

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LUKE 9:18-20 IN RELATION TO THE LEADERSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST: A CASE STUDY OF THE LEADERSHIP STYLE IN IKWO NOYO LGA, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

Rev. **Mgbebu**,¹ Ikechukwu Ogbu; Rev. Fr. **Joseph**,² Monday Orji

ikechukwumgbebu@gmail.com¹ | +2348063374444¹

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND PEACE STUDIES^{1,2}

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

EBONYI STATE UNIVERSITY^{1,2}

ABSTRACT

This paper critically analyses the leadership model of Jesus Christ in Luke 9:18-20 and examines its application to leadership practices in Ikwo Noyo LGA, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Using a case study approach, the paper explores the leadership style of Pastor Emmanuel Nweke, a local religious leader in Ikwo Noyo, to illustrate how Jesus' principles of servant leadership, humility, and mission-centered leadership can be integrated into traditional African leadership structures. The study highlights the balance between traditional authority and Christian leadership in the region, noting that while traditional leadership is deeply rooted in hierarchical and patriarchal values, the teachings of Jesus challenge these norms by emphasizing leadership through service and self-sacrifice. Through qualitative research methods including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, the paper identifies the challenges of integrating Christian leadership in a traditional society, particularly resistance to change and the tension between cultural norms and religious values. Despite these challenges, the study demonstrates the transformative potential of servant leadership, offering practical recommendations for religious leaders to engage in community development, conflict resolution, and social justice initiatives. The findings suggest that Jesus' leadership model offers valuable insights for reshaping leadership in Ikwo Noyo and similar African communities, promoting inclusive, compassionate, and collaborative leadership.

Keywords: *Jesus' Leadership, Servant Leadership, Traditional Leadership, Ikwo Noyo LGA.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the study

Leadership, especially religious leadership, plays a pivotal role in shaping the beliefs, behaviors, and values of a community. In Christianity, the leadership of Jesus Christ has served as an archetype for Christian leaders across generations, transcending time and cultural boundaries. One of the most profound depictions of His leadership is found in the Gospel of Luke, specifically in Luke 9:18-20, where He engages in a pivotal conversation with His disciples, revealing His identity as the Messiah. This passage illustrates Jesus' unique leadership style, marked by humility, service, and relational authority. Through His interaction with His disciples, Jesus exemplifies a leadership model based on service to others, emphasizing the importance of spiritual guidance over political or military power. This paper seeks to critically analyze the leadership principles exemplified by Jesus in this passage, and their implications for modern religious leadership, particularly in the context of Ikwo Noyo LGA, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Ikwo Noyo, a prominent community in the South Eastern region of Nigeria, has a rich cultural history that significantly influences its leadership practices today. The region is marked by its distinct traditions, folklore, and religious beliefs, all of which contribute to the leadership dynamics in both traditional and religious settings. Despite the influence of Christianity in the region, local leadership still reflects a blend of traditional and modern Christian practices. By examining the leadership style of Jesus in Luke 9:18-20 in light of local leadership practices, this paper aims to bridge the gap between biblical leadership models and their practical application in a contemporary African context.

1.2 Contextualization of the Study

The leadership dynamics in Ikwo Noyo LGA are shaped by both traditional and religious factors. Ikwo Noyo's cultural practices, which include age-grade formations, title-taking, and the organization of local festivals, form the bedrock of its social and leadership structures (Eze, 2011). Traditional leaders in the region often hold positions of power through lineage, with authority passed down through generations. These leaders are expected to mediate between the spiritual and temporal needs of the community, often participating in rituals and cultural events that reinforce their leadership roles (Aloh, 2014). However, with the rise of Christianity and other religious movements, new leadership styles have emerged, reflecting a shift from solely traditional systems of authority to models based on Christian principles. This intersection between traditional leadership and Christian influence makes Ikwo Noyo LGA a unique case for exploring the applicability of biblical leadership principles, especially the leadership style demonstrated by Jesus. The passage of Luke 9:18-20 offers a foundational text for understanding servant leadership—an approach that emphasizes humility, service, and personal sacrifice over worldly power. As leadership in Ikwo Noyo continues to evolve, it is crucial to examine how Jesus' model of leadership, rooted in these principles, can inform and transform local leadership practices. By focusing on the leadership of Jesus Christ and contrasting it with the leadership practices in Ikwo Noyo, this study aims to provide insights into how Christian principles of leadership can be integrated into local contexts without undermining traditional values.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This paper seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To critically analyze the leadership model of Jesus Christ as depicted in Luke 9:18-20, focusing on key aspects such as humility, relational authority, and servant leadership.
- ii. To explore the leadership structures in Ikwo Noyo LGA, understanding how traditional leadership systems are integrated with Christian leadership models.
- iii. To compare and contrast the leadership style of Jesus Christ with the leadership practices in Ikwo Noyo, highlighting similarities, differences, and areas of potential integration.
- iv. To assess the potential impact of Jesus' leadership style on contemporary religious leadership practices in Ikwo Noyo LGA, focusing on both challenges and opportunities for leadership transformation in this local context.

