HUMANUS DISCOURSE Vol. 6. NO 1. 2026
ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Servant Christology and ecclesial praxis: Reimagining African Church leadership through a Christocentric lens

Ezema, Chukwuemeka Malachy[1]
Department of Biblical Studies,
Mountain Top Theological Seminary
Port-Harcourt Campus, River State, Nigeria

Oye-Oluwafemi, Femi Adetunji[2]
Department of Biblical Studies,
LIFE Theological Seminary,
Ikorodu, Lagos State, Nigeria

Abstract

This article interrogates contemporary leadership practices within African Christian contexts through a Christological and ecclesiological lens, arguing that prevailing leadership crises reflect a deeper theological misalignment rather than isolated moral failure. Situated within African Christian discourse and engaging interdisciplinary conversations on religion, culture, and power, the study employs biblical exegesis, contextual theological analysis, and constructive ecclesiology to examine the New Testament's Servant Christology and its implications for church life. By critically engaging traditional African leadership patterns, postcolonial political influences, and current ecclesial practices, the article demonstrates how sacralized and personalized authority structures often eclipse the kenotic logic of the Gospel. It contends that Servant Christology must function normatively in shaping ecclesiology, redefining authority as stewardship, leadership as accountable service, and the Church as a participatory community oriented toward the Missio Dei. The article contributes to ongoing African theological discourse by proposing a Christologically grounded framework for ecclesial leadership that enhances moral credibility, institutional integrity, and public witness in African societies.

Keywords: Servant Christology, Ecclesiology, African Christianity, Leadership, Power and Authority

Introduction

The African continent remains one of the most dynamic centers of contemporary Christian expansion, marked by numerical growth, liturgical vitality, and deep cultural embeddedness.[3]Yet alongside this expansion persists a discernible leadership crisis that continues to undermine the moral credibility, institutional stability, and prophetic witness of the African Church. Public discourse and scholarly assessment alike increasingly point to patterns

[1] emekaezema69@gmail.com +234 803 312 3491
[2] pastorfemi207@gmail.com +234 706 597 1969
[3]Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 122-124.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

of centralized authority, weak accountability mechanisms, financial opacity, and leadership personalization as defining structural challenges within many ecclesial contexts.[4] These realities raise a fundamental theological question rather than merely an administrative one. The issue is not simply leadership failure, but the theological logic that legitimizes such leadership practices.

This study contends that a significant proportion of these ecclesiological deficiencies can be traced to an incomplete integration of Christology into church governance and leadership praxis. While African Christianity has consistently affirmed the divinity, messiahship, and salvific authority of Jesus Christ, the functional implications of his servanthood, particularly his kenotic self-giving and *diakonia*-oriented ministry, remain underdeveloped in institutional practice.[5] Christology is affirmed confessionally, yet often muted structurally. The result is a disconnect between what the Church proclaims about Christ and how it exercises authority in his name.

Theologically, Ecclesiology is derivative rather than autonomous. The nature, structure, and mission of the Church must necessarily flow from the identity and ministry of Christ himself.[6] If Christ is revealed in Scripture as the Servant who exercises authority through self-emptying obedience and redemptive service, then the Church, as his Body, is called to embody this same logic of authority. Leadership within the Church is therefore not a matter of personal charisma, cultural inheritance, or institutional control, but of faithful participation in the servanthood of Christ.

Within many African ecclesial contexts, however, leadership models continue to reflect patterns shaped by precolonial sacral authority, postcolonial political centralization, and contemporary prosperity-driven religious economies.[7] These influences have produced ecclesial structures in which leaders function as unchallengeable figures, resources are personalized rather than stewarded, and succession is often dynastic rather than discerned communally. Such patterns stand in tension with the Gospel portrayal of Christ who deliberately relinquished status, embraced vulnerability, and redefined greatness as service.

