

Religious Leaders and the Burdens of Integrity in Nigeria

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Abstract

In Nigeria, most religious leaders are found wanting when it comes to leadership with integrity. Integrity is now a very serious missing link in the life of most religious leaders of Nigerian society. The paper focuses on integrity as required of religious leaders in Nigeria with particular reference to Samuel as a religious leader in Israel. The paper employs both qualitative and descriptive approaches in the documentation of data. Primary data is sourced from the biblical text (1 Samuel 12: 3 – 4) in conjunction with published works. Findings reveal that most religious leaders in Nigeria do not live up to expectations when it comes to the use of public funds and resources. This is because most people encourage shortcuts rather than integrity. The paper recommends Samuel's leadership integrity whose life was a match to his word. Integrity is an unavoidable value of personality that should characterize religious leaders in Nigerian society. Samuel's integrity is a benchmark for religious leaders because integrity sustains a person when no longer in office.

Key Words: Leadership, Integrity and Leadership, Religious Leaders in Nigeria, Prophet Samuel's Leadership of Israel.

Introduction

Nigeria is a religiously diverse society with lots of famous religious leaders, but the integrity of most of the leaders is at stake. Lack of correct orientation and attitudes, principles and values such as accountability, transparency, commitment to duties, selflessness and sincerity in the use of public funds are in many cases not preserved. Integrity is an important aspect of personality and spirituality expected among people, especially

among religious leaders in Nigeria. National daily papers carry headlines of a mismatch in the calibre, character and qualities in the life of religious leaders compared with that expected of them. Integrity is now a very serious missing link in the life of most religious leaders of Nigerian society. Dada observed that the searchlight of the society has often beamed on church leadership for accountability and probity in Nigeria and worldwide. The church must uphold its moral custodian status to the world and society.¹

Prophet Samuel's life was not without public scrutiny just as Moses, Joshua, Gideon and many others in the scripture. Samuel as a religious leader ever found in the bible was a leader of initiative, insight, nationalism, transparency, excellence, gratitude, relevance, teachability and yearning for transformation. A good record of his integrity made the people of Israel attest that Samuel never abused authority: neither did he enrich himself at the expense of his people. This is a testimony that is rare among some religious leaders of Nigeria. Huud stated that,

A human being is always outrageous when it comes to power. He behaves like God: he acts like no one queries his actions. When his actions or utterances are criticized, the critique becomes an open enemy. Hence, plans are put in place to exterminate by kidnapping or waylay the person. Interest for mundane is much more than the soul of his brethren. This behaviour has been observed on daily basis and it continues.²

This is because many leaders in Nigeria are unaware that they must be prepared to give an account of their leadership at any moment. Integrity demands that the leadership and public attestation of leaders make them conscientious enough to render accounts. Therefore, contemporary religious leaders in Nigeria must know that integrity is a measure of the worth of service delivery and proofs them impeccably. The prophet Samuel kept his integrity in the course of his ministry and this made him call for public attestation and probity. Samuel's leadership integrity is

almost a missing reality among Nigerian religious leaders: hence religious leaders must need to examine their ministry in the light of Prophet Samuel of Israel. The study entails using the documentation method to collect data from the Bible and other literature sources while the textual analysis method is used to analyse the collected data.

Description of Integrity

The Hebrew word translated ‘integrity’ is *tummah* (toom – maw’); *tummah*, from *tamam*: “to complete,” “be upright,” ‘perfect.’³ Integrity has a Latin root, *Integritas* meaning, “wholeness and completeness, being indivisible and inviolable.”⁴ Walker view integrity as ‘simplicity,’ ‘soundness,’ ‘completeness,’ rendered also ‘upright’ and ‘perfection.’⁵ In all places in which it appears, it seems to carry the meaning of simplicity, or sincerity of heart and intention, truthfulness, and uprightness. The word ‘integrity’ does not occur in the New Testament, but its equivalents may be seen in ‘sincerity,’ ‘truth,’ the “pure heart,” the “single eye,” etc. In the above sense of simplicity of intention, it is equivalent to being honest, sincere, genuine, and is fundamental to the true character of a religious leader.