1.4 Statement of the problem

This study argues that the leadership model exemplified by Jesus in Luke 9:18-20 provides a transformative framework for understanding religious leadership, especially in contexts where traditional leadership systems still hold sway. While leadership in Ikwo Noyo LGA is deeply rooted in ancestral authority and cultural practices, the principles of servant leadership, humility, and relational authority demonstrated by Jesus can serve as a valuable template for reshaping local leadership in ways that honor both tradition and Christian teachings. Through a

critical analysis of this biblical passage and its application to Ikwo Noyo, this paper demonstrates that integrating Jesus' leadership principles into contemporary religious leadership can promote more inclusive, compassionate, and effective leadership in the region.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Leadership Theories

Leadership theories provide valuable insight into the dynamics of leadership across different contexts, including religious settings. Among the most prominent theories relevant to this study are Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Charismatic Leadership. Each of these theories offers a lens through which to understand the leadership of Jesus Christ and its potential application in modern religious settings, such as Ikwo Noyo LGA. Servant Leadership, a concept popularized by Robert K. Greenleaf (1970), emphasizes the leader's role as a servant first. In this model, the leader prioritizes the well-being of followers, aiming to serve rather than be served. The servant leader listens actively, empathizes with others, and nurtures the growth of their followers. This leadership style aligns closely with the portrayal of Jesus Christ in Luke 9:18-20. Jesus' humble interaction with His disciples, His rejection of worldly power, and His emphasis on serving others embody the core principles of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). Transformational Leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to exceed their own self-interests for the greater good. A transformational leader acts as a role model, offering a compelling vision and fostering personal development among their followers (Bass, 1985). Jesus' leadership in Luke 9:18-20 can also be seen through this lens. By revealing His identity as the Messiah and calling His disciples to follow Him in faith and service, Jesus motivates them to be part of a larger mission. His transformational leadership is not about acquiring power but about transforming hearts and minds to fulfill God's will (Northouse, 2018). Charismatic Leadership is another relevant theory, focusing on a leader's ability to inspire devotion and admiration through personal magnetism and vision. Charismatic leaders tend to lead by example, generating enthusiasm and a sense of purpose among their followers (Weber, 1947). Jesus, in His interaction with His disciples, exemplifies this type of leadership. The compelling way He speaks, His ability to attract followers, and His persuasive vision of the Kingdom of God reflect the characteristics of charismatic leadership. However, His charisma is not centered on personal glory, but on fulfilling God's divine plan and leading others to eternal life (Shamir et al., 1993). These theories, though distinct in focus, all offer useful frameworks for analyzing the leadership of Jesus Christ. They provide various lenses through which we can understand His methods, objectives, and the impact of His leadership on His followers.

2.2 Religious Leadership

Religious leadership encompasses the unique role played by leaders within faith communities. Unlike secular leadership, religious leadership is often characterized by a moral or spiritual authority that stems from sacred texts, divine calling, and the pursuit of the spiritual well-being of followers. This type of leadership is typically grounded in the ethical and theological principles of the faith tradition the leader represents. One key aspect of religious leadership is the leader's function as a moral guide. Religious leaders are tasked with interpreting sacred texts and providing direction based on divine principles. They also serve as role models for ethical behavior, embodying the values of the faith. In Christian traditions, the role of the leader is to reflect the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, guiding the community toward righteousness, peace, and spiritual growth (Ališauskienė & Irons,

2021a). Additionally, religious leadership often involves a communal aspect. Leaders are not only responsible for guiding individual followers but also for fostering a sense of belonging and unity within the faith community. This communal leadership encourages collaboration and mutual support, reflecting the collective mission of the church or religious group (Carter, 2012). In the case of Ikwo Noyo LGA, the religious leaders integrate both traditional community leadership roles and Christian principles to foster a sense of unity while adhering to the Christian faith's teachings on love, humility, and service. Scholars have also noted the challenges and complexities involved in religious leadership, particularly in areas where traditional and religious leadership structures intersect (Bloksberg, 2021). In Ikwo Noyo, for instance, leaders often navigate the tensions between ancestral leadership practices and the emerging Christian norms, requiring a careful balance of respect for tradition and adherence to Christian values (Gaitho, 2019).

