

# Secular Versus Biblical Leadership Models: Hermeneutical Implication of Mark 10:41-45 for Contemporary Christian Ministers

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## Deskripsi

The article discusses the comparison between secular and biblical leadership models, highlighting the hermeneutical implications of Mark 10:41-45 for contemporary Christian ministers.

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## Abstract

*Leadership occupies a very critical position in every organisation, community, or society. Mark 10:41-45 is a major discourse by Jesus Christ on Christian leadership drawing the attention of his disciples to servant leadership. Today, there is dearth of servant leadership within the Christian ministry. While extant studies on leadership and church governance have examined pastoral authority, different leadership styles and theories, little or no attention has been paid into the attitudes of some contemporary Christian ministers who mostly behave as 'gods of men' instead of being 'men of God' and servants of all. Therefore, this paper focuses on the hermeneutical implications of Jesus' teaching in Mark 10:41-45 for contemporary Christian ministers, particularly in Nigeria. The paper, through an exegetical analysis of Mark 10:41-45 examines Jesus' teachings on the nature of Christian leadership, emphasizing humility, service, and sacrificial love as foundational to Christian leadership. The paper also provides insights into how Christian ministers can apply biblical leadership principles in promoting ethical leadership and enhancing the witness of the church in society. Historical-grammatical form of exegesis and theological methods were adopted to study the chosen text without ignoring the contextual analysis of the passage. It is discovered that Jesus Christ sets a high standard for Church leadership that emphasizes Christ-likeness and godliness. Church leadership is a position of humble and loving service; they are called not to be governing monarchs but humble slaves and labouring servant exemplifying sacrifice, devotion, submission and lowliness. Therefore, this study calls for servant leadership style among church leaders in Nigeria as this will reduce unhealthy rivalry and incessant problems associated with bad leadership.*

**Keywords:** *Servant leadership, Secular leadership, Church leadership, Contemporary Christian leaders, Mark 10:41-45*

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership is important for any organization that desires to thrive and achieve the purpose for which it is set up, and the church is not an exception. Leadership has to do with effecting changes, influencing others and coordinating organizational activities. The need for leadership in both secular and religious institutions is very important, as it is the bedrock of any

organization. Against the general belief of people, the Church is not the building designated for worship, rather, the church is the assemblage of People committed to the teachings and work of Jesus Christ. Just as stated in Ephesians 4:11-12, Jesus has gifted the Church with Pastors for the purpose of equipping and building his Church (Ephesians 4: 11-12). The Greek word used for Pastor is *poimen* meaning 'a helper or a feeder of sheep' (The International Bible Encyclopedia). In other words, Pastor is positioned by Christ in the Church as he shepherds the 'flock of Christ' and watch over her growth (Bruce, 1986; Stuart, 2006) (Douglas & Tenney, 1987).

The pastor has been divinely appointed, consecrated, and entrusted by God with responsibilities that often appear to be highly intricate. Niyi-Ojo notes that fulfilling the diverse expectations imposed by individuals on pastors can be challenging, particularly when such expectations appear to be arbitrary or mutually exclusive (Niyi-Ojo, 2020). In a Church, the roles of a Pastor are not limited to conducting religious services and performing other spiritual responsibilities, as well as administrative functions. A pastor is expected to possess certain qualities that can help him carry out his God-given responsibilities in the midst of the people of God. Once a Pastor is in a Church, he automatically becomes an administrator and so must know what he ought to be done. Church administration is an enormous task that every pastor must tackle headlong if he is to lead the people to achieve the purpose of the Church for which Christ established it. Pastors who resent the demands placed on their time and energy by administrative duties are shirking their ministerial responsibilities.