Psalm 15 furnishes with hallmarks of integrity values. A leader of integrity gains, not only the respect of others but also an audience with God. A Man of integrity: walks righteously before God and man: has a right standing with God and man, vs. 2, Speaks the truth from his heart, honest and trustworthy, does not gossip around, vs. 3, does not harm others around him, speaks out against wrongdoing by people, he does not keep quiet for false peace, honours those who walk in truth, keeps their words even when it costs them, not greedy for gain or covetous, takes no bribery, but strong and stable on the truth. Integrity is acting as if people were watching you. It is to be consistent in upholding certain principles and values that make a person exemplary and trustworthy. The place of integrity as the expected character in life and leadership, particularly in the Christian walk cannot be overemphasised. It is the most important virtue every Christian leader must possess in order to succeed in life’s pursuit. Integrity can be defined as the willingness and ability to act up to the required standard. Doing everything which is required to healthily promote human life without bias is what integrity is all about.

Foreman said, “Integrity is the heart of everything successful.”⁶ It is an imperative statement to say that to make real and remarkable progress in life, there is a need to be above board in all matters: from the family to the society, using every platform available for us as leaders or the led. Williams is accredited with the statement that, “People with integrity are those whose words match their deeds and behaviour mirrors their values.”⁷ Therefore, integrity requires that a person is impeccably honest with oneself and others. Persons with honesty and ethics can be trusted unconditionally. Integrity includes consistency and unwavering adherence to values and beliefs. These unwavering values and beliefs are required both in the religious and socio-political society. They are hallmarks of true humanity irrespective of one’s religious affiliation. The values and beliefs are universally accepted norms and embedded in almost every religious tradition. It is an important moral quality of a person’s character, particularly in a leader, and as a Christian. One’s image is not just about performances, attainments, achievements, theological exposure, qualifications, not even education, neither is it charisma, but the integrity of life.

Lack of integrity makes the way of life very slippery. A person without integrity cannot stand firm, cannot stand his word and will always make slippery promises. Such a person is known as a slippery person: unstable, changeable, inconstant and loose in morals. But, a true person of integrity shows honesty in words, in actions and in intentions. When a person is characterised by such a legacy, he or she is secure and firm, because integrity gives security. It secures one’s image and prestige. Living with integrity is walking firmly and clearly of life.

Analysing Prophet Samuel’s Leadership of Israel with Integrity

I Samuel 12: 3 – 4 says: “Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and His anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey

have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these things, I will make it right". The people were sure that Samuel had not done any of the evil against them, they replied, "'You have not cheated or oppressed us,' they replied. 'You have not taken anything from anyone's hand.'"

Samuel exerted enviable examples of leadership with integrity among the Israelites during their lifetime and tenure in offices. The above characters were examples for persons and socio-religious leaders today. Samuel was held with high regard in monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He was men characterised by honesty, truthfulness and straight dealings with every person, under all circumstances. Samuel is testified not to have exacted anything from the people on account of his services. As a judge, he had political authority over the people; as a prophet and a priest, he had spiritual authority over the people. In today's understanding, one would say that Samuel was all in all as far as leadership is concerned. However, Samuel did his best to maintain his integrity. He did not use his authority and influence to take advantage of his people. He demonstrated integrity per excellence by acting out the letter words of integrity in a leadership position. Being confident of his integrity in leadership, he shouted, "Great success in life is characterised by honesty, truthfulness and straight dealings with every person, under all circumstances." A person of integrity has inherent character inside which is always demonstrated by one's action, the things one do and say. So, integrity as a character than charisma preserves one's name and image. Every religious leader of the Nigerian society must guard one's integrity as a sacred thing. Integrity has a price but pays huge dividends. People cannot repose confidence in a person without integrity. Therefore, integrity is what one is. Williams opined, therefore, that "the memories of integrity in a man of God are better than an inscription of the finest marble."⁸

The Relationship between Leadership and Integrity

Leadership is a practised phenomenon but is not easy to define. Leadership should be thought of as the ability to influence people to see, believe and act in a certain way. Elisama views that leadership is not a

position and a title is neither a particular set hierarchy nor a place in an organisational or administrative structure. Rather, leadership is a process, commitment, and attitude to the life of an individual leader. Leadership is shaped by religion if the leaders are religious to a certain extent and integrate their religious beliefs and values in their leadership practices and principles.

