

Historical sources of Christian religious leadership ideology: implications and challenges for social transformation in post-military Nigeria¹

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Abstract

Various sources have influenced and shaped the ideological orientation and outlook of Christian religious leadership in successive epochs in Nigerian history. This orientation and outlook have by and large been sustained in the contemporary post-military dispensation. This article develops a more informed identification of the historical sources that have shaped the leadership ideology of Nigerian Christian leaders. Based on this identification, the discussion reflects critically on the socio-political implications of, and challenges posed by, the various historical influences for achieving positive social transformation in contemporary post-military Nigerian society. The article appreciates the prevailing relevance of particular elements from the leadership ideology and outlook that existed in primordial Nigerian and African society to guide a contemporary Nigerian Christian religious leadership towards a fundamental reorientation. The article closes by challenging especially Nigerian Christian religious leaders to adopt ideas of leadership such as “saviour” and “protector”, among other leadership ideas, for ideological reorientation and practical leadership in order to engender an enduring socio-political transformation and service to the people.

Introduction

In the course of tracing the historical path of Nigeria, the eminent Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, once asserted that “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership”.³ In similar vein Chikwendu Ukaegbu has also stated that “Nigerian leaders, both past and present, exhibit fatalistic orientation, have a highly dependent mentality, and lack a sense of personal or group self-efficacy” and as such should be held responsible for the socio-political and economic problems in the country.⁴ However, in contrast with Achebe and Ukaegbu, who appear to attribute the problems in Nigeria exclusively to ineffective leadership, Bennett Odunsi believes that poor leadership may be one of the important challenges that Nigerians are facing when he states that “(t)he pervasive political wrangling, civil strife, economic disorder and social malaise endemic in Nigeria today flow, in part, from ineffective leadership”.⁵

Bolatito Lanre-Abass, on his part, has argued that besides the failure of the political leadership, religious leaders who ought to be the moral conscience of the society have likewise failed in their responsibility to offer much-needed leadership to Nigerian society, especially ethical leadership in the face of the enormous challenges of corruption and its consequence in this society.⁶ Thus, the complaints of Nigerians concerning the prevalence of lack of accountability, corruption and poor leadership among socio-economic and political leaders may also be relevant to the way that they have been experiencing their religious leaders. In a sense, the commonality of such tendencies affirms the notion that what happens in the religious context is often a reflection of what is going on in the larger society and vice versa. It could therefore be argued that any attempt to transform Nigerian society should first begin with its religious institutions, which are supposed to be the bastions of ethical values. In as much as such a transformation within Christian religious leadership could be of immense assistance in re-positioning it as the conscience of society, a key step in this direction requires investigating the historical sources that have influenced and shaped Christian religious leadership ideology and performance. Revisiting the

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³ C. Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 1.

⁴ C.C. Ukaegbu, “Leadership fatalism and underdevelopment in Nigeria: imaginative policymaking for human development,” *Philosophia Africana* 10(2) (2007), 161.

⁵ Bennett Odunsi, “The impact of leadership instability on democratic process in Nigeria,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* XXXI(1-2), (1996), 66.

⁶ B. Lanre-Abass, “The crisis of leadership in Nigeria and the imperative of a virtue ethics,” *Philosophia Africana* 11(2) (2008), 123-124.

historical trajectory could accordingly assist in guiding Christian religious leadership towards improving their leadership ideology and practice for the common good of society in the future.

In this article Christian religious leadership ideology is defined as the non-coherent and non-systematic ideas held by the Christian clergy on leadership. Such ideas of leadership form the rationale for their practices and conduct. Accordingly such ideas on leadership connote their belief and worldview, which justifies their mindset and conduct in private life, within religious circles and in the larger society. Against this background, the article aims to develop a more informed identification of the historical sources that have shaped the leadership ideology of Nigerian Christian leaders and on the basis of this identification to reflect critically on the socio-political implications of, and challenges posed by, this historical influence for achieving positive social transformation in contemporary post-military Nigerian society. The questions that the article therefore seeks to address include: What historical sources of Nigerian leadership ideology have shaped the leadership ideology of contemporary socio-political leaders in Nigeria? How have those historical sources also shaped the Christian religious leadership ideology? Based on a consideration of the historical ideological conditioning of Christian religious leaders – in particular where such conditioning appears to be poor – how may a change of mindset on their part impact positively on the socio-political conditions in the contemporary post-military context?

The history of Nigerian pre-colonial leadership and the formation of leadership ideology

Richard Ruderman has defined leadership as the guidance of a group, party or political entity undertaken by an individual. The guidance which leaders offer could be by inspiration or charisma through which they provide their followers with a vision that functions as a map to new and unfamiliar terrains.⁷

Both the concept of leadership and leadership styles in contemporary Nigeria and Africa have been influenced by at least two broad sources: initial and subsequent sources. The initial sources comprise the pre-colonial historical heritage, namely the traditional African heritage, Christianity⁸ and Islam. The subsequent sources are the colonial and the various post-colonial Nigerian historical leadership practices that followed the initial historical heritage. Thus both the initial sources, which laid the foundation for the formation of leadership ideology and the subsequent sources from colonial and post-colonial leadership practices, all constitute sources through which the leadership ideology of Nigerian leaders has been shaped.

We will briefly discuss each of these initial and subsequent sources of leadership ideology for their influence on the leadership ideology and practices in Nigeria and, for that matter, in several other African countries.

Traditional African heritage

In traditional African societies leadership practices and styles vary from people to people and from place to place.⁹ In most instances the most prominent sources of leadership in the community are the kings, queens and rulers. However, in view of the fact that not all African societies have had rulers or leaders in the form of kings, queens and chiefs, there are other sources through which leadership has flowed to the people, for example, family, compounds and age grade structures. Most leaders in African traditional societies occupy a special place in the personal lives and broader social conventions and conceptions of their people by virtue of their office. John Mbiti has observed that “where these rulers are found, they are not simply political heads: they are the mystical and religious heads, the divine symbol of their people’s health and welfare”.¹⁰ These rulers may not necessarily have outstanding talents or abilities, but their office constitutes a link between human and spiritual rule. Thus, people regard them as God’s earthly viceroys. It is on this premise that these rulers are accorded extremely high positions and titles such as “saviour”, “protector”, “child of God”, “chief of the divinities” and “lord of earth and life”. Such leaders are not only allowed to do what they wish, but they are assumed to be incarnations of God who have proceeded from heaven and therefore possess power over natural phenomena.¹¹

The sacred position of African rulers is demonstrated in a number of ways. For example, they are not seen in ordinary life; no reference must be made to either their eating or their sleeping; they must be spoken well of; their followers must bow or kneel before them; they have sexual rights over the wives of their subjects; and their illnesses and death are not usually mentioned. The family members and close associates of the rulers also enjoy high esteem. While in some societies traditional rulers are succeeded by their sons, daughters, brothers or some other members of the royal family, in other societies the ruler’s successor could be chosen by a council of

⁷ R.S. Ruderman, “Leadership,” in *The Encyclopedia of Democracy*, ed. S. M. Lipset (Oxford: Routledge, 1995), 725-729.