The role of the pastor is often analogized to that of a manager within an institution (Atkinson, 1994; Noyce, 1988). This analogy introduces various managerial considerations, including "equitable compensation and recognition, just termination procedures, effective incentives, appropriate contracting and procurement practices, compliance with legal regulations, and prudent insurance coverage" (Atkinson, 1994; Noyce, 1988). However, the incorporation of management concepts into ministry is perceived by some as secular and profoundly unspiritual, leading to suspicions that such an approach may be fundamentally opposed to the ministerial vocation (Berkley, 1997). While managers are adept at creating efficient corporate structures, the same cannot be said for ministry. According to Berkley, managers are responsible for budget planning, decision-making, and the judicious allocation of material resources to achieve organizational objectives (Berkley, 1997). In contrast, ministry is fundamentally relational, involving interactions with individuals rather than mere objects; pastors, as ministerial leaders, engage with people to realize the church's vision. As Noyce asserts, "we cannot adopt a management model for ministry if that expression implies that the business management focus on efficiency and profit-making is to be the dominant concern that shapes the work" (Noyce, 1988). This is due to the necessity for the managerial aspect of ministry to support rather than undermine the ultimate objective of faith. Notably, the term 'manager' was never employed by Jesus; instead, He referred to the concept of a steward (Norman & Heuser, 1996). Jesus made several references to a steward as one who manages on behalf of another, the owner. The steward, as a manager, possesses no ownership but is evaluated based on their capacity to manage with integrity and prudence (Luke 16:1-8).

The stewardship behavior exhibited by managers consequently leads to exemplary corporate governance practices. Pastors, as stewards of God's people, should adhere to higher and more robust ethical leadership standards in their service, with an awareness of their accountability. Both pastors and other Christian administrators must be acutely aware of the significant responsibility entrusted to them as stewards of God's revelation and redemption (Anthony & Estep Jr., 2005). They are meant to set aside selfish ambitions and personal concerns for the value of that which has been entrusted to them. The chief moral expectation of any professional is self-discipline which is enough not to exploit whatever is committed to him or her (Noyce, 1988). This makes ministerial ethics demand that leaders should be wary about the way they exercise leadership. Norman and Heuser, posits that "in active ministry we are repeatedly invited, urged, and tempted to take the center stage" (Norman & Heuser, 1996). Church's leadership must be able to accept that servant leadership is transformational, which involves process that should be led by people who are inspired by God and at the same time ready to inspire others. Though often pushed to have one's way in congregational life, it must not be forgotten that the true purpose of ministry is to enhance the congregation's corporate life through genuine love and sincere service. Unlike the secular leadership model, church leadership should be seen in the light of a stewardship responsibility.

Different scholars such as Daniel, Engstorm, Fadeyi, Clinton and Anthony have carried out different studies on leadership and church governance (Anthony & Estep Jr., 2005; Clinton, 1988; Daniel, 2024; Engstrom, 1978). For instance, studies have been done on the effectiveness of established church governance styles with respect to pastors being able to effectively discharge their ministerial duties without becoming *Lasse-faire* or autocratic in their leadership roles. However, little or no attention has been paid into the attitudes of some contemporary Christian ministers who mostly behave as 'gods of men' instead of being 'men of God' and servants of all. Therefore, this paper focuses on the hermeneutical implications of Jesus' teaching in Mark 10:41-45 for contemporary Christian ministers, particularly in Nigeria. The paper, through an exegetical analysis of Mark 10:41-45 examines Jesus' teachings on the nature of Christian leadership, emphasizing humility, service, and sacrificial love as foundational to Christian leadership.

## METHOD

This study employs the exegetical method in studying the text of Mark 10:41-45 on the themes of servant leadership, the use of power and authority as taught by Jesus Christ in the chosen text. The method involved textual criticism, lexical analysis or word study, as well as grammatical and syntactical study of the original Greek text of Mark 10:41-45. The approach adopted for exegesis in the paper is the grammatico-historical approach, which studies the text within the original linguistic and historical contexts and locates contemporary application of the text within the limits implied by the original import of the text. Qualitatively, the paper features interaction with existing literature or works from various sources, including the Holy Bible, relevant books within the field of study, peer reviewed journal articles and materials

from internet on the book of Mark, leadership, servant leadership and Christian concept of leadership. This is done in order to provide foundational understanding of the topic and help identify key themes, debates, and gaps in the literature. The data collected was subjected to context-content thematic analysis. Through a systematic approach, the study focuses on key words for their lexical analysis and understanding of how each word contributes to the overall meaning of the passage. Delineating between secular leadership models and biblical principles, this study examines Jesus' teachings on the nature of leadership best suitable for the church, emphasizing humility, service, care and sacrificial love as foundational to Christian leadership.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Old Testament Background to Servant Leadership's Concept

This section briefly x-ray the concept or principles of leadership from the Old Testament perspective. This serves as a background information to the discussion of leadership that culminates in the exemplary living and teaching of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Leadership in the Old Testament (OT) is in the context of divine sovereignty. God is supreme as all human forms of government and authorities derive their power from Him. From this theocentric view of leadership descent, leaders of every category owe their attainment of power and position to God. They are chosen by God and it is His prerogative to promote or demote those in leadership positions. OT principles of leadership demonstrate very clearly that leadership begins with divine appointment (Danfulani, 2009). Most of the leaders in biblical history were appointed by God and not elected as it is with leaders in contemporary times.