This paper argues that Servant Christology, grounded biblically in the Suffering Servant motif of Isaiah, articulated explicitly in Jesus' self-understanding, and climactically expressed in the kenotic hymn of Philippians 2, provides a normative theological framework for reimagining African church leadership.[8] Servanthood is not presented here as one leadership style among many, but as the constitutive logic of Christian authority itself. Consequently, an ecclesiology

[4]Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the 21st Century* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), 34.
[5]Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 56-58.
[6]Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 71.
[7]J.N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995), 160-162.
[8]For a discussion on the kenotic hymn as a model for leadership, see Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 212.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

shaped by Servant Christology demands structural, ethical, and missional reorientation.

The study proceeds by first establishing the biblical and theological foundations of Servant Christology. It then critically examines traditional and modern African leadership paradigms, identifying points of convergence and conflict with the Christological model. This is followed by an analysis of contemporary African church leadership practices, highlighting systemic distortions of authority and accountability. The paper subsequently develops an ecclesiological framework derived from Servant Christology and concludes by proposing concrete, institutionally viable strategies for embedding servant leadership within African ecclesial structures. The central thesis is that authentic and sustainable reform of African church leadership is possible only where Christ's servanthood is allowed to shape not merely personal ethics, but the very architecture of ecclesial life.

Methodological framework

This study adopts a qualitative theological methodology that integrates biblical exegesis, contextual analysis, and constructive ecclesiology. The research is fundamentally normative in orientation, seeking to articulate theological criteria for ecclesial leadership rather than merely to describe existing practices.

First, the study employs close exegetical analysis of key biblical texts that articulate the servanthood of Christ, with particular attention to Isaiah's Servant Songs, the Synoptic sayings on leadership and service, the Johannine foot washing narrative, and the Pauline kenosis hymn in Philippians 2. These texts are examined to establish Servant Christology as a central and coherent biblical witness rather than a marginal ethical motif.

Second, the paper engages in contextual theological analysis of African leadership realities. This involves critical interaction with traditional African authority structures, postcolonial political leadership patterns, and contemporary ecclesial practices, especially within Pentecostal and independent church movements. African theological scholarship is engaged dialogically to identify prevailing interpretations, critiques, and gaps within existing discourse.

Third, the study advances a constructive ecclesiological synthesis in which Christology functions as the normative foundation for church structure, governance, and leadership praxis. Rather than treating servanthood as a personal virtue alone, the paper explores its institutional implications, including authority distribution, accountability mechanisms, leadership formation, and missional orientation.

By integrating these methodological strands, the study seeks to move beyond ethical exhortation toward a coherent theological framework capable of informing both personal leadership conduct and ecclesial system design within African church contexts.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF SERVANT CHRISTOLOGY

Servant Christology is not a secondary ethical accent within the Christian tradition but a central biblical category through which the identity, mission, and authority of Jesus Christ are disclosed.[9] The scriptural witness presents Christ's servanthood as integral to his messianic vocation and decisive for understanding the nature of divine authority. Any ecclesiological model that claims fidelity to the Gospel must therefore be grounded in this foundational Christological logic.

The Old Testament provides the initial theological grammar for understanding Christ's servanthood, most notably through the Servant Songs of Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). These texts portray a divinely commissioned figure whose mission advances not through coercive power or political domination but through obedience, suffering, and redemptive solidarity with the afflicted.[10] Isaiah 53, in particular, depicts the Servant as one who bears the iniquities of others and accomplishes deliverance through vicarious suffering. Within the Christian canon, this figure functions not merely as a historical or poetic construct but as a prophetic anticipation of the messianic pattern fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.[11]

In the New Testament, Jesus explicitly interprets his mission in continuity with this Isaianic vision. The Synoptic tradition records Jesus' programmatic declaration that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28). This statement reconfigures prevailing expectations associated with the Son of Man motif drawn from Daniel 7, where authority is expressed through exaltation and dominion.[12] Jesus does not reject authority but redefines it. Authority within the kingdom of God is exercised through self-giving service rather than hierarchical control.

The Pauline articulation of this Christological vision reaches its theological climax in the *kenosis* hymn of Philippians 2:6–11. Here Christ, though existing in the form of God, does not exploit divine status but willingly empties himself, taking the form of a slave and becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross.[13] The language of *kenosis* signifies a voluntary renunciation of privilege for the sake of redemptive obedience. This self-emptying does not negate Christ's divinity but reveals its true character. Divine authority is disclosed precisely in humility and sacrificial love.

