah in Daniel 9:2. The prophecy is found in Jeremiah 29:8-10 and it refers to the 70 years the Jews would be in exile in Babylon. Despite being torn from his native country, he engaged positively in Babylon, his new city, using his position of immense authority fully. Hence, Christian political leaders are to align their daily lives with those biblically-normed values they are convinced and talked about. In furtherance to "walking the talk", these leaders should collaborate with other Christian leaders in the same kind of work: "At Daniel's request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be in charge of all the affairs of the province of Babylon, while Daniel remained in the king's court" (Daniel 2:49 NLT).

Furthermore, Daniel had two options. First, he had the option of withdrawing from the corrupt and profane Babylonian government and seek a life pleasing to God among his fellow Jews. Second, he had the

option of relegating his faith to a private, personal sphere, involving praying to God in his closet while loving the life of Babylonian power and influence- a kind of promise. But he chose neither of the aforementioned options. Rather, he embarked on an impactful public career as a political administrator cum public servant while remaining publicly devoted to God. Christian political leaders are not to escape secular workplaces to withdraw into insular communities of Christian-only institutions. They are to bring the sacred into the secular since God is the Creator of both the Word (the Bible) and the world. In "walking the talk", they must draw the lines where the Bible draws them.

Green highlights three themes that can help promote integrity, which is useful for Christianity-inclined political leaders in Nigeria: moral accountability to ourselves, others and to God; relational consistency; and personal discipline.[xxix] This comes about as Christian leaders harmonise their thoughts, words and deeds around the Bible as God's word. Living with integrity means that character becomes the basis for actions. Therefore, Christian political leaders must have clear, well-defined values. Without them, they will become indecisive, inconsistent and unethical in compromising situations and difficult times.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the biblical perspective of integrity as referenced in Daniel's political leadership in Babylon and anchored on the behavioural theory of leadership.

1. Nigeria's political system should be restructured to bring up politicians and public office holders with uncontestable integrity.
2. Those that will midwife the election and selection of political leaders and public office holders, respectively, in Nigeria must be tested and trusted people – people of integrity chosen by the masses, and not those handpicked by any government in power.
3. Christianity-inclined political leaders and public office holders must have clear, well-defined biblically-normed values, express the courage of their convictions, and be willing to act and speak in line with them.
4. Christianity-inclined political leaders and public office holders should form associations or network groups at every stratum of leadership in Nigeria. This will create the avenue for active

collaboration in various issues of concern; for accountability; and measurement and evaluation of performance within the same Christian faith-guided frameworks.

## CONCLUSION

Daniel's actions, consequent upon his integrity, as a political administrator and public office holder in Babylon, was one that was impactful, was scripturally based and God-inclined. This resonates with the position of the behavioural theorists of leadership that what leaders do is the best predictor of their leadership influences and likewise the best determinant of their leadership success. Daniel lived and acted according to his godly convictions both in private and public life.

Therefore, Christianity-inclined political leaders and public office holders in Nigeria are to emulate Daniel in their leadership roles. They can no longer sit back and confine their biblically-normed beliefs in the spaces of private and personal lives because other people who are not Christians are competing to shape the Nigerian society and its politics and sometimes with unchristian principles. The bifurcation of life into the secular and sacred is no longer tenable. Hence, as being Christian leaders, they must "know the walk", "talk the walk", and "walk the talk".

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