There is always the reluctance and the feeling of unworthiness in OT leaders when they were called. Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Saul and David were all reluctant leaders but chosen by God to lead His people. Israel which was a theocracy knew that it was the king who chooses who should be what in His kingdom. the choice of most OT leaders was not based on their human perfection or criteria; Moses, who lacked eloquence (Ex. 3:9), Gideon, who was hiding out of fear (Judg. 6:11-12), David, who was the youngest out of eight siblings (1 Sam. 16:11), shows God's choice of individuals who appear to lack acceptable credentials for such roles but God looks at the mind as a criterion for his choice of leadership. This is one of the reasons why choice of leaders based only on *charismata* often fails.

Another principle of leadership, as observed in the Old Testament, can be characterized in contemporary terms as a participatory leadership style. This is exemplified in the life of Moses, who delegated leadership responsibilities to others and shared his authority (Ex. 16:22; Num. 13:3). While God does not abdicate His throne or supremacy, nor does He entirely delegate His authority to human leaders, He permits the governance of the world through human agency in alignment with His divine will (Gen. 1:28). Consequently, all authority, both in heaven and on earth, must be subordinate to God's authority and in obedience to His will. Failing to adhere to this principle is regarded as rebellion against God and is tantamount to inviting His judgment.

A number of other principles that could be seen from the OT includes, deliverance and liberation of people from oppressive rulers as evident in the lives of the various judges; leadership responsibility and preparation for it (Josh.1:1-8); a sensitive mind to spiritual things combined with skillfulness as exemplified by Nehemiah who was involved in organization, planning, delegation, supervision, arbitration, training and evaluation, all at the same time.

### **Contextual Background of the Book of Mark**

It is widely accepted that the Gospel of Mark was composed for a Gentile audience, particularly targeting Roman readers. This perspective is substantiated not only by external testimonies from early church figures such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Jerome, but also by substantial internal evidence. The Old Testament scriptures and prophecies, which hold significant meaning for the Jewish audience, would likely be of little relevance to a Roman reader who is unfamiliar with them. Similarly, the reason and philosophy that resonate with the Greek audience would have limited appeal to the Roman, who tends to prioritize action over contemplation. Thus, the Gospel must portray the character and mission of Jesus in a manner that aligns with concepts of divine power, action, law, conquest, and universal authority (Herbert, 1975; Klijn, 2023).

The author of the Gospel of Mark tailored his writing to cater specifically to Roman readers, intentionally omitting certain elements that are present in the accounts of Matthew and Luke. For instance, the extensive discourses found in Matthew are largely absent in Mark. Instead, Mark emphasizes Christ as a powerful figure of action rather than as a profound thinker. Although Christ is referred to as Teacher on twelve occasions, the evangelist's primary objective is to depict Him as the great worker (Best, 1983; Dewey, 1986). Consequently, Mark's narrative is characterized by its vivid and rapid pace, featuring minimal discourse and a strong focus on movement and achievement. In this way, Mark, with the Latin audience in mind, highlights aspects of Christ that are most likely to resonate with them (Mathews, 1901; McCain, 1996).

The discourses in the other Gospels would not have been of a great interest to the Romans as they were to the Jews to which they were focused. In Mark's Gospel there are 661 verses (RSV), and of these, 277 in whole or part, record the words of Jesus (Gromacki, 1984; Jack, 2007). These 277 verses contain only one major discourse – the eschatological discourse (Chapter 13), reported in only 37 verses which is between one – seventh and one – eighth of all Christ's words in Mark's Gospel (Burney, 1990).

McCain while quoting Guthrie is of the opinion that all other words of Christ might rightly be regarded as talks on various subjects which include ceremonial washings (7:1-23); Cross – bearing (8:34 – 9:1); humility, tolerance and offences (9:33 – 50); divorce (10:5-12); riches, self-sacrifice and reward (10:23-31); false ambition or true greatness (10:38-45); faith and prayer (11:23-26) (McCain, 1996). All these are in no way comparable with the number of discourses recorded by Mathew, even Mark's peculiar discourse (Mk. 13) has only 37 verses whereas in Mathew same discourse has 97 verses. As it has been noted earlier, the gospel of

Mark broadly emphasizes what Jesus did rather on what He said. In Guthrie's opinion, discourses on various subjects as found in Mark can be termed talks because of their brevity.