2.3 Jesus' Leadership in Luke 9:18-20

In Luke 9:18-20, we find a powerful example of Jesus' leadership style, marked by several key characteristics that are foundational to His mission and His role as a spiritual leader. This passage provides a snapshot of Jesus' engagement with His disciples, where He asks them, "Who do the crowds say I am?" and later reveals to them His true identity as the Messiah. His leadership in this moment reflects not only His divine purpose but also the relational nature of His leadership. Humility is one of the key features of Jesus' leadership. He does not present Himself as a king or conqueror in the traditional sense, but instead speaks with a sense of vulnerability and openness, inviting His disciples into an understanding of His divine mission. By acknowledging the opinions of the crowd and asking His disciples for their perspective, Jesus shows a level of humility that contrasts with the typical expectations of earthly rulers (Luke 9:18). His leadership is not about asserting dominance or seeking power, but about serving others, teaching them to live in harmony with God's will. Another essential aspect of Jesus' leadership is His relational authority. Unlike secular leaders who rely on coercion or fear, Jesus' authority is rooted in His relationship with His followers. He leads by example, modelling the behaviors and values He expects of others. This relational dynamic is evident when Jesus reveals His identity to the disciples, emphasizing that they must take up their own crosses and follow Him. This invitation to self-sacrifice exemplifies His servant leadership, where true greatness is found not in position or power, but in the willingness to serve others (Luke 9:23-24). Finally, Jesus' mission-centered leadership is crucial in understanding His approach. In this passage, Jesus reveals His divine mission which is to suffer, be rejected, and ultimately die for the salvation of humanity (Luke 9:22). His leadership is purpose-driven, focused on fulfilling God's plan for redemption. He challenges His disciples not to seek personal glory but to follow Him on a path of sacrifice and service. The leadership of Jesus in Luke 9:18-20 offers a model that contrasts sharply with traditional views of leadership. His authority comes not from external power or dominance but from His divine calling and His selfless service to others. His servant leadership, combined with relational authority and a mission-centered purpose, provides a paradigm that can be applied in contemporary settings, especially in communities like Ikwo Noyo, where both traditional and religious leadership are intertwined.

3. ANALYSIS OF LUKE 9:18-20

3.1 Context of the Passage

Luke 9:18-20 provides a profound moment in the Gospel narrative, where Jesus engages with His disciples about His identity. This passage occurs in a period of increasing tension and growing public interest surrounding Jesus' ministry. Jesus had already performed numerous miracles, preached about the Kingdom of God, and demonstrated His power over nature, illness, and death. As a result, the crowds had begun to speculate about His identity, asking, "Who is this man?" (Luke 9:18). In response, Jesus seeks to clarify His identity and mission to His disciples in a private setting. At this point in Luke's narrative, Jesus had just fed the 5,000 (Luke 9:10-17) and had been engaging in public ministry, preaching the Gospel and healing the sick. The miracles and teachings performed by Jesus led many to believe He was a prophet or a prophet-like figure, but there was uncertainty about whether He was the Messiah. This confusion is reflected in the question asked by Jesus in verse 18: "Who do the crowds say I am?" Jesus' inquiry is not for His own knowledge, but rather to set the stage for His revelation to His disciples about His divine identity and mission. Jesus' question regarding the crowds' perception sets up a critical turning point in the narrative, one that brings into focus His authority and divine purpose. The disciples' responses reflect the common perceptions of Jesus at the time: some believed He was John the Baptist, others Elijah, and some even thought He was one of the ancient prophets risen from the dead. These responses, while recognizing Jesus' prophetic power, fail to acknowledge His true identity as the Messiah. In verse 20, Jesus turns the conversation to His disciples, asking them directly, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" Peter's answer, "God's Messiah," is a pivotal declaration that affirms Jesus' messianic identity. This moment is crucial because it marks the first time in Luke's Gospel that the identity of Jesus as the Messiah is explicitly recognized by one of His disciples. It also serves as a catalyst for Jesus to begin explaining to them the nature of His messianic role, which involves suffering, death, and resurrection.

3.2 The Leadership of Jesus Christ in Luke 9:18-20

The leadership of Jesus in Luke 9:18-20 is exemplified through several critical dimensions: His humility, relational authority, and mission-centered focus.

Humility in Leadership:

Jesus' leadership is fundamentally grounded in humility, a central characteristic that distinguishes His approach from that of worldly rulers. Unlike secular leaders who often seek to affirm their power and position, Jesus does not assert His identity forcefully or demand recognition. Instead, He begins by asking His disciples about the public's view of Him, demonstrating a willingness to engage in dialogue and self-reflection (Luke 9:18). By asking this question, Jesus invites His disciples into a participatory process, where their understanding of His identity can evolve. This approach is both humble and relational, emphasizing the importance of mutual engagement rather than authoritarian rule (Northouse, 2018).

Relational Authority:

Jesus' leadership is also marked by relational authority, a type of leadership that is earned through trust and closeness with His followers. In contrast to hierarchical or coercive forms of authority, relational authority is based on genuine connection and influence. In verse 19, the disciples' response to Jesus' question reflects a sense of admiration and respect for His miraculous works, but it also underscores the uncertainty surrounding His identity. Jesus uses this moment to invite deeper reflection, asking the disciples directly in verse 20, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" This question emphasizes the personal nature of discipleship—each disciple is called to form their own understanding of Jesus' true identity. By drawing this direct response from Peter, Jesus emphasizes the role of relational engagement and personal commitment in leadership.