Leadership is about the people and their well-being. It is first and foremost a call to serve and meet the needs of the people. Walter opines that leadership can be defined as “the influence of others in a productive, vision-driven direction and is done through the example, conviction, and character of the leader” and “the use of power to serve the people.”⁹ From these descriptions, it is clear that influence and service are vital in leadership. Leadership is a noble task that demands the highest honour and sacrifices in life. It has both privileges and costs. Not everybody who holds a leadership position today is a leader either in the public or private domain, either secular or religious.

Prophet Samuel’s Integrity Leadership and Religious Leadership in Nigeria

There are religious leaders, and so many others scramble for this noble task of leadership, yet very little consideration is given to the demands of this calling. Leaders of integrity are people who can positively influence the people (through their positive behaviours and speeches) and who are willing to serve the people rather than to serve their interests. Samuel’s integrity value sustained him when he was no longer in a leadership position. According to Foreman, "Charisma may take people up but it is the character, which is integrity that keeps them up."¹⁰ Many people went up and could not stay up because sustaining integrity was lacking.

John Maxwell, in “Developing the Leaders Around You,” discussed levels of authority. He cited authority by Position; authority that does not extend beyond the parameters of the job description. People respect this type of leader based on his position, and when he drops from the position he loses his authority over them. This is because; the leader never developed integrity as a character, but assumed integrity by his elevated position. Therefore, the certainty of a position, irrespective of

circumstances, can be maintained only by a life of integrity, based on the tenets of the word of God. Religious leaders in Nigeria can be above reproach when they refuse to use their position to amass public wealth for personal possession by ensuring the right values of integrity. Integrity is such a big idea that encapsulates the entire life of a leader. There are areas where leaders must pay keen attention to deliver leadership with integrity. Concerning leadership, integrity can be viewed as an acronym.

Initiative and insight in leadership show integrity. Inspiration is an external force that encourages or being enabled by God or by surrounding happenings to do what one ought to do as leader. The core source of inspiration should be the scriptures; Bible and Qur'an, based on one's religious tradition. The Bible is the core book in Christianity consisting of the Old and New Testaments. The Quran is the central text in Islam alongside hadith collections, which contain reports about the sayings and doings of Muhammad. Leaders should rely on God for counsel through the scriptures, and also seek advice from godly and experienced people.

Nationalism/Patriotism is a vital aspect of leadership integrity. The prophet Samuel was a good example of a leader with a nationalistic interest which makes him a leader of integrity. A leadership of integrity is non-tribalistic, sectionalise or biased concerning other people. The interest of the nation or society occupies his mindset. If a leader lacks a sense of patriotism, this leader will not lead with integrity. Nationalism creates the zeal to do things the right way and for the sake of the people and nation. Nationalistic leaders are unselfish – they do not lead for their benefit, but for the benefit of the people they lead. They are concerned about the provision of basic social amenities for the people they represent or stand for. Suffice it to say that many religious leaders are assuming a self-centred interest in ministerial dispositions. Religious leaders in Nigerian society must learn how to deal with one's selfishness. Selfishness is the one sin that has plagued all mankind from the fall in the Garden of Eden to the present. Selfish persons think first, last and always of themselves.¹¹ Selfish people are rigid and intolerable of other people's desires and insensitive to others' needs or feelings.

Truthfulness and transparency in leadership is integrity. Transparency is a degree of accessibility to peoples' views publicly and privately. People

must bear in mind, the watchful eyes of God and the people. But, persons should as a mark of integrity, do things whether people are watching or not. According to Chris, people can do nasty things when they are alone, but try to do their best when others are watching them. Doing what one needs to do without hiding it from those that are supposed to be part of it or know of it is integrity in leadership.¹² Leaders of integrity know that what they do is the right thing, and for this reason, they do let others see and know what they are doing. Transparency is, therefore, the letting of others know and see what one does, and this, in turn, forces the leader to do what is right – this is now integrity. Brian Tracy corroborates the idea of transparency when he said “always carry yourself as though everyone is watching, even when no one is watching.”¹³ Samuel was a truthful leader and as such, it is also expected of religious leaders in Nigerian society. Many people along life’s upward journey are held down because their lives have been spoiled by unjust gains, falsehood and various other vices. Steven Covey said, "People with integrity are those whose words match their deeds and behaviour mirror their values. Their honesty and ethics can be trusted unconditionally."¹⁴ No matter how good a person is in anything, if people cannot trust him, they will not do any transaction with him. Integrity requires honesty, truthfulness, and straight dealings with everyone, under all circumstances. A religious leader should be impeccably honest with oneself and others.