⁸ The Christian influence on African societies occurred in two phases. The first phase was brought about by the engagements of indigenous Africans who had the initial contact with Christianity during the time of Christ and the Roman Empire. This phase was before the colonial era. The second phase was during the colonial period, which was also the period of the missionaries.

⁹ M. Masango, “Leadership in the African context,” *The Ecumenical Review* 55(2003), 313.

¹⁰ J. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1999), 177-178.

¹¹ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 177-178.

chiefs. Priests, prophets and the religious founders of African traditional religion constitute another source of leadership in many African societies.¹² Besides the broader African context, the formation of leadership ideologies also occurred among the various ethnic groups in pre-colonial Nigerian societies.

The basic political units in pre-colonial Nigeria were the village, village group, clan, state, chiefdom, kingdom, empire and caliphate.¹³ Long before 1500 AD much of modern Nigeria was divided into nation-states identified with ethnic groups.¹⁴ Using the three major tribes in Nigeria – namely Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo – as our point of reference, we will now briefly elaborate on how these varied societies were ruled and on the leadership ideology that held sway among the people.

- **Leadership among the Hausa-Fulani and Kanem-Bornu**

The Hausa-Fulani and Kanem-Bornu system of administration was centralised. After the 9th century AD Islam made incursions into this region via the trans-Saharan trade routes. The arrival of Islam in this area through the Jihad of Uthman dan Fodio soon altered the rhythm of the economic, political and social life.¹⁵ It was, indeed, this development that gave rise to the establishment of the emirate system with the Sokoto and Gwandu emirates as the most prominent in the Hausa-Fulani and Kanem-Bornu Empire. The Emirs of Sokoto and Gwandu were assumed to have the power of life and death over the other emirates within their subdivisions. Of these two most prominent emirates, the Sokoto emirate, headed by the Sultan of Sokoto, exercised the highest level of religious and political power over the others. “Islam was used to reinforce the political and social structures of the state.”¹⁶

Emirs exercised both a high level of authority and enormous power over their subjects and, in most cases, they were very dictatorial. An emir could be removed by a general consensus of the senior officers of the ruling houses if he became a dictator.¹⁷ However, this rule was rarely put into practice as a result of the powers which the emirs wielded. It is important to note at this point that the prevailing leadership style was often authoritarian and also a combination of religious and political leadership invested in the same individual (the emir).

¹² Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 183.

¹³ G. Chuku-Okereke, “Evolution of Nigeria as a political unit: an historical analysis,” in *Nigerian Politics*, eds. C.A. Ndoh & C.E. Emezi (Owerri: CRC Publications, 1997), 5.

¹⁴ J. O. Akpeninor, *Democracy and Issues of Governance in African Politics: The Nigerian Perspective* (Ibadan: Bookwright Publisher, 2007), 9.

¹⁵ C. A. Ndoh, “Pre-colonial political institutions in Nigeria,” in *Nigerian Politics*, eds. C.A. Ndoh & C.E. Emezi (Owerri: CRC Publications, 1997), 27.

¹⁶ Akpeninor, *Democracy and Issues of Governance in African Politics*, 11-12.

¹⁷ Ndoh, “Pre-colonial political institutions in Nigeria,” 28.

- **Leadership among the Yoruba**

The Yoruba are the dominant group on the west bank of the Niger to the south. The Yoruba kingdom of Ife and Oyo were founded around 700–900 AD and 1400 AD respectively.¹⁸ In about the 11th century adjoining compounds, known as *ile*, were transformed into a number of city-states under dynasties. The Benin kingdom is linked historically to the Yoruba kingdom. Political and religious authority resided in the Oba (king), who was assumed to be a descendant of the Ife dynasty.¹⁹

The Oba was chosen to rule based on the royal family that had the royal blood of Oduduwa. His candidature had to have the blessing of the senior chiefs.²⁰ Despite the fact that each Oba exercised his independent authority within his jurisdiction, he was traditionally expected to look to the Oni of Ife for leadership. Administratively, the Oba was expected to follow the advice of his council of chiefs and elders. An Oba who ruled autocratically could be compelled to commit suicide through the presentation of an empty calabash.²¹ It is, therefore, the opinion of certain scholars that the Yoruba system of leadership was more democratic than that of either the Hausa-Fulani or the Kanem-Bornu. However, as in the Hausa-Fulani context, even when Obas became autocratic, they were seldom removed, as they held enormous power over the area they ruled.²²

- **Leadership among the Igbo**

The area which comprised the diverse Igbo kingdoms was situated to the south-east of the Niger. The Onitsha kingdom had already come into existence during the 16th century AD, while other kingdoms included the Nri and Arochukwu. In the south-east and south of modern Nigeria other kingdoms such as Calabar, Opobo, Bonny, Brass, Eleme, Kalabari and others flourished.²³ It may be observed that the Efik and Opobo, for example, were ruled by kings and that there was a leadership structure in place that was different from that in other neighbouring communities. However, many other communities such as the Olulumo, Ikom and Etung had leadership structures that were similar to that of the Igbo. The reason for the lack of centrality in the administrative structures of these communities is said to have been the result of the tropical nature of the area.²⁴

Besides the Council of Elders and the Village Assembly, the age-grade system represented another vital structure that assisted in the enforcement of law and the provision of social services in the community.²⁵ The Igbo and the other groups who were neighbours of the Igbo held personal freedom in high esteem and resented any form of autocratic government. It would thus not be incorrect to say that leadership in Igboland was predominantly democratic.²⁶

Summing up, it is evident that before colonisation the major tribes that constitute modern Nigeria and the other smaller groups that lived around them were diverse in terms of their history, culture, political development and religion. Anthropologists have placed these societies in two main categories, namely centralised (state) and non-centralised (stateless). While the Igbo kingdoms, in particular, and other kingdoms around them were non-centralised, the Sokoto Caliphate and other northern emirates were highly centralised. Also included in this category, but without the high degree of centralisation, were the Benin, Oyo and other Yoruba traditional institutions. The highly centralised and non-centralised societies had clearly defined demarcations between the rulers and the ruled. These demarcations were usually based on wealth and ascribed status.²⁷ Despite such differentiation, it should be understood that in all African traditional societies the rulers were highly venerated and they had great influence in their communities. Also, spiritual and political authority was invested in the same individual.²⁸

We will now turn to the indigenous and missionary Christian influences on the leadership ideology of these societies.