It is essential to categorize the gospel pericopes according to their respective forms and to assign them to their appropriate *sitze im leben*. According to Marshall, there are five primary categories: pronouncement stories, miracle stories, historical narratives, legends, myths, and exhortations (Marshall, 2005). Furthermore, Marshall formally delineates the sayings of Jesus into several subcategories, including maxims, metaphors, parabolic narratives, prophetic challenges, brief commandments, and extended commandments accompanied by a motive clause. Bultmann's analysis of the sayings of Jesus is even more comprehensive, as he classifies them into three content-based groups: logia or wisdom sayings; prophetic and apocalyptic sayings; and laws and community regulations (Marshall, 2005). The passage selected for this study, Mark 10:41–45, constitutes a discourse that serves as an exhortation to the community of believers, addressing the regulation of leadership practices within the community.

### Exegetical Analysis of Mark 10:41-45

Although the disciples failed to fully grasp Jesus' prediction of His passion, there remained within them a conviction that the establishment of His kingdom was imminent. This belief prompted two of the twelve, James and John, to seek personal advantage (Mark 10:35–40). Their request, though misguided, nonetheless reflected a measure of faith in Jesus' authority to inaugurate His kingdom (Morris, 1985). Jesus responded to their ambition with notable patience and gentleness, in contrast to the reaction of the remaining ten disciples. At such a critical moment, when Jesus' heart was burdened with the suffering awaiting Him in Jerusalem, the disciples' petty self-interest must have been deeply painful to Him, necessitating immediate correction and re-instruction.

Verse 41 reveals that the ten disciples displayed their spiritual immaturity by responding with indignation toward James and John, who had strategically attempted to secure a privileged position (Morris, 1985). Their anger, however, did not arise from theological concerns regarding the nature of God's reign but was fueled by jealousy over the glory they themselves coveted (cf. 9:34). The ten, no more than the two, had failed to comprehend Jesus' teaching. Their indignation, described by the verb *aganakteō*—the same term used to characterize Jesus' reaction to the disciples preventing children from approaching Him (Mark 10:14)—exposed their underlying motivations. Yet there is a vast difference between Jesus' righteous indignation and the selfish anger of the ten (Edwards, 1985). Their resentment likely stemmed from the realization that James and John's request could potentially exclude them from the honor of close association with Christ in His glory (Oden, 2006). Rather than responding with humility, they succumbed to bitter rivalry, jeopardizing the unity and spiritual vitality of the apostolic community, thus necessitating Jesus' immediate intervention. As Brooks notes, the indignation of the ten was no more praiseworthy than the presumptuous ambition of the two (Brooks, 1991).

In verse 42, the RSV renders that Jesus "called them to him," though the term "summoned them" would better capture the force of the Greek *pros-kaleomai*, which in Mark

consistently signifies Jesus gathering His disciples or the crowds for significant teaching moments. Jesus summoned them in order to issue a rebuke. He utilized this occasion to impart an essential lesson on humility and service. Rather than harshly reprimanding them, Jesus gently but firmly corrected both James and John and the other ten, exposing their shared ignorance concerning the true nature of Christian leadership (Morris, 1985). Jesus emphasized that ambition and jealousy have no place among the followers of the Son of Man. His teaching began with familiar realities—the oppressive leadership styles of Gentile rulers (10:19)—to illuminate the contrast between worldly and kingdom values (Barclay, 1977).

Some scholars have argued that the expression *hoi dokountes archein* ("those who are regarded as rulers") carries a subtly pejorative nuance. It portrays authority as a form of presumptive rule rather than legitimate leadership. In classical usage, *hoi dokountes* often referred to prominent or recognized leaders. Manson challenged the traditional interpretation that rulers merely "seem" to rule, emphasizing that rulers in the first century indeed exercised substantial and often oppressive authority (Edwards, 1985). Moreover, *hoi dokountes* parallels *hoi megaloi* ("the great ones") in verse 42, a term devoid of pejorative connotation. Jesus, therefore, referred to real power exercised over others, as captured by the verbs *katakryieuō* ("to dominate") and *kataexousiazō* ("to exercise authority"), both denoting the imposition of mastery over subordinates (Manson, 1963). The authoritarian tendencies of ancient rulers, even at minor levels, were unmistakable.