Excellence in leadership is required among religious leaders in Nigeria. Excellence is the process of aspiring for the best practice. Only those leaders with the willingness to do the right and excellent things can excel in their leadership. Passion for excellence continues to dominate the thoughts of every person who aims at great achievements and remains the driving force in the activities of any purpose-driven achiever. Excellence is putting the best construction in your lifestyle. It also means doing your very best in everything you do.¹⁵ This should be the spirit that drives religious and political leaders of the time. Samuel like Daniel had an excellent spirit, and this made him prosperous in everything he did, Daniel 2: 19 – 23; 2: 47; 4: 9; 5: 12 – 17.

Every work done without the spirit of excellence is doomed to failure. Integrity must be accompanied by excellence, and excellence must be in the heart of every leadership. Samuel was a leader of excellence and so

should religious leaders of the Nigerian society today. People who aim at excellence must pay the price of burning the midnight oil to search and research into the deep reservoir of knowledge for extraordinary performance. A man of excellence knows what he deserves and will work tirelessly to attain it. Excellence is not based on past performance. It is a title given to someone who persisted and rose above his calamities.¹⁶ If leaders take the time and make the effort, if one puts his or her whole heart into what one is doing, one will move into the hall of fame of great achievers. But the fact is that excellence is the result of years of hard work, dedicated effort in a single direction. Make a decision today to become one of the very best in your endeavour: pay any price, make any sacrifice, and never quit until you make it.

Good life and gratitude to God and the people is a demonstration of integrity. A good life is a life of witness of God's nature in a person. It is proof of a person as a light and salt of the earth. It speaks for itself and in volumes. The prophet Samuel was an example of a person of good life and gratitude to God and the people. Gratitude is an act of appreciation to God or persons. Fugoyo-Baime submits that gratitude here is the act of being grateful, satisfied and happy with the opportunity to serve.¹⁷ Leaders should be grateful for the opportunity to serve the people.¹⁸ Williams said, "Praising God is not a magic formula for success. It is a way of life that is solidly backed up in God's word."¹⁹ Leaders of integrity are people of gratitude to God and the people for every opportunity of life.

Risk and relevance service in leadership is a sine-qua-non to integrity. Samuel was a leader who dared risk as an unavoidable fact of life. According to Williams, "If you don't take risks great goals will not be achieved. The risk reduces all threats of uncertainty and opens the door for a breakthrough in life. Action and all decision making involves an element of risk. There is a risk in crossing the street and there is a risk in not crossing the street."²⁰ Taking risks is the bridge that helps leaders to advance in life. Those who take risks will always be celebrated by those who don't. A leader who values taking risk brings solutions to the people's need and execute quality goods and services that make sense in the society. Samuel as a leader of integrity always cared about the people he served because they matter more than anything else. Archbishop

Mokiwa described a situation where socio-religious leaders use their position as an opportunity to amass wealth. He succinctly put it thus:

Political power disguised as a democracy through popular vote has been transformed into a weapon for self-enrichment and not service. Political offices have been transformed into control towers for manipulation through resource allocation. The effects of these have been the formation of classes. Here we have the rulers emerging as the superrich... and then we have the poor who comprise a retreating middle class and the peasantry. The irony is that the majority of the citizenry have become spectators cut off from any platform that determines their destiny. In turn, despair has engulfed hope and the future has turned bleak.²¹

The concern is about knowing what people are going through, how people are doing, and how the people can be helped and empowered. Initiative in leadership shows integrity and such was exemplified by Samuel's leadership pattern. A leader of the initiative is inventive. According to Williams, "Imagination rules the world."²² The initiative is seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought.²³ Williams corroborated that "every human creature has potentials for creativity. If you allow your imaginative power to start free operation in your life, you will begin to realize there are many new ideas in your mind. Great achievers of our time began by daydreaming."²⁴ According to Fugoyo-Baime, the tomorrow planned for is a successful tomorrow. Planning is part of integrity because integrity does not come as a surprise; integrity must be planned for.²⁵ The initiative involves planning and visualising the future. A leader with the initiative is a visionary leader. The initiative creates a drive towards a goal and a target for achievement. Leadership without legacy is a result of poor or lack of initiative. When leaders use

their brains properly in a creative way, new ideas and results will show for it.