¹⁸ Akpeninor, *Democracy and Issues of Governance in African Politics*, 9.

¹⁹ Akpeninor, *Democracy and Issues of Governance in African Politics*, 9.

²⁰ Ndoh, "Pre-colonial political institutions in Nigeria," 29.

²¹ Ndoh, "Pre-colonial political institutions in Nigeria," 29.

²² O.M. Agbiji, *Development-Oriented Church Leadership in Post-Military Nigeria: A Sustainable Transformational Approach* (PhD dissertation, Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 2012), 96.

²³ Akpeninor, *Democracy and Issues of Governance in African Politics*, 31.

²⁴ Ndoh, "Pre-colonial political institutions in Nigeria," 31.

²⁵ Ndoh, "Pre-colonial political institutions in Nigeria," 31.

²⁶ Agbiji, *Development-Oriented Church Leadership in Post-Military Nigeria*, 97-98.

²⁷ Agbiji, *Development-Oriented Church Leadership in Post-Military Nigeria*, 98.

²⁸ Agbiji, *Development-Oriented Church Leadership in Post-Military Nigeria*, 96.

- **The Christian influence**

Christianity could be considered as part of African indigenous religion in view of the fact that it has had a lengthy history on the continent. However, it may also be argued that it falls into the category of a later arrival on the shores of Africa, long after the evolution of African traditional religion, albeit before Islam. Christianity was long established in North Africa, Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt before the 7th century. "It was a dynamic form of Christianity, producing great scholars and theologians like Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine."²⁹ There is, therefore, no doubt that it was the impact of Christianity that led to the emergence of these outstanding scholars, whose influence extended to a broad range of men and women. It is, thus, assumed that these men especially were able to bring their Christian-imbued leadership virtues and skills to both the church and to African society.³⁰

Subsequent contact with Christianity on the African continent came about as a result of the activities of the missionaries who came to Africa during the colonisation of the continent.³¹ During this period, Maake Masango notes, "African religion and its leaders were challenged by the missionaries, especially in the way that they brought change".³² Such changes led to some of the leaders and the people adopting Western concepts of leadership and discarding their own African religious values, customs and culture.³³ Because of the impact of Christianity on the concept, ideology and practice of leadership in Africa, leadership was shaped by missionary education, colonialist style leadership and professionalism. Not only did African leaders come to be evaluated by Western standards of leadership, the use of traditional methods of leadership was considered barbaric by some Westerners.³⁴

With the advent of the Christian missionaries and the colonial masters, much of the leadership role shifted from the traditional leaders, such as kings, queens, priests and chiefs, to the missionaries and teachers. Although the traditional ideology and styles of leadership were severely affected, they were not completely eradicated.³⁵

Despite the negative aspects of the impact of both African and missionary Christianity on African styles and concepts of leadership, some African leaders did derive something positive from the biblical teachings on leadership. Christian concepts such as "people being created in the image and likeness of God", "love for one's neighbour" and "the body of Christ" enriched the value that African leaders accorded to human life and the positive assertion of leadership on their subjects.³⁶ In addition, these concepts contributed to the unity of communities as the Christian converts who had attained leadership positions sought to live out the Christian ideals in their villages and communities.³⁷

- **The influence of Islam**

Within a century of the death of the prophet Mohammad in 632 AD Islam had swept through the whole of North Africa as well as the Horn of Africa, reaching southwards to the east coast of Africa.³⁸ As is the case with early Christianity, Islam may arguably be termed an indigenous African traditional religion as a result of the length of time it has existed on the African continent and interacted with a number of African communities and cultures. The trade routes as well as the commercial activities between the Arab world and North Africa contributed significantly to the spread of Islam on the continent.³⁹

Recounting the impact of Islam on the Nupe, a tribe in northern Nigeria (or the middle belt), Mbiti has noted that "since Islam came to Nupe as a religion of conquerors and the ruling class, what counts is, first and foremost, the assimilation to upper-class culture and, only secondarily, the deliverance from unbelief".⁴⁰ This assertion implies that the social impact of Islam on the Nupe may be regarded as an example of what happened in other parts of Africa into which Islam made incursions. While Islam has provided a point of reference for a sense of pride and superiority in the Muslim convert, it has been less successful in touching the deeper levels of

²⁹ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 223.

³⁰ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 223.

³¹ The discussion on the advent of missionary Christianity in Africa can hardly be distanced from the colonial rule, yet Christian missionary evangelisation cannot be said to be one and the same thing as colonial rule in Africa. Therefore in this article discussions on the influence of Christianity and colonial rule on the leadership ideology of Nigerians will be undertaken separately.

³² Masango, "Leadership in the African context," 316.

³³ Masango, "Leadership in the African context," 316.

³⁴ Masango, "Leadership in the African context," 316, 317.

³⁵ Agbiji, *Development-oriented Church Leadership in Post-Military Nigeria*, 92.

³⁶ Masango, "Leadership in the African context," 316, 317.

³⁷ Masango, "Leadership in the African context," 316, 317.

³⁸ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 236.

³⁹ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 236-240.

⁴⁰ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 240.

the soul of its converts.⁴¹ In as much as Islam may have contributed positively to African communities, the inculcation of a sense of pride and superiority embodied in the ultimate culture of a class-cult has been detrimental to the development of a positive leadership ideology and qualities in members of African villages and communities, and it is unlikely that Islamic converts who assume leadership positions in their communities would regard themselves as being accountable to their fellow villagers. Most importantly, because such a conversion is more social than spiritual, it may lead to the fragmentation of the community by creating class distinctions and the use of force in leadership.⁴²

Throughout the chequered history of the Nigerian nation the leadership ideology and practices of its leaders have been influenced by leadership notions that may be traced to one or more of the leadership influences derived from the African traditional heritage, the Christian religious influence or the Islamic religion. In addition, leadership influences have also been derived from other sources, more specifically the socio-political leadership that was offered during the colonial, independence, military and post-military eras, as well as by the social and cultural impact of globalisation, which will now be discussed as subsequent sources.