The Gospel of John reinforces this theological vision through the foot-washing narrative (John 13:1–17). In performing an action associated with the lowest

[9]Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 44–46.
[10]Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 410–12.
[11]Some African scholars also highlight this "suffering solidarity" as a point of contact for the "Christus Victor" motif common in the Global South. See B. Diane Stinton, *Map of African Christologies* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2004), 145.
[12]N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 602–4.
[13]Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 164–68.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

household servant, Jesus enacts a symbolic reversal of social and religious expectations.[14] The act functions pedagogically and paradigmatically. Jesus does not merely model humility but commands his disciples to reproduce this pattern of service within their communal life. Leadership is defined not by distance from menial service but by proximity to it.

Traditional African leadership models and modern challenges

Traditional African leadership systems developed within complex ecosystems in which authority was simultaneously communal, hierarchical, and sacral. In many precolonial societies, figures such as kings, chiefs, and elders functioned as custodians of communal identity and spiritual continuity.[15] Authority was typically sustained by cosmological assumptions linking the leader to the ancestors.

The Sacralization and Personalization of Power

One defining characteristic was the sacralization of authority. Leaders often occupied a sacred office; to challenge them was to disrupt the spiritual equilibrium of the community.[16] While this fostered cohesion, it limited accountability.A second feature was patrimonialism, where power was maintained through patronage networks. This personalized authority and blurred the distinction between communal resources and the leader's prerogatives.[17] Leadership legitimacy was reinforced through benefaction rather than service.

The "Big Man" Phenomenon and Ecclesial Transposition

The transition to modern contexts introduced the "Big Man" phenomenon. Colonialism disrupted indigenous governance while reinforcing centralized patterns, which postcolonial political leaders later adopted to concentrate power.[18]Within many African ecclesial contexts—particularly in Neo-Pentecostal movements—these patterns have been transposed into church governance. Leaders are positioned as "Man of God" figures whose authority is insulated from critique.[19] Ecclesial leadership is thus shaped more by cultural expectations of unquestioned authority than by the *kenosis* (self-emptying) of Christ.

[14]Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 374–76.
[15]John S.[1]Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 177–79.
[16]LaurentiMagesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 248–50.
[17]Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 6–10.
[18]Goran Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 94–96.
[19]J. KwabenaAsamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 132–34.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Prosperity Theology and Material Legitimacy

The influence of prosperity-oriented theology has intensified these dynamics. Material success is reframed as a visible marker of spiritual legitimacy, justifying conspicuous consumption and creating hierarchical distance.[20] As AgbonkhianmegheOrobator notes, when the leader becomes a "sacred celebrity," the biblical call to communal shepherding is often replaced by a model of religious entrepreneurship.[21]

Points of Conflict with Servant Christology

The following table summarizes the tension between these inherited models and the Christological framework:

Feature	**Traditional/Big Man Model**	**Servant Christology Model**
Source of Power	Ascribed (Lineage/Status)	Derived (Participation in Christ)
Nature of Authority	Sacral/Unchallengeable	Diaconal/Accountable
Resource Logic	Personalization/Patronage	Stewardship/Shared *Koinonia*
Succession	Dynastic/Appointed	Communally Discerned

These developments expose a fundamental tension. While African traditions emphasize communal identity, they often sacralize power in ways that conflict with the Gospel. The challenge is not a wholesale rejection of culture, but its critical re-evaluation in light of Christ's servanthood.[22]

Critical analysis of contemporary African church leadership

The leadership challenges confronting contemporary African churches are not isolated moral failures but systemic distortions rooted in an inadequate ecclesiological appropriation of Christology. While African churches

[20]OgbuKalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 212–15.
[21]Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 118.
[22]Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 234.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

demonstrate remarkable vitality and missional energy, their leadership structures frequently mirror cultural and political patterns of power rather than the kenotic logic of the Gospel.[23] This disjunction between theological confession and institutional practice constitutes a primary obstacle to the Church's moral credibility and social witness.