Mission-Centered Leadership:

The third key aspect of Jesus' leadership in this passage is His mission-centered approach. Jesus' identity as the Messiah is not simply a title to be acknowledged; it is the foundation of His mission to bring salvation to the world. After Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus begins to shift the focus from public perceptions to the reality of His messianic mission, which involves suffering, rejection, and death (Luke 9:21-22). Jesus' leadership is not about seeking personal glory but about fulfilling the divine will of God. His mission to suffer and die for humanity's salvation reveals the sacrificial nature of His leadership. He does not lead for self-interest or power but for the ultimate purpose of serving others through His death and resurrection (Wykes, 2015). Jesus' leadership is also marked by His ability to focus His followers on the bigger picture of God's plan. His direct communication with His disciples helps them understand the necessity of His suffering and death. By revealing the cost of following Him, Jesus challenges the disciples to rethink their expectations of the Messiah and to embrace a leadership model based on self-sacrifice rather than worldly success (Luke 9:23-24).

3.3 Theological Implications of Jesus' Leadership

The leadership demonstrated by Jesus in Luke 9:18-20 carries profound theological implications for both His followers and for the broader understanding of leadership in Christian contexts. Jesus' humble, relational, and mission-centered approach to leadership reveals important aspects of God's character and His kingdom.

God's Kingdom and the Reversal of Worldly Power:

One of the most important theological implications of Jesus' leadership is the reversal of worldly power structures. In contrast to earthly rulers who often wield power for self-aggrandizement, Jesus demonstrates that true leadership in God's kingdom is characterized by service, humility, and sacrificial love. Jesus' declaration of His messiahship is not followed by an assertion of political power but by a prophecy of suffering and death (Luke 9:22). This illustrates the upside-down nature of God's kingdom, where greatness is found not in dominance or control but in service to others. The call to self-sacrifice, as introduced in verse 23, is a key theological insight into the nature of Jesus' leadership and His kingdom (Ortiz-Gómez et al., 2020).

The Suffering Messiah:

Another significant theological theme in this passage is the identity of Jesus as the Suffering Messiah. Jesus' revelation to His disciples about His impending suffering and death stands in stark contrast to the popular understanding of the Messiah as a political and military leader. By embracing the role of the suffering servant, Jesus redefines messianic expectations and challenges His followers to adopt a similar posture of humility and sacrifice. The theological paradox of a suffering Messiah has profound implications for Christian discipleship: it calls believers to embrace suffering as part of their following of Christ and to find strength in weakness, service, and self-giving love (Peltonen, 2017).

Discipleship and the Call to Follow:

Jesus' leadership also implies a radical redefinition of what it means to be a disciple. Discipleship is not about personal glory or ease, but about taking up one's cross and following Jesus through suffering. The theological challenge of this passage is clear: Jesus calls His followers not to a life of comfort or worldly success but to a life of sacrifice, service, and ultimate commitment to God's will (Luke 9:23). This presents a radical departure from the expectations of leadership in both religious and secular contexts, emphasizing the need for personal transformation and spiritual commitment in the pursuit of God's kingdom.

4. LEADERSHIP STYLES IN IKWO NOYO LGA

4.1 Overview of Leadership in Ikwo Noyo

Ikwo Noyo, located in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, is a community deeply influenced by traditional customs and religious practices. The leadership in Ikwo Noyo is a complex amalgamation of ancestral authority, religious leadership, and modern governance. The region's social structure is deeply rooted in a hierarchical system where power is traditionally vested in elders, chiefs, and religious leaders, with authority passed down through family lineages or communities. However, the influx of Christianity in recent decades has created a shift in leadership dynamics, as religious leaders now hold significant influence alongside traditional figures. The traditional leadership structure in Ikwo Noyo revolves around clan-based authority, where the eldest male of a family or lineage assumes the role of chief, guiding the community through both spiritual and temporal matters. These leaders are deeply respected and play a crucial role in decision-making, conflict resolution, and the organization of communal activities (Aloh, 2014). On the other hand, the church has also established a prominent presence, with pastors, elders, and deacons assuming leadership roles within religious settings. As Christianity continues to grow in Ikwo Noyo, these religious leaders are increasingly seen as moral and spiritual authorities, sometimes even challenging the power of traditional chiefs. The leadership styles in Ikwo Noyo are characterized by authoritarianism, patriarchy, and communal responsibility. Leaders are expected to maintain the social order, ensure the well-being of the community, and uphold cultural traditions. The influence of traditional and religious authority often overlaps, with religious leaders sometimes taking on roles typically reserved for traditional chiefs. As such, the leadership style in Ikwo Noyo is highly intertwined with both spiritual and cultural practices, making it unique in comparison to other regions in Nigeria.