The history of Nigerian colonial and post-colonial leadership and the formation of leadership ideology

Leadership in the colonial era

On 1 January 1900 Nigeria became a British protectorate. Subsequently, in 1914, under the leadership of Lord Lugard, the northern and southern protectorates were amalgamated and it was this amalgamation of the two protectorates that gave birth to modern Nigeria. Nevertheless, in the administrative sense Nigeria remained divided into the northern and southern provinces and the colony of Lagos. These areas were administered separately until 1946 when, in terms of Arthur Richards's constitution,⁴³ the two protectorates were brought under the same legislative authority.⁴⁴

As a result of the inefficiency of the British administrative staff, inadequate funding, fear of local resistance, and a lack of knowledge of and familiarity with the local conditions, customs and traditions of the local peoples, Lugard introduced a system of "Indirect Rule". A. H. M. Kirk-Greene defines indirect rule as "rule through the native Chiefs or traditional authorities who are regarded as an integral part of the machinery of government, with well-defined powers and functions recognized by the government and by law".⁴⁵ The main implication of this policy was that the administration or leadership of the indigenous people was, at the outset, the exclusive preserve of the traditional rulers. However, this policy meant that the Western-educated elements from southern Nigeria were alienated from the political processes. The alienation aroused the hostility of the southern nationalists towards the traditional rulers and the native administration.⁴⁶ Whereas the policy of Indirect Rule had been successful in the North, it failed in Yoruba and Igboland. In the West or Yorubaland, a number of factors contributed to this failure, namely a non-centralised system of administration, limited power and restricted public appearances on the part of the Oba, and the rise in the number of the Western, educated elite who questioned the system and clamoured for independence. In Igboland the failure was attributed to the absence of a centralised political structure, a negative perception of the system of indirect rule and the absence of a tax system. Other factors were alienation of the elite from the leadership, the extremely limited power and jurisdiction of the traditional rulers, and the corruption of the warrant chiefs.⁴⁷

The introduction of the policy of indirect rule was not well intended by the colonial government and, thus, it did not help in the development of competent leadership in Nigeria. Franz Fanon's evaluation of colonialism is extremely informative in that he claimed that by its very nature colonialism is separatist in the sense that it does not only state the existence of tribes, but it reinforces their separate existence.⁴⁸ The system led to excessive concentration of political power in the hands of the traditional rulers, which made most of them dictatorial. The chiefs and the native authorities were also supported by the British to the neglect of the masses. This alienated the educated elites, which led to disunity and discord between the local chiefs and the new breed of educated elites in society. These elites who had embraced democratic ideas from the West were anxious to

⁴¹ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 240.

⁴² Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 240.

⁴³ The Richards Constitution was enacted in 1946. The constitution was named after the then Governor-General of Nigeria, Arthur Richards. The constitution provided a central legislature for the whole of Nigeria and three Regional Houses of Assembly. It made it possible for the first time in the history of the nation for representatives of the northern and southern regions to have direct contact in Lagos.

⁴⁴ Akpeninor, *Democracy and Issues of Governance in African Politics*, 14-16.

⁴⁵ Cited in C.A. Ndoh, "Colonial system of administration in Nigeria: the policy of indirect rule institutions in Nigeria," in *Nigerian Politics*, eds. C.A. Ndoh & C.E. Emezi (Owerri: CRC Publications, 1997), 42.

⁴⁶ Ndoh, "Colonial system of administration in Nigeria," 45.

⁴⁷ Ndoh, "Colonial system of administration in Nigeria," 49-50.

⁴⁸ Franz Fanon, "The wretched of the earth," in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, eds. E. C. Eze (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 233.

put them into practice, but were not given any opportunity to do so. In some cases a direct form of administration was applied, while in others it was indirect rule. The system made most of the traditional rulers the stooges of the colonial masters.⁴⁹

Based on the above, it may be deduced that the colonial era did little to develop the leadership potential of Nigerians with regard to the development of a more positive leadership ideology among both religious and secular leaders. The poor ideological orientation of Nigerian leaders during the colonial period was especially evidenced in the colonial administration's use of traditional rulers as stooges and its refusal to give impetus to the development of potential leaders among educated Nigerians. The question thus arises as to how this leadership setback and the dislocation of the socio-political, economic and cultural structures affected the post-colonial and military eras.

Leadership in post-colonial (independent) Nigeria

Anti-colonial movements may be said to have arisen as soon as the indigenous peoples realised that the European presence posed a threat to their social, political and economic security.⁵⁰ The discontent nursed by the Yoruba and Igbo elite as a result of the policy of indirect rule that had initially side-lined the elite from the political processes soon gave rise to a more vigorous and politically motivated nationalism. During this period there were quite a number of associations with political, economic and ethnic undertones that flourished across the country. However, despite the fact that these associations were helpful during the struggle for independence, soon after independence they were used to intensify the tribal and ethnic divisions that had been set in motion by the colonial policy of divide and rule. Soon after independence from British colonial rule these ethnic interests would engender animosity among the major tribal groups that comprised Nigeria.⁵¹

Nigeria was granted independence on 1 October 1960. The country was to operate under a constitution that provided for a parliamentary system of government with a significant measure of self-governance for the three regions of the country. However, the political parties had a propensity to reflect the views of the three major ethnic groups, namely the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo.⁵² Unfortunately, Nigeria inherited a weak socio-political structure, coupled with an intensification of ethnic consciousness and rivalries, a subverted indigenous ethos of government and culture, and an inexperienced leadership.⁵³ Thus, the politicisation of ethnicity in Nigerian politics that had been engineered by the colonial leadership was given impetus by the nascent and inexperienced leadership of Nigeria by Nigerians. Inevitably this led to an extremely vicious and combative struggle for the control of the federal government. Thus elections were rigged; census figures were manipulated to give political advantage to the competing regions; and violence, corruption and brigandage were all employed by politicians to win or retain power both in the regions and at the centre. Consequently the underdeveloped and corruption-ridden economy inherited from the colonialists fared badly and dashed the hopes of meaningful development.⁵⁴

It may be said that the failure of the colonial leaders to respect the peculiarities of the peoples and their traditional divisions and cultures led these divergent groups being both forced together and at the same time divided in order to satisfy the selfish desires of the colonisers. Thus, to an extent, the failure of leadership in the colonial period laid the foundation for the failure of leadership in the post-colonial era. Inadvertently, the unbroken chain of leadership failure has taken an immense toll on the socio-religious, economic, political and cultural life of Nigerians.

Leadership during the military era

The emergence of the military on the Nigerian political stage on 15 January 1966 and their remaining there until 1999, despite some interludes of civil rule, introduced many negative factors into socio-political life in Nigeria. The leadership offered by these military rulers also had a negative influence on the formation of the leadership ideology of Nigerian leaders in all strata of society.

The incursion of the Nigerian military into Nigerian political governance could be said to have been primarily orchestrated by the struggle for political power by the politicians and by the economic problems stemming from widening class distinctions. Other factors included the modernisation of the Nigerian army, which produced ambitious military officers who were not satisfied with the traditional constitutional roles of the

⁴⁹ Ndoh, "Colonial system of administration in Nigeria," 49-50.