Scholarly discourse on African church leadership has historically occupied two distinct camps. On one hand, Western-centric organizational studies emphasize administrative efficiency and democratic governance, often overlooking the deep-seated "sacral" nature of authority in African worldviews.[24] On the other hand, African political theologians have brilliantly critiqued the "Big Man" syndrome but often stop at sociological analysis without providing a robust, structural Christology to replace it.[25]

This position leaves a significant gap which is a lack of "applied ecclesiology" that translates the biblical motif of the *Suffering Servant* into specific institutional mechanisms (such as financial bylaws or succession protocols) for the African context. Most studies call for "better character" in leaders (moral exhortation) rather than a "re-engineered architecture" of the church itself (structural reform). This study seeks to bridge that gap.

The Personalization and Concentration of Authority

A central feature of this distortion is the concentration of authority in "prophetic" or "founding" figures. In many Neo-Pentecostal contexts, leadership is vested almost exclusively in an individual whose role combines spiritual authority, administrative control, and financial oversight.[26] Such personalization transforms the church into an extension of individual vision rather than a communal body governed in accountability to Christ. Authority becomes possessive rather than stewardly, undermining the New Testament conception of leadership as *episkope* (oversight) exercised as a temporary trust.[27]

The Crisis of Accountability and Theological Silencing

Closely related to this concentration of power is the absence of functional accountability. Although constitutions may exist formally, they are often subordinated to "charismatic authority."[28] Mechanisms for critique are weakened by theological narrativessuch as the popular "Touch not my anointed" (Psalm 105:15) trope, that equate questioning leadership with

[23]Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 234–36.
[24]Peter L. Berger, *TheDesecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 112.
[25]Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the 21st Century* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), 45–48.
[26]J. KwabenaAsamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 140.
[27]N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (London: SPCK, 2000), 122.
[28]Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1947), 358–60.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

spiritual rebellion. This environment creates a "culture of silence" where abuse of power persists without redress. In contrast, the Servant Christ exemplifies leadership that welcomes scrutiny, embraces vulnerability, and submits authority to divine judgment.[29]

Financial Opacity and the Prosperity Logic

Financial practice represents a critical site of ecclesiological distortion. Patterns of opaque management stand in sharp contrast to the Gospel's emphasis on *diakonia* (service) and solidarity with the poor. Resources contributed by economically vulnerable congregants are frequently directed toward sustaining elite leadership lifestyles, rationalized through prosperity-oriented narratives.[30] This reflects what scholars call the "religious economy," where spiritual blessing is commodified.[31] The result is a fundamental contradiction of the Church's vocation as a community of shared life (*koinonia*).

The Instability of Dynastic Succession

Succession poses a final challenge. Because authority is personalized and sacralized, leadership transition becomes a site of conflict. Succession is frequently managed through familial inheritance or unilateral appointment rather than communal discernment. This practice reflects inherited cultural patterns of "ascribed authority" rather than the New Testament emphasis on character and communal affirmation.[32]

Summarily, these pathologies reveal an ecclesiology insufficiently shaped by Servant Christology. Power is accumulated rather than relinquished, and leadership is insulated rather than accountable. Addressing these challenges requires more than moral exhortation; it demands a fundamental reorientation of ecclesial structures around the *kenotic* (self-emptying) logic of the Gospel.

Reimagining African church leadership through servant Christology
From Critique to Constructive Theology

Theological reflection on church leadership cannot remain at the level of sociological critique. If Christology is genuinely normative for ecclesiology, then the servanthood of Christ must inform not only leadership ethics but the very architecture, authority patterns, and mission of the Church. As John Zizioulas famously argued, there is no "true" ecclesiology without a "proper" Christology; the Church is not a self-constituting club but a community "called out" and shaped by the life of the Triune God revealed in Jesus.[33]

---

[29]John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 284.
[30]OgbuKalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 215–18.
[31]Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 165.
[32]Eloy Bueno and Roberto Calvo, *The Church in Africa: A Theological Reflection* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2000), 92.
[33]John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St.[1] Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 130–32.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