By aspiring to positions of greatness, the disciples risked replicating the oppressive model of Gentile rulers. Jesus decisively rejected this paradigm, declaring, "it is not so among you"—not merely a future imperative but a present description, as indicated by the textual choice of *estin* rather than *estai* (Bock, 2015). Thus, verse 43a asserts that among Christ's followers, such a model of leadership is already contrary to the reality of the kingdom (Morris, 1985). True greatness among Jesus' disciples is characterized by servanthood (*diakonos*) and slavery (*doulos*), a radical redefinition of leadership as humble service. As Osborne further explains, in a cultural context where status and power were measured by domination, Jesus' disciples are called instead to embrace leadership as a privilege of service to those entrusted to their care by God (Osborne, 2014).

Failure to embody the posture of a servant is not merely a shortcoming relative to an ideal, but a deviation from the very condition reflective of the kingdom of God. The model of servanthood in ministry finds its supreme example in the person of Jesus Christ. Nowhere is the ethical divergence between the kingdom of God and the world more pronounced than in the contrasting understandings of power and service. Jesus' integration of rulership and service reveals an unprecedented paradigm, distinct from both Old Testament and Jewish traditions (Seeley, 1993). In a radical reorientation of values, Jesus redefines greatness not as a function of power, prestige, or authority, but as manifest in service: "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all" (Mark 9:35; Luke 22:24-27). Conversely, many contemporary religious leaders seek prominence through the accumulation of authority and status rather than through humble service, thereby exercising excessive control over their congregations to serve their personal ambitions. These

leaders, who ought to shepherd God's people, often elevate themselves as figures to be revered, behaving more like 'gods' among men. Nevertheless, the cardinal virtue of the kingdom is not power nor even freedom, but servanthood (Beavis, 2011). Paradoxically, true greatness belongs to the one who embraces the lowliness of the *diakonos*—a table servant—and the *doulos*—a slave wholly belonging to another and devoid of independent rights. The notion that the least and the lowest should be considered the greatest was as startling and counterintuitive to Jesus' audience as the image of a camel passing through the eye of a needle (Garland, 1996).

The implications of Jesus' teaching on *diakonos* and *doulos* remain profound and enduring for the Twelve and for all Christian leaders across generations. It is particularly concerning that the behavior of many church leaders, especially in Africa, stands in stark opposition to these foundational teachings. Such leaders have often positioned themselves as deified figures, expecting veneration from their followers and demanding hierarchical deference even among their ministerial peers. Yet, Christian leadership is intended to be embedded within, not elevated above, the community of believers; leaders exist for the Church, not the Church for them.

Moreover, Jesus' instruction regarding service and self-sacrifice is not presented merely as a moral ideal but as a pattern of life that is authoritative and intended for replication among his disciples (Edwards, 1985). The use of the Greek particle *gar* ("for") at the beginning of Mark 10:45 underscores the purposefulness of this calling: disciples are to adopt the stance of servants and slaves, not by virtue of ethical calculation, but because this posture is modeled by the Son of Man himself. Thus, Christian life is not centered on an abstract ethical framework but on living in accordance with "the way of the Lord," incarnated perfectly in Jesus (Edwards, 1985).

The verbs "to be served" and "to serve" (*diakoneō*)—derived from the noun found in verse 43—originally denoted menial tasks such as table service. While Jesus does not specify the particular acts of service he performed, he affirms that his entire life was characterized by an attitude of servanthood and the performance of various forms of ministry (Bock, 2015). In doing so, he established a definitive pattern for his followers. Such a model of ministry does not originate from worldly systems but solely from the unique life and example of Jesus. The essence of this pattern is encapsulated in the dual acts of serving and giving. Edwards asserts that the servant's preeminent position in the kingdom of God arises because the servant's sole function is to give—and giving constitutes the very essence of God's nature (Edwards, 1985).

Central to Jesus' mission as the Son of Man is the act of giving "his life as a ransom." The Greek term *lytron*—translated as "ransom"—was historically associated with compensatory payments for personal injury (Exodus 21:30), crimes (Numbers 35:31-32), the redemption of enslaved relatives (Leviticus 25:51-52), and the sacrifice of firstborn children (Numbers 18:15). In extrabiblical literature, *lytron* referred to the price paid to free a slave or prisoner, redeem a pledge, or reclaim pawned goods (Osborne, 2014). Additionally, Exodus 30:12 links it to the annual half-shekel tax that funded temple sacrifices for atonement. Thus, the concept of ransom inherently involves notions of cost, substitution, and atonement.