⁵⁰ C.A. Ndoh & A. Njoku, "Nigerian nationalism in Nigeria," in *Nigerian Politics*, eds. C. A. Ndoh & C.E. Emezi (Owerri: CRC Publications, 1997), 51-52.

⁵¹ Agbiji, *Development-oriented Church Leadership in Post-military Nigeria*, 101.

⁵² Ndoh & Njoku, "Nigerian nationalism in Nigeria," 51-52.

⁵³ C.E. Emezi, "Ethnic foundations of the Nigerian society," in *Nigerian Politics*, eds. C. A. Ndoh & C. E. Emezi (Owerri: CRC Publications, 1997), 21.

⁵⁴ Emezi, "Ethnic foundations of the Nigerian society," 22-23.

military, the political instability arising from disputed elections, and disagreements between the various ethnic groups over census figures.⁵⁵

Political commentators agree that all the successive military governments that came to power through coups provided a range of reasons to justify their taking over of the government in Nigeria. As such, the issues and the sentiments that they kept raising became a familiar refrain. For example, five years into independence the first coup was staged with the following words that were intended to rally the support of all Nigerians: “Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand 10 per cent; those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPs at least.”⁵⁶

Admittedly, these quoted words spoken by Major Kaduna Nzeogu and the passion behind them did make reference to the issues at stake, but it is doubtful whether this same passion characterised the intentions of the successive military coups that followed that first coup. Unfortunately, the first attempt by the military to rectify the socio-political and economic ills of Nigerian society were not realised as that group of officers was ousted shortly after they had taken over. The coup failed. However, other military leaders such as J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed, Olusegun Obasanjo, Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha and Abdulsalami Abubakar then entered the Nigerian political arena.⁵⁷

Thus the Nigerian military scores low with respect to the issue of leadership and the formation of a responsible leadership ideology. Included in the issues held against the military are the impoverishment of the citizenry; the display of dictatorship and despotism; fraudulent practices and the embezzlement of public funds. There is no doubt that there was an escalation in the level of poverty, corruption, oppression and bad leadership at all levels of Nigerian society during the years of military rule in the country. The obvious question then arises as to whether the more than eleven years of civil rule have offered any solutions to the plight of Nigerians, especially in the sense of their understanding of the role, concepts and ideological development of responsible leadership.

Leadership in post-military (democratic) Nigeria

Nigerian politicians have controlled the instruments of governance for thirteen uninterrupted years – 1999 to 2013. It is mainly for this reason that political analysts are referring to the current chapter of Nigerian history as “post-military” or “democratic” Nigeria. This period has witnessed political governance under the leadership of three presidents who emerged through the political processes. These presidents were Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007); Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar’Adua (2007–2010) and Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2010–2013). Of these three leaders, Obasanjo ruled for eight years, while Yar’Adua’s presidency lasted two years only as a result of ill health and his eventual death. Jonathan, who was Vice-president under Yar’Adua, took over from Yar’Adua on 6 May 2010 and has been in power for four years. It is thus worth noting that much of the assessment of the current Nigerian democratic dispensation will be based on Obasanjo’s tenure of office as an example of a democratically elected leader and especially as he has served the maximum two terms of four years each in office.

Chief Obasanjo’s rise to democratic political power was at the behest of the military hegemony as Obasanjo was a retired military general. He won the 1999 and 2003 presidential elections under the flag of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) amidst stiff opposition to his pseudo-military rule. In the course of his eight years of leadership he was severely criticised by civil society groups, trade unions and other political parties. Dele Seteolu’s assessment of Obasanjo’s political leadership is worth noting: “He was perceived as intolerant, arrogant, combative, bellicose, cantankerous and pedantic.”⁵⁸ Political commentators attributed Obasanjo’s leadership ideology to his military orientation, personal attributes and demeanour. This description of Obasanjo’s leadership style, as determined by his character traits and professional influence, provides an insight into the influence which has now taken hold of the Nigerian political class, with this influence pervading the political landscape from local to federal government. It is common knowledge among politicians that, when appointed as political officers, appointees are made to sign their letters of resignation, which are then kept in the custody of the chief executive (governor or president). This exercise is aimed at extracting absolute loyalty from the appointees and also at facilitating their easy removal from office at any time the political leader so wishes.⁵⁹

A key function of political leadership is the formulation of policy for the purpose of delivering the benefits of governance to the citizenry. It is seriously doubtful whether the political class in the post-military period has shown a responsible commitment to dealing with the challenges of poverty, underdevelopment,

⁵⁵ Akpeninor, *Democracy and Issues of Governance in African Politics*, 61.

⁵⁶ Akpeninor, *Democracy and Issues of Governance in African Politics*, 61.

⁵⁷ Agbiji, *Development-oriented Church Leadership in Post-military Nigeria*, 103.

⁵⁸ D. Seteolu, “The challenge of leadership and governance in Nigeria,” in *Governance: Nigeria and the world*, ed. S. Odion-Akhaine (Lagos: Centre for Constitutionalism and Demilitarisation, 2004), 73.

⁵⁹ Agbiji, *Development-oriented Church Leadership in Post-military Nigeria*, 105.

corruption and irresponsible leadership. Many Nigerians are of the opinion that the political hegemony is still under the influence of the politicians who came to power soon after independence in 1960. There is a widespread belief that the politicians are in politics for their own personal gain. It may, therefore, be argued that their fatalistic⁶⁰ tendencies and lack of imagination in their policymaking provide clear proof of their political incompetence with regard to running the intricate affairs of government.⁶¹

In considering the possibility of positive leadership ideological development, post-military or democratic Nigerian leaders still draw on the primordial, colonial, post-colonial and military leadership ideology and practices of their forebears. However, in addition to the contributions of the various leadership practices in Nigerian history to the culture of leadership in Nigeria, it is also essential not to overlook the positive and negative effects that globalisation has had on Nigerian leadership ideology and engagement.

The influence of globalisation

Robert Schreiter has argued that there is no single definition of the term globalisation.⁶² However, he does explain that globalisation has to do with the “increasingly interconnected character of political, economic and social life of the peoples on this planet”.⁶³ Information technology is also playing a vital role in the ever-increasing influence of globalisation.