In the African context, where the "Big Man" syndrome and patrimonialism have deeply seeped into the sanctuary, the task is to move beyond lamenting leadership failure toward constructing a "Kenotic Ecclesiology." This model suggests that the Church's identity and operational logic derive entirely from the person and work of Christ. Consequently, Servant Christology functions not as an optional moral corrective but as the constitutive foundation of Christian communal life.[34]

The Body of Christ: Relationality over Hierarchy

Within the New Testament, the Church is consistently portrayed as the Body of Christ (*Soma Christou*), a living community whose identity is shaped by participation in Christ's life and mission. This metaphor, particularly in the Pauline corpus (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4), carries significant ecclesiological implications. Authority within the Body is relational rather than hierarchical, functional rather than positional, and oriented toward mutual edification (*oikodome*) rather than domination.[35]

For the African Church, this necessitates a shift away from the "Chief-Subject" model of leadership. In many traditional African settings, the leader is the "head" in a way that implies ontological superiority. However, a Christological reading of the "Body" suggests that while Christ is the Head, all members are pneumatologically equal. Leadership exists to equip and sustain the community for participation in the *Missio Dei*, not to accumulate status. As Kwame Bediako noted, the "ancestral" authority of Christ provides a model of "sacrificial mediation" rather than "coercive control," suggesting that the leader's power is only valid when it facilitates the life of the whole body.[36]

Authority as Stewardship: The Death of Personalization

Servant Christology mandates a reconceptualization of authority as stewardship (*oikonomia*). The authority entrusted to church leaders is neither inherent nor permanent; it is derivative and provisional. It is exercised on behalf of Christ and remains strictly accountable to the community he serves. This stands in sharp contrast to cultural models that sacralize the leadership office, insulating it from evaluation under the guise of "spiritual covering."
In a servant-shaped ecclesiology, leaders are custodians of trust rather than proprietors of power. This theological shift requires structural "checks and balances." If authority is a stewardship, then:

1. **Term Limits:** Leadership should not be a life-long "dynastic" possession.

[34]Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 125.
[35]Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 221–23.
[36]Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 42–44.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

2. **Shared Governance:** The "Founding Father" model must yield to a plurality of elders or councils, reflecting the communal discernment seen in Acts 15.[37]

3. **Financial Transparency:** Since resources belong to God for the sake of the poor and the mission, "personalizing" church tithes is a theological violation of stewardship.

Western scholars like Henri Nouwen have highlighted that the "temptation to be powerful" is the greatest hurdle for the modern minister, yet in Africa, this is compounded by a political culture where power is the primary means of survival.[38] A robust Servant Christology acts as a "cruciform" weight that pulls the leader back to the foot of the cross.

Humility as a Structural Principle: The Logic of Kenosis

The *kenotic* self-emptying of Christ (Philippians 2:5–11) establishes humility not merely as a personality trait, but as a structural principle. Any ecclesial system that rewards visibility, wealth, and dominance is fundamentally misaligned with the Gospel. A servant ecclesiology instead privileges practices that decentralize authority and normalize accountability.African theologians such as Mercy AmbaOduyoye have pointed out that traditional African "gerontocracy" (rule by the elderly) and patriarchy often masquerade as "biblical order."[39] However, if the "first shall be last," then the leadership structure must deliberately create space for the voices of the marginalized—women, youth, and the poor. Humility structurally expressed means the leader is not the only one who speaks, decides, or "owns" the vision. Leadership credibility is measured by faithfulness in *diakonia* (service) rather than the magnitude of one's "ministry empire."

Inclusive and Participatory Structures

The ministry of Christ consistently drew marginalized persons into the center of communal life, challenging social hierarchies and religious exclusion. An ecclesiology shaped by this Christological vision resists patriarchal and class-based exclusions. The diversity of gifts (*charismata*) within the Body is affirmed and mobilized through structures that empower rather than suppress communal agency.