It is significant to recognize that Jesus likely understood his impending death through the lens of Isaiah 53, perceiving it as a vicarious sacrifice for sin (Brooks, 1991). The preposition translated "for" in Mark 10:45 conveys the idea of substitution, denoting "in place of" rather than merely "on behalf of." Thus, Mark presents Jesus' death as a substitutionary offering for the sins of others. While the term "many" might suggest a particular group benefiting from this sacrifice, in Semitic idiom it can inclusively signify "all" (Beavis, 2011) (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:17; 1 Timothy 2:6). Ultimately, the benefits of Christ's atoning work extend to all who are willing to receive it. Garland further notes that the emphasis lies on the multitude in need of redemption and the singular action of the one who voluntarily offers his life as the ransom (Garland, 1996). The initiative for humanity's atonement originates in the Son of Man himself, who, in stark contrast to worldly power-seekers (Mark 10:42), willingly lays down his life as the price for humanity's freedom (John 10:11). As the Father's chosen one, Jesus, through his suffering, death, and resurrection, freely and obediently offers himself as the substitute on behalf of all humanity.

### **Church Leadership Versus Secular Leadership: A Comparative Analysis**

The Scriptures do not provide a systematic theory of leadership; rather, they offer insight into leadership predominantly through narrative examples of both positive and negative models. Leadership perceptions vary across sociopolitical contexts, with each cultural setting shaping its own understanding. Within the context of Roman imperial rule, Herodian monarchy, and the religious leadership of the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus' teachings and actions concerning servant leadership stood in stark contrast to the prevailing cultural norms (McCain, 1996). Whereas leadership in the Graeco-Roman and Jewish contexts was largely associated with dominance and lordship over others, Jesus redefined leadership as humble service. This corrective is particularly pertinent for contemporary church leaders in Nigeria and across Africa, many of whom operate more as "gods of men" rather than true "men of God," asserting excessive authority over their followers for personal gain.

Jesus emphasized that service must be the defining characteristic of authentic leadership (Morris, 1985). He taught that anyone aspiring to leadership must first commit themselves to serving others. Contrary to the prevailing views of His time, where service was associated with the social status of slaves, Jesus inverted this perception by establishing service as the hallmark of true greatness. As recorded in Mark 10:43–45, "anyone who wants to be great among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Initially, the apostles misconstrued greatness as the exercise of authority, leading to disputes over status. However, Jesus corrected this by teaching that true greatness is found in serving others: "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves" (Luke 22:25–26, RSV).

Secular leadership, particularly within the marketplace, operates according to business and management principles. Leaders are often envisioned as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)

occupying top-tier offices, primarily tasked with issuing directives and ensuring organizational efficiency and employee productivity. As Lindner observes, decisions regarding workplace arrangements—whether remote, in-office, or hybrid—are fundamentally driven by concerns for employee productivity and organizational performance (Lindner, 2024). In the corporate sphere, leadership effectiveness is typically assessed by outputs and service delivery, focusing on task management rather than personal development. However, church leadership extends beyond mere system management; it fundamentally involves nurturing people. As Lindner further notes, while employees in office settings may appear productive, appearances can be deceptive, mirroring the challenges of evaluating productivity in remote work contexts (Lindner, 2024). Hence, the evaluation of congregational engagement must transcend metrics of productivity and encompass the spiritual and relational dimensions of followership. In secular frameworks, employees are often perceived as components within a larger operational mechanism, and leadership success is primarily measured by the achievement of organizational goals rather than the well-being of followers. In contrast, authentic leadership is intrinsically linked to transcendent motivations and altruistic actions that genuinely benefit others (Kams, 2024).

The ethos of secular leadership thus diverges markedly from the principles of servant leadership. Servant leadership, characterized by an ethic of love, care, and service—especially towards the marginalized—is posited as a corrective to patriarchal and authoritarian tendencies (Spears, 2023). Spears further asserts that servant leadership transcends theoretical constructs; he maintains that “any great leader, by which I also mean an ethical leader of any group, will see himself or herself primarily as a servant of that group and will act accordingly.” According to Stoddard, the principles of servant leadership offer potent remedies for the prevailing anger, hostility, and societal discord of the modern age (Stoddard, 2023). Spears also emphasizes that servant leadership is more relevant today than ever before, offering a necessary alternative to the widespread “gods of men” phenomenon that afflicts many church leaders in Nigeria (Spears, 2023).