The influence of globalisation on all societies is inescapable and globalisation has impacted on Nigerian and on other African communities as well, both positively and negatively. An important example of the negative impact of globalisation has been the extinction of the cherished traditional practice of moulding leaders around the fire. Africans, it has been argued, had a helpful model of moulding leaders around the fire. Around the fire and especially in the evenings, young boys would listen to stories of brave men at war. As they listened to these stories they developed leadership skills.⁶⁴ The main point of this argument is that the practice of leadership development around the fire, which used to be part of traditional Nigerian societies, has now been replaced by the television. Unfortunately, however, television does not mould people in the same way as a result of the content, values and culture that television programmes tend to propagate. Also, in today’s world of the “haves” and the “have-nots”, globalisation is being used by the leaders of the powerful nations to co-opt and control the leaders of the weak nations of which many nations of Africa, including Nigeria, constitute the bulk. It is in the main for this reason that Jose Chipenda has called on churches and Christian religious leaders to offer the much needed leadership to African societies.⁶⁵

However, Nigeria and other African countries have also benefited from the positive aspects of globalisation such as effective communication systems and the exchange of technological ideas between the developed and developing countries that have led to the improvement in the living conditions of people in the developing world. But could the formation of Christian religious leadership ideology have escaped the negative influences that ensued from the leadership ideology and practices during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras and from the social changes brought about by globalisation?

The history of poor Nigerian leadership and the formation of negative Christian religious leadership ideology

African heritage

Leaders come from a culture and culture imparts character traits for leadership.⁶⁶ As such, just as culture can offer character traits for good leadership, culture can also impart character traits for poor leadership. Culture could therefore be seen as a source of influence for the formation of ideology and consequent human behaviour. Like the Nigerian political leadership, Nigerian religious leaders come from a culture which is not different from that of the political leadership, especially in the sense of the socio-political and economic culture. Such a culture of leadership, which has contributed immensely to the frame of reference of both secular and Christian religious leadership and leadership practices, could be traced back in the first place to some leadership tendencies embedded in the African heritage.

As stated earlier, leaders in African traditional societies occupy a special place in the personal lives and broader social conventions and conceptions of their people by virtue of their office. Accordingly, Mbiti has

⁶⁰ Leadership fatalism has to do with a situation whereby leaders believe that the challenges in Nigerian society have been predetermined by God and as such they are inevitable.

⁶¹ Ukaegbu, “Leadership fatalism and underdevelopment in Nigeria,” 161-182.

⁶² R. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Local and the Global* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 5.

⁶³ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 5.

⁶⁴ Masango, “Leadership in the African context,” 316.

⁶⁵ J. Chipenda, “Culture and the gospel in changing Africa,” in *The Church and the Future in Africa: Problems and Promises*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi (Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1997), 23.

⁶⁶ Lanre-Abass, “The crisis of leadership in Nigeria and the imperative of a virtue ethics,” 124.

observed that where these rulers are found, they are not just political heads: they are the mystical and religious heads, the divine symbol of their people's health and wellbeing. The individuals, as such, may not necessarily have outstanding talents or abilities, but their offices represent the connection between human and spiritual rule.⁶⁷ In addition, these leaders, who have both a secular and religious responsibility, are accorded very high positions and titles such as "saviour", "protector", "child of God", "chief of the divinities" and "lord of earth and life".⁶⁸ In many African traditional societies, including Nigeria, these leaders do what they wish and are assumed to be incarnations of God who have come from heaven and, therefore, possess power over natural phenomena. For example, they are not seen in ordinary life. They must be spoken well of and their followers must bow or kneel before them. In some instances such leaders have sexual rights over the wives of their subjects and their illnesses and death are not usually mentioned. Family members and close associates of the rulers also enjoy high esteem. In some societies traditional rulers are succeeded by their sons, daughters, brothers or some other members of the royal family; in others, the ruler's successor could be chosen by a council of chiefs.⁶⁹

The traditional leadership ideology as shown above constitutes a source for the formation of contemporary leadership ideology. Among other things, this source (which reflects high esteem for socio-political and religious leadership) and the privileges and succession plans for such leadership may have positive dimensions. However, it also constitutes a ground on which a negative leadership ideology can be formed. Such negative influence could become a basis for the exploitation of the masses and the manipulation of leadership to serve selfish interests. Unfortunately, large numbers of Nigerian religious and secular leaders have been influenced by this leadership ideology.

Among the Hausa-Fulani and Kanem-Bornu of Northern Nigeria, whose political and religious leadership have historically been strongly influenced by Islam, emirs who are seen as both political and religious leaders are assumed to have the power of life and death over their emirates. The same emirs also exercised enormous power over those they ruled and were often dictatorial. Over the years such leadership ideology could also have rubbed off on both the political and religious leadership, having provided a frame of reference for leadership in all strata of society. In the same vein, among both Yoruba and Igbo traditional societies, religious and political leadership was often invested in the same person. Despite the degree of democratic practices within these cultures, authoritative and hereditary leadership, especially among the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba, were often the norm. The ruled were often viewed as the servants of the rulers.

Both the negative Christian and Islamic religious influences also played their respective parts in shaping the leadership ideology of Christian leaders. African leaders were challenged by the missionaries⁷⁰ to adopt Western styles of leadership, which led to the abandonment of African religious values, customs and culture.⁷¹ Although the traditional ideology and styles of leadership were severely affected, they were not completely eradicated.⁷² However, the leadership challenge brought about by the imposition of Western styles of leadership by the missionaries and the jettisoning of African values, customs and culture initiated a culture or ideology of leadership that portrays the leadership as knowing it all, while the followers were just to take orders and be led to wherever the leaders wished. The upper-class culture that was, for instance, derived from Islamic religious ideology by Muslim converts during the Islamic jihads and subsequent spread of Islam resulted in class distinctions and use of force in leadership, especially in societies where Islam had made incursions.⁷³ This source of leadership ideology has led to considerable class distinctions in Nigerian society and the use of force by its leadership.⁷⁴ It could be on the basis of this premise that religious leaders, like political leaders, view themselves as superior to their followers and as such feel insulted when asked by them to tender explanations for unacceptable conduct. This leadership ideology could also explain why some religious leaders threaten their followers with curses whenever they are called to account for certain issues by their members.

It has been argued that the problem actually lies with political leaders and that this problem has its roots in long-standing immoral tendencies. The immoral tendencies are self-interest, greed among past leaders and a failure to acknowledge ethical values that could engender responsible leadership in society.⁷⁵ However, the problem is no longer just with political leadership; Christian religious leaders are part of the problem too. In as much as it is possible to affirm Lanre-Abass's assumptions about the elements that have influenced Nigerian leadership ideology,⁷⁶ the foundations of the culture of poor leadership cannot be divorced from the influences on leadership derived from primordial, Christian, Islamic and colonialist leadership practices. The poor

⁶⁷ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 177.