In many contemporary African churches, the "laity" are often treated as passive consumers of a leader's "anointing." This is a "clericalist" distortion that denies the Priesthood of All Believers. A participatory ecclesiology demands:

[37]Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 264.
[38]Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 57–59.
[39]Mercy AmbaOduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 84–86.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

- **Decentralized Ministry:** Recognizing that the Holy Spirit is not the private property of the "Man of God."[40]

- **Empowerment:** Leadership is successful only when it makes itself "unnecessary" by maturing the saints to perform the work of ministry (Eph 4:12).

Reorienting Toward Mission: Beyond Institutional Self-Interest

Finally, Servant Christology reorients ecclesiology toward mission. The Church exists not for self-preservation but for participation in the *Missio Dei*. Christ's servanthood was expressed through healing, teaching, reconciliation, and sacrificial presence among the vulnerable. Ecclesial structures that consume disproportionate resources for internal maintenance or the elevation of the "Senior Pastor" betray this missional vocation. David Bosch argued that "mission is the mother of theology," and specifically, that the Church's structure must follow its mission.[41] If the mission is to serve a broken world, the Church cannot be a "fortress" of privilege. In the African context, this means the church must be a "prophetic servant" in the public square, speaking against the very corruption and "Big Man" politics that it too often mimics in its own boardrooms.

In sum, Servant Christology provides the theological architecture for an ecclesiology of *diakonia*. Authority is exercised as stewardship, leadership is validated through humility, community is structured inclusively, and mission is prioritized over institutional self-interest.The reform of African church leadership is not a matter of "better management" techniques borrowed from Western business schools. It is a matter of "Christological repentance." Without this grounding, ecclesial reform risks replicating cultural power patterns under new names. Authentic reform occurs when the "Man of God" is replaced by the "God who became Man" to serve.

Conclusion and implications for African ecclesial praxis

This study has argued that the crisis of leadership within many contemporary African churches is fundamentally theological rather than merely moral, cultural, or administrative. At its core lies a disjunction between Christological confession and ecclesial practice. While African Christianity robustly affirms Jesus Christ as Lord, its leadership structures often remain shaped by inherited cultural models of sacralized authority and modern political patterns of personalized power. Such structures stand in tension with the Servant Christology that lies at the heart of the Gospel.

By grounding ecclesiology in Servant Christology, this paper has demonstrated that Christian leadership cannot be reduced to charisma, office, or institutional success. Rather, leadership emerges from participation in the self giving life of

[40]J. KwabenaAsamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 158.
[41]David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 372.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me

ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Christ. The kenotic movement of Christ redefines authority as stewardship, power as service, and leadership as responsibility exercised for the flourishing of the community. Where these Christological commitments are absent, ecclesial systems inevitably drift toward domination, exclusion, and self preservation.

The analysis of traditional African leadership models revealed both points of continuity and critical discontinuity with biblical servanthood. While communal orientation and consultative processes offer valuable resources for ecclesial life, the sacralization and personalization of authority require theological re-evaluation. African ecclesiology must therefore engage culture neither uncritically nor dismissively, but discerningly, allowing Christology to function as the ultimate criterion of evaluation and transformation.

The implications for African ecclesial praxis are significant. Churches shaped by Servant Christology must intentionally design leadership structures that embed accountability, transparency, and shared discernment. Financial stewardship must be aligned with the Gospel's preferential concern for the vulnerable, resisting theological frameworks that legitimize excess and inequality. Leadership formation must prioritize character, humility, and theological depth over visibility and entrepreneurial skill. Succession planning must be communal, discerned, and institutionally grounded rather than personalized or hereditary.

Ultimately, the recognition of Servant Christology as normative for ecclesiology offers African Christianity an opportunity to reclaim moral credibility and prophetic witness within its societies. In contexts marked by political authoritarianism, economic inequality, and social fragmentation, the Church is uniquely positioned to embody an alternative vision of power rooted in service and love. Such an ecclesial posture does not weaken the Church's authority but authenticates it. When the Church leads as Christ served, it becomes not only a place of worship but a living sign of God's redemptive presence in the African context.

© humanusdiscourse@gmail.com , http://humanusdiscourse.website2.me