In His discourse on leadership in Mark 10:41–45, Jesus explicitly rejects authoritarianism, opposes the domination of others, and promotes a servant-oriented mindset. Most significantly, He establishes a fundamental Biblical principle: leadership within the church is qualitatively distinct from leadership within secular institutions. While every organization, secular or ecclesial, requires structure and leadership to fulfill its purposes, the mission of the church—centered on worship, proclamation, education, ministry, and fellowship—demands a leadership model aligned with Scripture rather than with profit-driven organizational models. As Berkley notes, in Christian contexts, administration must focus on “growing people” rather than merely “getting things done.” Thus, leadership in the church prioritizes ministry over methods, and people over paperwork, eschewing bureaucratic processes and dehumanizing policies.

Nonetheless, the growing adoption of secular leadership paradigms by many churches, particularly in Nigeria and Africa, poses a significant threat, fostering a spirit of domination contrary to the servant leadership modeled by Christ. Leaders, whether in secular or ecclesial

settings, are tasked with strategic vision casting and resource management for long-term development. However, while secular leadership primarily concerns itself with change management and profit maximization (Berkley, 1997), spiritual leadership is fundamentally different. Norman and Heuser point out that although the concept of management may appear secular and thus unspiritual, effective leadership within ministry contexts requires management as an essential function of biblical stewardship (Norman & Heuser, 1996).

Maxwell offers a comprehensive framework for differentiating between secular and spiritual leadership, highlighting key contrasts across six dimensions. While secular leaders gain influence through the exercise of power, spiritual leaders achieve influence by demonstrating love and care for others. Confidence for spiritual leaders stems from their dependence on God, whereas secular leaders rely on competition and personal achievements for self-assurance. In secular contexts, authority is often derived from asserting one's rights and position, but spiritual authority is rooted in servanthood. Additionally, secular leadership promotes organizational growth by placing demands on individuals, whereas spiritual leadership prioritizes the development of individuals. The vision of secular leaders is typically focused on short-term, worldly accomplishments, while spiritual leaders are guided by eternal, God-centered purposes. Finally, success for secular leaders is measured by their ability to overcome competition, while spiritual leaders define success through their obedience to God. Thus, authentic spiritual leadership, grounded in the principles of service, humility, and eternal perspective, stands in stark opposition to secular leadership models centered on authority, competition, and profit (Maxwell, 2014).

### **Implications of Mark 10:41–45 for Contemporary Christian Ministers**

Throughout His ministry, Jesus consistently utilized various moments to impart divine principles of leadership to His disciples. Distinct from worldly conceptions of leadership, which often equate authority with dominance, Jesus redefined leadership as fundamentally rooted in servanthood rather than lordship. Church leaders are thus called to embody the role of "men of God," not "gods of men." Christ introduced an entirely new paradigm, not merely adjusting worldly models but revealing the authentic nature of leadership within the Kingdom of God. Particularly in hierarchical societies where leadership is often exercised through coercive power (Song, 2024), Jesus' example stands in sharp contrast. He did not seek position or status for Himself but rather came to serve and offer His life as a ransom for many. Consequently, Jesus' life and teachings have left an indelible mark on Christian leadership. Contemporary Christian ministers can glean several enduring lessons from Mark 10:41–45.

First, leadership is fundamentally servanthood. Jesus persistently emphasized that true leadership must be characterized by selfless service rather than personal gain. As Crutcher (2024) notes, any individual has the capacity to become a servant-leader, provided that their life experiences mold them into genuine servants. In verse 45, Jesus asserts, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Moreover, Jesus redefines greatness: it is not achieved through power, prestige, or authority, but through service — as demonstrated when He declares that "whoever wants to become

great among you must be your servant (diakonos), and whoever wants to be first must be slave (doulos) of all" (cf. Mark 9:35; Luke 22:24–27). In ancient contexts, a slave (doulos) was the least and the last — entirely at the disposal of his master. Likewise, contemporary African church leaders must internalize and practice the principles of diakonos and doulos, shunning authoritarianism and fostering environments where all are treated with dignity and respect, thus transforming the Church into a sanctuary of healing and community.