⁶⁸ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 178.

⁶⁹ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 183.

⁷⁰ Masango, "Leadership in the African context," 316.

⁷¹ Masango, "Leadership in the African context," 316.

⁷² Agbiji, *Development-oriented Church Leadership in Post-military Nigeria*, 92.

⁷³ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 240.

⁷⁴ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 240.

⁷⁵ Lanre -Abass, "The crisis of leadership in Nigeria and the imperative of a virtue ethics," 124.

⁷⁶ See the second paragraph of this article again.

ideological foundation of leadership, which has served as a well-spring for successive Nigerian and African leaders across the spectrum of leadership, including the Christian religious leadership, can be traced to traditional African leadership ideology, depicted in leadership practices in African societies. Our contention is that the formation of negative leadership ideology in traditional African societies that ought to have been reformed in the course of history, has by and large been upheld by Nigerian socio-political, economic and religious leaders in successive Nigerian historical periods.

Colonial, post-colonial, military and post-military heritage

The colonial, post-colonial, military and post-military leadership practices also provided sources that contributed to the formation of a poor leadership ideology among Nigerian Christian religious leaders. The colonial period, for instance, initiated the policy of indirect rule that construed a form of colonial leadership that was insensitive to the wellbeing of the masses. Besides, power was concentrated in the hands of the traditional leaders, who may not have possessed the best leadership skills to steer their respective communities as well as the nation to a better socio-political and economic destination. In failing to appoint a competent leadership corps that could give adequate direction to the socio-political wellbeing of the various communities especially in the southern region of Nigeria, the colonial leadership construed the position of leadership as a vehicle to serve the self-interest of leaders rather than the public good. It also taught the people that positions of leadership may not necessarily be reserved for the best candidates, but for those candidates who could best serve the interest of some influential individuals who paved the way for them to ascend to esteemed positions of leadership.

In our discussion of leadership in the colonial era it was pointed out that the notion of indirect rule was in effect a policy of divide and rule that led to the deliberate institution of divisions among the people for the benefit of the colonial government. In addition, the colonial powers in most cases made the traditional rulers their stooges.⁷⁷ A careful observer of Nigerian leadership history will notice that a few powerful Nigerians have often sought to install leaders who would be their stooges in all strata of the Nigerian society, including in the religious sphere. Leadership in the Nigerian context is not attained by the most competent candidates, but by those who have godfathers⁷⁸ and who can serve the selfish interests of their godfathers even to the detriment of the masses. Such leaders do not see themselves as accountable to the masses but to their godfathers. In so doing the colonial leadership shaped a poor leadership ideology among Nigerians. This poor leadership ideology has endured in Nigerian society.

The affirmation of ethnic groups and the intensification of an ethnic ideology led to the politicisation of tribal and ethnic interests during the post-colonial era. A number of political, economic and religious institutions have followed this ideology in the appointment or election of leaders. It is therefore common in Nigeria that religious institutions which were founded by a person of a particular ethnic or tribal group will witness the leadership being surrounded by the people of his or her ethnic or tribal group. This negative trend witnessed during the post-colonial period has also constituted a source for the formation of successive leadership ideologies. Also, during the post-colonial era, aspiring to and retaining leadership positions were viewed as reachable goals through engagement in vicious and combative strategies that entailed the use of violence and fraudulent means.⁷⁹ This ideology has sadly been sustained by political leaders and adopted by religious leaders.

The Nigerian military in turn also provided a negative ideological source for religious leadership through their oppressive and fraudulent tendencies, which led to the embezzlement of public funds and the impoverishment of Nigerians. In fact, there were military rulers who corrupted religious leaders with sums of money and other perks paid for from public funds. In so doing, they legalised corruption in Nigerian society.⁸⁰ The corruption in Nigerian society has become ideologically ingrained in the Nigerian socio-religious leadership. This is a negative leadership ideological source derived from the leadership during the military era.

If Dele Seteolu's assessment of Obasanjo's political leadership can be used as a yardstick for the ideological culture of political leadership in the post-military era, then the intolerance and arrogance cannot be divorced from the leadership ideology of Nigerian politicians.⁸¹ Unfortunately, this post-military leadership ideological bequest has not only shaped the political leadership ideology, but it has now become a frame of reference for Nigerian religious leadership as well.

The impact of globalisation as a source of a poor religious leadership ideology could be attributed to the negative impact of the mass and print media and the internet. This has weakened the concept of mentoring that

⁷⁷ Ndoh, "Colonial system of administration in Nigeria," 49-50.

⁷⁸ The term "godfather" refers to rich and powerful political individuals who serve as mentors to some politicians. They often use their privileged positions and affluence in society to fraudulently install politicians who are loyal to them in positions of authority. This trend has also made incursion into religious institutions.

⁷⁹ Emezi, "Ethnic foundations of the Nigerian society," 22-23.

⁸⁰ S.P.I Agi, "Religion and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria," in *Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria*, ed. O.E. Uya, (Ibadan: Daybis, 2008), 133.

⁸¹ Dele Seteolu, "The challenge of leadership and governance in Nigeria," in *Governance: Nigeria and the World*, ed. S. Odion-Akhaine, (Nigeria: Centre for Constitutionalism and Demilitarisation, 2004), 73, 70-78.

emerging leaders should have developed.⁸² The values of traditional Nigerian communities are fast being replaced by those of a television culture. Above all, because of the high levels of poverty, globalisation is being used by leaders of the rich and powerful nations to co-opt and control leaders of the weak and poor nations, many of which are African, including Nigeria.⁸³ Thus the negative influence of globalisation on Christian religious leadership ideology has created a poor self-identity among many Nigerian religious leaders as they tend to evaluate their success or failure in leadership in terms of material acquisitions instead of sound ethical standards.

It could therefore be argued that the negative leadership ideologies of the colonial, independent, military and post-military eras have been basically used to sustain the negative leadership ideologies derived from pre-colonial Nigerian societies. Given this state of affairs, it is common practice in Nigeria that religious and political leaders demand high respect and are accorded very high respect. This is often reflected in their titles, status vehicles and display of flamboyance both in public and private life. Religious leaders now take on titles such as Doctor and Professor (even when many of them do not have academic degrees) while titles such as Pastor or Reverend are no longer seen as prestigious enough in their estimation. When Nigerian political leaders are ill, their illnesses and treatment are often shrouded with secrecy and this often applies to some religious leaders. Like many politicians, there are religious leaders who conduct themselves arrogantly and practise ostentatious lifestyles with a thirst for power and wealth that can be hardly assuaged. Such an attitude has given impetus to the commercialising of religion as church leaders fight for positions in ecclesial settings and jostle to undo each other in the media and advertisements of religious programmes. In addition, Christian religious leaders also establish churches and run them as private businesses where their spouses, children and close family members occupy strategic positions. Besides, as S.P.I. Agi argues, the “dismal story of the romance of certain Christian religious leaders with any government in power”⁸⁴ in what has been dubbed “political tourism”, leaves much to be desired. Such an attitude, we suggest, is reflective of the kind of leadership ideology that has influenced and shaped religious leadership ideology. In as much as all human beings rightly deserve to be respected and honoured, including when they have distinguished themselves, such honour and respect should be held and practised within descent parameters that reflect responsible and exemplary conduct. There is hardly any doubt that a poor Christian religious leadership ideology has negative socio-religious implications.