Teachable in leadership shows the integrity of the leader. There is just no limit to what people can accomplish when they develop their minds and use books to acquire knowledge. Learning increases knowledge. The only way people rise to the top is through much learning and hard work. Reading informs you and reforms you. It helps in your mental formation, your psychological formation, your character, your ideas formation, and outlook formation.²⁶ Religious leaders in Nigeria should study other successful leaders and learn from them so that they can improve in their leadership duties daily. Being a teachable leader of integrity is being a good listener and receptive to criticism and corrections. Leaders with integrity know that they do not know everything. They are open to learning and be taught by other people around them. Religious leaders in Nigeria should engage in seminars and refresher courses to enable them to do better in leadership delivery.

Yearning for the transformation of the people and society is leading with integrity. God is a God of transformation, justice and peace. God brought transformation to His people through Jesus who was born to bring transformation. Positive life-changing transformation cannot take place in the absence of justice and peace in the society by leaders of integrity. David Fugoyo-Baime Leaders who lead with integrity are agents of transformation wherever they lead. Transformation, in this context, is the process of bettering and improving the lives of the people in every way. If transformation is missing in any leadership, then the leadership is mere self-centred activities of the individuals claiming to lead the people.²⁷ Leaders who concentrate on bringing about positive change to the community should be elected or chosen to lead the people. Jesus' leadership was all about transformation, changing people from sons of darkness, where people lived under the authority of Satan, to the sons of light, where people would live under the authority of God, doing what was good for them and their neighbours.

Conclusion

Going by the findings of this study, it could be concluded that the burdens of integrity on religious and political leaders have great potentials for promoting godliness and transparency in society. With godliness and transparency in governance and leadership, equity, justice and peace will ensue the society. The gap of integrity in social and religious leadership stands out as an unfinished agenda in religious leadership. Integrity is the most important virtue every Christian leader must possess in order to succeed in life's pursuit. The integrity of the religious leader will go a long way to reduce the problems of abuse in leadership as a means of the amazing public wealth entrusted to leaders.

People paid from the public treasury have a special duty to work with integrity, respect and contentment. They must treat all people fairly. They must report their observations about crimes in an unbiased and honest manner. They must also not allow themselves to become discontent over their wages, because that is the first step in abusing their power.²⁸ There is also a lot of crisis in the religious circle among members because of a lack of trust in their leaders. Leadership with integrity is a biblical requirement. Prophets Samuel, Jesus, Paul and other Apostles showed leadership disposition with integrity. In the African Traditional Religion (ATR), the value of integrity is an ideal that builds a high moral character of leaders. A leader with integrity will help against the problems of corruption, greed and avarice in society. Therefore, there is the need for re-conscientisation of the minds of leaders and citizens of the society to imbibe in the value of the burden for integrity.

Finally, both the religious, political leaders and the led in the religious and social circle should be willing to restore the burden of integrity in everyday living. Transformation and development are highly dependent upon the attitude of the people accepting integrity as a basic requirement of life. Where people are willing and are ready to make proper amendments, a life of integrity will be possible in society. Therefore, the readiness and willingness of the religious, political leaders and followers, will play vital roles in the restoration of the ideals of integrity as a recommendation as to the model for transformation and development in the society.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹²C. Brady and O. Woodward, *Launching a Leadership Revolution: Mastering the Five Levels of Influence Business Plus*, (New York: David-Baime, 2005), 7.
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- ²¹J.N. Amanze, *How Prosperity is the Prosperity Gospel? An Examination of the Impacts of the Theology of Prosperity in Africa from a Sociological Perspective*, (Ibadan: University Press, 2019), 133 – 134.

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