Secondly, leaders must exemplify the life they advocate. Jesus' actions consistently validated His teachings. He never commanded others to do what He Himself would not do. A notable example is found in John 13:1–17, where Jesus humbly washes His disciples' feet, an act that symbolizes humility and service. This profound gesture serves as a lasting model for Christian leaders, underscoring that authentic leadership must be demonstrated by action, not merely by words — embodying the principle of "walking the talk."

Third, lasting impact derives from relationships, not merely from positions or titles. Jesus did not exploit any official position to garner followers; instead, He forged deep, transformative relationships with individuals. True influence emerges through relational investment, not by imposition. As Daniel observes, servant leaders are deeply concerned for the well-being of others, actively working to remove barriers that hinder their growth and potential (Daniel, 2024). This relational dynamic is evident in Mark 10:42, where Jesus gathers the disciples to foster unity and eliminate rivalry. Likewise, contemporary church leaders, especially within African contexts, must endeavor to cultivate atmospheres of trust and collaboration. Servant leaders consistently ask, "How can I help you?" — prioritizing the needs of others over the pursuit of power, wealth, or personal prestige.

Building on this, great leaders inspire greater commitment from their followers. Jesus' unwavering commitment to the mission of the Kingdom culminated in His ultimate sacrifice on the cross. His life was characterized by complete devotion, even at the cost of His own life (Mark 10:45). In turn, Jesus demands serious commitment from His followers and ministers. Leadership thus entails profound dedication — first to Christ, and then to the mission entrusted to them. Contemporary African church leaders must move beyond materialistic concerns or self-centered ambitions and instead focus on selfless service, driven by concern for the spiritual and holistic well-being of others.

Fifth, leaders must intentionally select and develop key individuals. Effective leadership is inherently collaborative. No leader can achieve his vision alone. Jesus exemplified this by choosing ordinary individuals and molding them into a formidable team within a brief period. However, as Daniel critiques, many contemporary church leaders are reluctant to develop others, often out of fear of losing authority or skepticism about others' competence (Daniel, 2024). This insecurity leads some leaders to cling to positions indefinitely. In contrast, Jesus gathered His disciples (Mark 10:42) to nurture and prepare them for future leadership. Modern church leaders must therefore trust and empower others, recognizing that true servant leadership involves delegation and the intentional development of successors.

Finally, and crucially, a leader's legacy is secured through mentoring and succession planning. Jesus persistently communicated the broader vision and prepared His disciples for

continuity beyond His earthly ministry. He ensured that His mission would endure through capable successors. Leaders must avoid the misconception that they are indispensable. Effective mentoring and discipleship must be prioritized, particularly among Nigerian church leaders today. Rather than transforming the Church into a profit-driven enterprise, leaders should invest in helping their followers realize their God-given potentials. The enduring impact of leadership is measured by the sustainability of the mission after the leader's departure — failure to raise and equip successors is, ultimately, a failure of leadership.

## CONCLUSION

The investigation reveals a profound distinction between worldly conceptions of greatness and the teachings of Jesus regarding true discipleship. While the apostles initially misunderstood the nature of greatness, aspiring to positions of power and dominance, Jesus redirected their focus toward service. The final instructions given by Jesus emphasize that greatness in His Kingdom is not determined by status or control over others but by the selfless act of service. Crucially, it is important to recognize that Jesus did not relegate the disciples to a position of perpetual inferiority, but instead, He demonstrated how they could attain true greatness. This greatness, however, is not synonymous with slavery or subjugation, but rather, it is rooted in the humility and service that Christ exemplified. Jesus denounces the desire to dominate as characteristic of pagan leadership structures, which seek to secure seats of power and authority over others. In contrast, He points out the dangers of imitating secular authority systems that emphasize hierarchical control and domination. The passage ultimately presents a stark contrast between the hierarchical models of secular power and the egalitarian principles of Christian leadership. The illustrations drawn from secular authority serve as a negative model, illustrating the dangers of worldly ambitions for power and control. The primary message, however, is clear: Christian leaders are called to embody a radically different form of authority. Instead of being served, they are called to serve others, following the example set by Jesus. In summary, greatness within the Kingdom of God is defined by the extent of one's service to others. Christian leadership, therefore, is not characterized by dominion or the accumulation of power, but by the willingness to selflessly give to others. This redefined notion of authority challenges contemporary leaders to reject worldly ambitions for power and embrace a model of leadership rooted in humility and service.

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