Religious implications

Over the years various individual crises of leadership have engendered the general crisis of political leadership in Nigeria. There is obviously a crisis of religious leadership, in that religious leaders hardly do enough to criticise the moral decadence in the political and socio-economic realm.⁸⁵ Besides, these religious leaders are also implicated in various forms of scandals and corruption that deprive them of the moral authority to criticise political leaders.⁸⁶ In addition, because religious leaders are not setting the right example for their followers, Nigerian Christians cannot inculcate sound ethical values in their circles of influence. This reflects a situation where there is much display of religiosity, but this is a religion with very shallow ethical standards. The reason for the failure of Christian religious leadership in this situation could be because Christian religious leaders, like other leaders, are constantly challenged to set aside their values in the interests of expediency. Within the context of ecclesial leadership, as well as in the political and socio-economic realms, leadership failure appears to arise more out of character failure than unwise decision-making.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, where such leadership failure occurs there are dire socio-religious, political and economic consequences.

Social implications

One of the crucial contributions that the Christian religion could provide in Nigerian society, especially through its leadership and the faithful, is a frame of reference in which the existing value system may be critically examined. Another is to foster the values that should inspire politics. More so, religion and indeed the Christian religious leadership have the responsibility to be a unifying factor and vehicle for socio-political and economic development.⁸⁸ The persistence of corruption and irresponsible leadership in post-military Nigeria has been alleged to have tainted all strata of society, including ecclesial communities and their leadership. “This has resulted in many years of hardship and suffering for the vast majority of Nigerian citizens as civil society and the rule of law disintegrate.”⁸⁹ Thus, a Christian religious leadership with a disfigured and debased value system

⁸² Masango, “Leadership in the African context,” 316.

⁸³ Chipenda, “Culture and the gospel in changing Africa,” 23.

⁸⁴ Agi, “Religion and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria,” 133.

⁸⁵ Lanre-Abass, “The crisis of leadership in Nigeria and the imperative of a virtue ethics,” 123.

⁸⁶ Lanre-Abass, “The crisis of leadership in Nigeria and the imperative of a virtue ethics,” 123.

⁸⁷ E. Gibbs, *Leadership Next: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 27.

⁸⁸ Agi, “Religion and the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria,” 129.

⁸⁹ Lanre-Abass, “The crisis of leadership in Nigeria and the imperative of a virtue ethics,” 125.

does not only spell doom for society; it loses its social relevance and, as such, must vacate its privileged position as the bastion of moral values for the wellbeing of society and its respective institutions. In order to avoid such a dethronement, Christian religious leadership must seek a re-orientation of its leadership ideology.

Conclusion: towards the re-orientation of Christian religious leadership in post-military Nigeria

How else can the workings of the minds of Nigerian Christian religious leaders or what could be referred to as their ideological formation be discerned except by listening to their words and reading their writings, and by examining the issues that engage their energies? There is no longer any doubt that many Nigerian Christian religious leaders are obsessed with titles, advance the commercialisation of religion and shady deals, serve as palace prophets for the political and economic elite, and manipulate and cajole their followers and indeed the Nigerian populace. Such spurious acts are carried out for their selfish gains. Whereas such practices have their roots in – and indeed can be said to have been given impetus by the high esteem in which religious leaders are held in the African heritage – the contemporary Nigerian Christian religious leadership need to re-examine their ideological frame of reference.

The quality of leadership that emanates from the formation of a responsible and creative leadership ideology and practice has been recognised by authors such as Achebe, Ukaegbu and Lanre-Abass to be vital for the progress and wellbeing of any human society.⁹⁰ Where the leadership ideology is distorted, a re-orientation is crucially needed. This is especially true of the kind of leadership ideology that should govern the practices of Christian religious leadership in Nigeria and Africa. Leadership cannot achieve substantial socio-political and economic transformation without the component of legitimate socio-religious, political and economic conscientisation. Such crucial endeavours can be given impetus by the positive religio-social, political and economic legacies that can be gleaned from the history of leadership in Nigerian society. “This is where [Christian religious] leaders should play their roles as the structural engineers and architects of society.”⁹¹ But such engineering and re-engineering should begin with the leaders themselves to make it more effective among their followers and the wider Nigerian society.

Drawing from the primordial Nigerian context and based on the rich leadership ideological elements from this context, Nigerian religious and political leaders should be reminded that they are not simply political heads: they are the mystical and religious heads, the divine symbols of their people’s health and wellbeing. Christian religious leadership ideology should be re-orientated towards the wellbeing of the Nigerian populace, who find themselves engulfed in poverty and deplorable living conditions. This should be seen as a sacred responsibility that should be diligently carried out. As leaders, the office is the link between human rule and spiritual rule. Christian religious leaders should re-orientate their leadership ideology and practice based on the conviction that their prophetic voice and engagement are both a social and spiritual contract for which they are accountable to God and to the people of God. As such they are divine rulers and the reflection of God’s rule in the world.

As God’s representatives in the eyes of the people and based on their divine calling, Nigerian Christian leaders are called to be with the people and for the people. Only then can they understand them and speak their language. Only then can they be heard by political and economic leaders as speaking for the people. Only then can they give hope to the hopeless who abound on the “black continent” and the world so battered by pain and poverty. The extremely high positions and titles such as “saviour”, “protector”, “child of God”, “chief of the divinities” and “lord of earth and life” accorded to religious and political leadership will be more meaningful if they can be cherished as the bearers of a leadership ideology which is life sustaining in all ramifications.

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⁹⁰ Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, 1-3, 19-25; Ukaegbu, “Leadership fatalism and underdevelopment in Nigeria: imaginative policymaking for human development,” 161-182; Lanre-Abass, “The crisis of leadership in Nigeria and the imperative of a virtue ethics,” 117-140.

⁹¹ Lanre-Abass, “The crisis of leadership in Nigeria and the imperative of a virtue ethics,” 131.

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