4.2 Traditional Leadership Practices

Traditional leadership practices in Ikwo Noyo are deeply connected to the community's cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs. Elders and chiefs, often referred to as "Ogwa" or "Okpuiukwu", hold positions of authority, and their leadership is primarily based on lineage and age. Leadership is often passed down from father to son, with younger members of the community showing deference and respect for the wisdom and experience of elders (Eze, 2011). A key aspect of traditional leadership in Ikwo Noyo is the age-grade system. Age grades are organized groups of people born within a specific time period who share responsibilities such as community service, organizing events, and participating in religious and social activities. The age-grade leaders, who are usually selected from among the most respected members of each group, act as mediators and conflict resolvers within the community. Their leadership is centered on ensuring the welfare of the group and facilitating communal harmony. Another critical component of traditional leadership in Ikwo Noyo is title-taking. As individuals progress through different stages of life, they may take on various titles that denote their social status, wisdom, and leadership role within the community. These titles, such as Ogbuisi and Njoku, symbolize not only personal achievements but also the responsibilities the individual assumes in maintaining societal order (Aloh, 2014). Title holders often play key roles in decision-making processes, representing the community's interests and ensuring that cultural traditions are upheld. The concept of title-taking emphasizes respect for authority, seniority, and accountability, with leaders being expected to act as role models for younger generations. Religious leaders in Ikwo Noyo, while influenced by Christian teachings, still maintain elements of the community's traditional leadership practices. Many churches in the area have adapted the local systems of authority, with pastors or priests assuming leadership roles similar to those of traditional chiefs. For example, the Parish Priests and

Deacons are often treated with high regard, and their leadership extends beyond spiritual matters to encompass social issues such as education, health, and welfare. This integration of religious leadership with traditional leadership structures further blurs the lines between secular and religious authority in Ikwo Noyo.

4.3 Leadership Style Comparison

When comparing the leadership style in Ikwo Noyo to the leadership model of Jesus Christ as presented in Luke 9:18-20, several key differences and similarities emerge. The leadership of Jesus is often described as humble, servant-oriented, and mission-focused, whereas the leadership in Ikwo Noyo tends to be more hierarchical and authoritative.

Authority and Power:

Traditional leaders in Ikwo Noyo typically exercise coercive authority, often relying on their age, lineage, or title to maintain order. Their power is grounded in a deep respect for tradition and cultural norms. In contrast, Jesus' authority in Luke 9:18-20 is relational rather than coercive. He does not demand allegiance but invites His followers to understand His true identity as the Messiah (Luke 9:20). Jesus' leadership is not based on personal power but on divine calling and a mission of service to others (Greenleaf, 1970). This highlights a key difference between the two leadership styles: Jesus' servant leadership contrasts with the top-down hierarchical model of Ikwo Noyo.

Humility vs. Authoritarianism:

One of the most striking aspects of Jesus' leadership is His humility. He asks His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" not to assert His own identity but to invite His followers into a deeper understanding of His role (Luke 9:20). In Ikwo Noyo, however, traditional leadership tends to be more authoritarian, with leaders asserting their power based on age or lineage. While humility is a virtue in Ikwo Noyo, it is not necessarily the hallmark of leadership in the way that it is for Jesus. Leaders in Ikwo Noyo are often expected to uphold their authority and make decisions for the good of the community, but they do so from a position of status rather than servitude (Eze, 2011).

Servanthood and Mission Focus:

Jesus' leadership is marked by His mission to serve others, which is evident when He speaks about taking up one's cross and following Him (Luke 9:23-24). Jesus leads by example, prioritizing the well-being of others over His own comfort or status. In contrast, leadership in Ikwo Noyo often involves serving the community, but it is also centered on maintaining traditional authority and social order. While traditional leaders in Ikwo Noyo may serve the community, their leadership is often more concerned with preserving culture and status within the community than with serving others selflessly in the way that Jesus did.

4.4 Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges:

The integration of Jesus' leadership model in Ikwo Noyo faces several challenges. One significant challenge is the deeply entrenched traditional hierarchical structures in Ikwo Noyo. Leaders are often selected based on lineage, age, or social standing, which may conflict with Jesus' call for servant leadership. In a society where authority is largely tied to ancestral traditions, the humility and self-sacrifice that Jesus exemplifies may be difficult for some to embrace. Another challenge is the resistance to change. Many communities in Ikwo Noyo place great value on their cultural practices, which may create resistance to adopting a leadership style that appears counter-cultural or foreign. The transition from authoritative leadership to a more relational and servant-oriented model could be met with scepticism or opposition, especially from those in power.

Opportunities:

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for integrating Jesus' leadership model in Ikwo Noyo. First, the strong sense of community in Ikwo Noyo provides a fertile ground for servant leadership. Jesus' leadership emphasizes the importance of caring for others, and this aligns with the communal responsibility that is central to the culture of Ikwo Noyo. Religious leaders could play a pivotal role in introducing and modelling servant leadership principles within the community. Moreover, as the region continues to experience the growth of Christianity, there is an opportunity to redefine leadership in a way that honors both traditional values and Christian principles. Christian leaders in Ikwo Noyo can adopt the relational, humble, and mission-centered leadership style of Jesus to foster unity, humility, and service in their communities. In conclusion, the leadership style of Jesus Christ provides a transformative model for leadership in Ikwo Noyo LGA. By integrating elements of servant leadership, humility, and a mission-centered approach, leaders in Ikwo Noyo can navigate the complexities of tradition and modernity, ultimately fostering more inclusive and compassionate leadership in the region.

5. CASE STUDY: LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN IKWO NOYO LGA

5.1 Case Study Overview

The leadership practices in Ikwo Noyo LGA, a culturally rich and historically significant area in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, offer a unique lens through which to examine the intersection of traditional and religious leadership. This case study explores the leadership model of a prominent local religious leader in Ikwo Noyo—a Christian pastor in a growing church that blends traditional values with Christian teachings. The church in question is located in the central part of Ikwo Noyo, where Christianity has seen significant growth over the past few decades.

The pastor in this case, Pastor Emmanuel Nweke, is a respected leader within the community who plays an influential role both within the church and in the broader social fabric of Ikwo Noyo. He is known for his community engagement, deep respect for traditional values, and active participation in local cultural events. Pastor Emmanuel's leadership provides an interesting point of comparison with Jesus' leadership style, particularly in the way he balances religious authority with the expectations of the Ikwo Noyo community. This case study examines how Pastor Emmanuel navigates the challenges of integrating Christian servant leadership with the hierarchical and communal leadership traditions of Ikwo Noyo. It analyses how his leadership model resonates with both the spiritual and social needs of his followers and explores the potential impact of Jesus' leadership style on his practices.

5.2 Methodology

To conduct this case study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. The methodology focused on in-depth interviews and participant observation. These methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the leadership practices of Pastor Emmanuel and the broader dynamics of leadership within the church and the community.

In-Depth Interviews:

A total of 10 key informant interviews were conducted with church members, elders, and community leaders, including those who have worked closely with Pastor Emmanuel. The interviews were semi-structured, focusing on topics such as: Pastor Emmanuel's leadership style and how it integrates Christian teachings with local traditions. The role of the church in community development and conflict resolution. The impact of Pastor Emmanuel's leadership on the spiritual and social life of the church and the community.

Participant Observation:

Observations were made during regular church services, community gatherings, and cultural festivals, where Pastor Emmanuel actively participates. The researcher attended several church meetings and community events, noting the dynamics of his leadership, his interactions with the congregation, and the way he navigated between traditional and religious authority.

Document Review:

Church records and community reports were also reviewed to gain a broader understanding of Pastor Emmanuel's influence on community leadership and his theological approach. These documents included sermon notes, church bulletins, and minutes from church board meetings.

5.3 Findings

The findings of this case study shed light on the complexity of leadership in Ikwo Noyo, highlighting how religious leaders can bridge the gap between traditional cultural practices and Christian leadership principles.

Balancing Traditional and Christian Leadership:

Pastor Emmanuel exemplifies a unique leadership model that blends traditional respect for elders and cultural authority with the servant leadership principles of Christianity. In his leadership approach, he draws heavily from Ikwo Noyo's hierarchical system, where respect for elders and family lineage plays a central role. However, Pastor Emmanuel's leadership also emphasizes serving others—a key aspect of Christian leadership as modelled by Jesus Christ (Luke 9:18-20). For example, he often references Jesus' humility and servant-hood in his sermons, teaching his congregation that true leadership involves putting others' needs before one's own. "Leadership in Ikwo Noyo has always been about authority," Pastor Emmanuel explains. "But I believe that true authority comes from serving the people, just as Jesus served His disciples. My role is not to dominate but to guide, support, and help others find their way to Christ." His approach has earned him the respect of both his congregation and the broader Ikwo Noyo community, where traditional leaders are often seen as figures of authority.

Community Engagement and Social Responsibility:

Pastor Emmanuel's leadership is not confined to the church building. He is actively involved in local festivals and cultural events, often speaking at gatherings and using his platform to emphasize unity and spiritual growth. For instance, during the Nnesweoha Festival, a significant event in Ikwo Noyo, Pastor Emmanuel integrates messages of peace and service into the festival's rituals. While the festival is rooted in ancestral traditions, he encourages his congregation to reflect on the sacrificial nature of leadership, drawing parallels to Jesus' call for self-sacrifice (Luke 9:23). Pastor Emmanuel also runs various community outreach programs, including education initiatives and health campaigns, aiming to address the social challenges faced by the community. These efforts reflect the servant leadership model Jesus exemplified—leading through action rather than words alone. His active role in addressing poverty, illiteracy, and healthcare has made the church a central pillar of community development in Ikwo Noyo.

Navigating Conflicts Between Tradition and Modern Christian Values:

One of the significant challenges Pastor Emmanuel faces is the tension between traditional leadership norms and the biblical principles of servant leadership. In a community like Ikwo Noyo, where elders hold considerable power, Pastor Emmanuel's teachings sometimes conflict with the expectations of traditional leaders. For instance, in matters of conflict resolution, traditional leaders often rely on patriarchal authority, while Pastor Emmanuel emphasizes forgiveness, reconciliation, and community dialogue—values that align with Jesus' teachings. A

case in point is when a local conflict arose between two families over land disputes. While the traditional leaders favoured a top-down approach to resolve the issue, Pastor Emmanuel facilitated open discussions where both parties were encouraged to express their grievances and seek forgiveness. This approach reflected the restorative justice model of Christian leadership, which prioritizes healing and reconciliation over retribution. Though his approach was initially met with resistance from some traditional leaders, the success of the conflict resolution has helped integrate more collaborative methods in community governance.

The Role of Leadership in Spiritual Growth:

Pastor Emmanuel's leadership has significantly contributed to the spiritual growth of his congregation. His mission-centered leadership, as seen in Luke 9:18-20, calls his followers to take up their cross and follow Jesus, emphasizing sacrifice and obedience as integral components of Christian discipleship. His ability to balance spiritual leadership with practical engagement in the community has led to an increased commitment to the Christian faith, especially among younger generations in Ikwo Noyo. The church has seen a rise in youth participation, with young people becoming more actively involved in church programs and community outreach efforts. Pastor Emmanuel's approach mirrors the transformational leadership model, inspiring his followers to go beyond the status quo and become agents of change in their community.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Insights from the Case Study

The case study of Pastor Emmanuel Nweke's leadership in Ikwo Noyo LGA provides a compelling example of how Jesus' leadership principles can be effectively integrated into local religious practices. From the study, several key insights emerge regarding the way traditional leadership values intersect with Christian leadership teachings in Ikwo Noyo. One of the most striking observations is the balance Pastor Emmanuel strikes between traditional leadership structures and servant leadership. In a society where elders and chiefs hold significant cultural authority, Pastor Emmanuel's model of leadership is both revolutionary and transformative. He does not seek to dismantle the existing authority structures but instead introduces biblical principles that complement and refine them. His leadership style emphasizes that true power does not lie in position or status but in service to others. This is consistent with the servant leadership model of Jesus Christ, which is grounded in humility and selflessness. Pastor Emmanuel's engagement in community development initiatives—such as educational outreach and health campaigns—further highlights the practical implementation of Jesus' leadership. In Luke 9:18-20, Jesus demonstrates a leadership that transcends mere rhetoric; He leads through action, teaching His disciples not only by what He says but also by what He does. Similarly, Pastor Emmanuel leads by example, using his position to improve the well-being of his congregation and the broader community. His involvement in local festivals and cultural rituals, which are key to Ikwo Noyo's communal life, helps build rapport with the community while also teaching his followers to embrace both tradition and faith. However, the case study also reveals the complexities that arise when trying to merge traditional leadership practices with biblical principles. While Pastor Emmanuel has successfully integrated elements of servant leadership into his role, this hybrid approach is not always easy. Some traditional leaders in Ikwo Noyo resist the idea that religious leaders can challenge established social structures. Pastor Emmanuel's leadership, which emphasizes humility and service, at times conflicts with the authoritarian tendencies inherent in the traditional leadership model. Despite this, the success of his initiatives, such as conflict resolution and youth empowerment, suggests that

Jesus' leadership model holds great potential for fostering unity and collaboration in the community.

6.2 Theological Reflection

Theologically, the integration of Jesus' leadership model in the context of Ikwo Noyo has profound implications for how Christian leaders understand their role in society. Theologically, Jesus redefined leadership through His actions and teachings. His leadership in Luke 9:18-20 reveals that true greatness in God's Kingdom is not about earthly authority but about serving others and loving them unconditionally. This stands in contrast to secular notions of power, which often prioritize control, dominance, and hierarchy. In the context of Ikwo Noyo, Jesus' servant leadership challenges the existing notions of social status and authoritative rule. As demonstrated in the case study, Pastor Emmanuel's leadership is a reflection of Christ's humility and commitment to the well-being of others. This theological framework suggests that Christian leadership should be rooted in service and sacrifice rather than in the pursuit of power or prestige. Furthermore, Jesus' leadership calls His followers to move beyond the confines of cultural expectations to embrace a higher, divine calling that compels them to prioritize the Kingdom of God above all else (Matthew 6:33).

Theologically, the power of servant leadership is transformative. Christian leaders are not merely spiritual guides but agents of social change. Just as Jesus' leadership brought healing to the broken and reconciliation to the alienated, Christian leaders in Ikwo Noyo have the opportunity to foster peace, unity, and social justice by leading through service. The example set by Jesus empowers Christians to act as stewards of God's love, which transcends all barriers, including those imposed by cultural traditions.

6.3 Challenges and Applications

While the case study demonstrates significant success in integrating Jesus' leadership model into the Ikwo Noyo context, several challenges remain. One of the main challenges is the resistance to change within the traditional leadership structure. In Ikwo Noyo, as in many African communities, elders and chiefs hold a deep sense of cultural authority, and introducing a leadership style that emphasizes humility and service can be perceived as undermining established power structures. This is particularly true when religious leaders like Pastor Emmanuel challenge the status quo and advocate for collaborative leadership instead of top-down control. Another challenge lies in the tension between religious and cultural identities. Ikwo Noyo is deeply rooted in its traditions, and religious leaders, including Pastor Emmanuel, often find themselves balancing the call to biblical discipleship with the need to respect and preserve traditional values. For instance, while the Christian concept of forgiveness and reconciliation aligns with Jesus' teachings, it can conflict with traditional practices that prioritize justice through retaliation. Pastor Emmanuel's efforts to mediate conflicts by advocating for forgiveness and dialogue sometimes meet resistance from community members who believe in a more punitive approach to conflict resolution (Nweze, 2021). In terms of application, there are numerous opportunities to further integrate Jesus' servant leadership in Ikwo Noyo. For example, Christian leaders can play a pivotal role in educating the younger generation on the values of service, humility, and spiritual transformation. Encouraging youth participation in community development initiatives not only empowers the next generation but also helps shift the focus from individual gain to communal well-being. Jesus' leadership style, which emphasizes self-sacrifice and love for neighbors, can inspire young people to embrace leadership that is inclusive and centered on the greater good. Furthermore, the church, under Pastor Emmanuel's leadership, has the potential to transform the local economy through

social enterprises, educational programs, and healthcare initiatives. By aligning the church's mission with community development, Pastor Emmanuel can use his position to address pressing social issues, such as poverty, illiteracy, and inadequate healthcare, all while remaining true to the biblical principles of leadership.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of Key Points

This study critically analysed the leadership model of Jesus Christ as depicted in Luke 9:18-20 and its application to leadership practices in Ikwo Noyo LGA, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The analysis revealed that Jesus' leadership is characterized by humility, servant leadership, and a mission-centered focus, which contrasts sharply with traditional hierarchical leadership models. The study also examined how these leadership principles could be integrated into the complex leadership environment of Ikwo Noyo, which blends both traditional authority and Christian leadership.

Through the case study of Pastor Emmanuel Nweke, a local religious leader in Ikwo Noyo, it was demonstrated that servant leadership, as exemplified by Jesus, can effectively be applied in a traditional African context. Pastor Emmanuel's leadership style is grounded in both Christian values of service and respect for traditional authority, striking a balance between humility and cultural expectations. His engagement in community development, his role in conflict resolution, and his participation in local cultural events illustrate how Christian leadership can coexist with and even enhance traditional leadership structures. However, the study also identified several challenges in the integration of Jesus' leadership model, particularly resistance from traditional leaders and the tension between religious teachings and cultural norms. Despite these challenges, the findings underscore the transformative potential of servant leadership, especially when religious leaders emphasize self-sacrifice, service, and collaborative leadership.

7.2 Implications for Leadership

The implications of this study for leadership, both in Ikwo Noyo and in broader contexts, are significant. First, the integration of Jesus' servant leadership into local leadership structures has the potential to reshape how authority is perceived and exercised in Ikwo Noyo. While traditional leadership in the region is often rooted in hierarchical authority and patriarchal structures, Jesus' model calls for humility, self-sacrifice, and a focus on the needs of others. For contemporary religious leaders, adopting this model can help shift the focus from personal power to community well-being, emphasizing the leader's role as a servant who works for the good of others rather than for self-interest. Moreover, the community engagement demonstrated by Pastor Emmanuel provides a practical example of how religious leaders can actively participate in social issues, such as education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation, while remaining true to their spiritual mission. By embracing Jesus' approach to leadership, Christian leaders can contribute to holistic community development, integrating both spiritual and social transformation. This is especially important in African contexts, where traditional systems of leadership often focus on preserving authority and cultural practices without addressing pressing social issues. The challenges highlighted in this study particularly the resistance to change and conflict between cultural practices and Christian values are not unique to Ikwo Noyo but are present in many communities worldwide. These challenges underscore the need for contextualized leadership that respects cultural heritage while introducing transformative change. The leadership of Jesus Christ, centered on love, humility, and service, offers a valuable framework for navigating these tensions and achieving sustainable change. In conclusion, Jesus' leadership model provides a timeless framework for leadership,

especially in religious and community contexts. By embracing this model, leaders in Ikwo Noyo and similar communities can promote unity, peace, and justice, creating more inclusive and compassionate leadership that serves both the spiritual and social needs of the community. This study contributes to the ongoing conversation on how biblical principles can shape leadership practices in non-Western, traditional settings, offering valuable insights for both religious leaders and community influencers.

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