

# The Role of Church Leaders in the Rise of Moral Decay in Malawian Society: A Case Study of Selected Urban Churches in Blantyre

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## Abstract

Across the world, moral decadence manifested in acts such as fraud, rape, covetousness, sexual misconduct, character assassination, cultic activities, and idolatry has brought significant reproach to the sacred order. This has raised concerns about the moral integrity of some church leaders in the 21st century. While the church is traditionally seen as a moral compass, its credibility is increasingly questioned. Many church leaders focus more on theological knowledge while neglecting moral discipline. In Malawi, many studies have been conducted regarding the church's role in various aspects, but little is said regarding the contribution of Church Leaders in the increase of Moral Decadence. The study, therefore,

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aimed at investigating the contribution of Church leaders in the increase of Moral Decadence in the selected Blantyre Urban Churches in Malawi, with focus on the sacred order using the Pastoral Epistles, particularly 1 Timothy 3:1-7 as a benchmark. A qualitative study involving twenty church leaders from Catholic, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist, and Assemblies of God Churches in Blantyre Urban examined this issue using Merton's Anomie-Strain Theory. The findings of the study revealed that church leaders contribute to moral decay through appeasement policies, false teachings, medium consultations, greed, drunkenness, inherited priesthood, selective justice, prostitution, and a relentless pursuit of wealth. By applying appeasement policy, church leaders divert from the true message to ensure high church membership that can help them to increase Tithes returned by church members. False teachings are aimed at attracting a large following on condition that their church leaders have the potential to perform miracles, including making barren women able to bear children, and helping members access good paying jobs, etc. All these and other unnoticed aims behind immoral behaviour. As for the love of money at the expense of preaching the True Message of God without any compromise, the study reminds church leaders that they are required to relate with the opposite sex, whether they be male or female, with decorum in and outside the church. Not relating decorously with the opposite sex has caused many church leaders to lose their integrity, and some have been involved in illicit sexual misconduct. In the electronic and print media, there are cases of sexual scandals and immorality, fraud, and cultic practices by some church leaders in contemporary times.

**Keywords:** Roles, Church Leaders, rise, Moral Decadence, Malawian Society, Churches.

### **Abstrak**

Di seluruh dunia, kemerosotan moral yang terwujud dalam tindakan seperti penipuan, pemerkosaan, ketamakan, pelanggaran seksual, pembunuhan karakter, aktivitas kultus, dan penyembahan berhala telah membawa celaan besar terhadap tatanan suci. Hal ini menimbulkan kekhawatiran mengenai integritas moral beberapa pemimpin Gereja di abad ke-21. Meskipun Gereja secara tradisional dipandang sebagai kompas moral, kredibilitasnya semakin

dipertanyakan. Banyak pemimpin Gereja lebih menekankan pada pengetahuan teologis sambil mengabaikan disiplin moral. Di Malawi, penelitian yang membahas peran pemimpin Gereja dalam kemerosotan moral masih terbatas. Sebuah studi kualitatif yang melibatkan dua puluh pemimpin Gereja dari Gereja Katolik, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Gereja Masehi Advent Hari Ketujuh, dan Assemblies of God di Blantyre Urban meneliti isu ini dengan menggunakan teori Anomie-Strain dari Merton. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa para pemimpin Gereja turut berkontribusi terhadap kemerosotan moral melalui kebijakan penenangan, ajaran sesat, konsultasi dengan perantara roh, keserakahan, mabuk-mabukan, sistem pewarisan kepemimpinan Gereja, keadilan yang tidak merata, praktik prostitusi, serta pengejaran kekayaan yang tak henti-hentinya.

**Kata kunci:** Peran, Pemimpin Gereja, kemerosotan moral, Masyarakat Malawi, Gereja.

## Introduction

The Church is seen and accepted as one institution where one goes to acquire good knowledge, morals, values and other behavioral modifications to build up integrity for the betterment of self and society. Today, the situation has changed such that the church that was meant to influence and impact positively on the world is now being influenced by the world system negatively. In the words of Catholic Bishop Father Kukah "the world has become so churchy, while the Church has become so worldly." Most of the vices that were hitherto alien to the church are now being perpetrated in the church.<sup>1</sup> The integrity of the church has received serious questioning from both within and without.

Ijabla posits that, based on the attitudes of some church leaders, the confidence reposed in the church has been eroded, as most people no longer regard their leaders' opinions. Hence, it is difficult for the church to command the respect and honour it

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<sup>1</sup>E.O. Anyacho. *Religion in society*. Anambra: C. P. Globe, 2013.

deserves within the society, even among the adherents of Christian faith due to an integrity deficit.<sup>2</sup> For example, in Ghana, challenges which the Baptist Church encounters in its effort to deal with moral issues include politicizing statements made by the clergy, and inadequate training offered to church leaders, especially pastors and reverends.<sup>3</sup>

The study conducted by Baloyi in South Africa discovered that some years back, the role of the pastor was not only recognized by the church in which he served, but also by the entire community, government, institutions, and society at large, to an extent, relied on pastors to help build up communities.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, politicians and the media sought pastoral opinions in times of strife, boycotts, and other upheavals. Public offences such as rape, murder, robbery, violence and other crimes have always been described as the deeds of evil people whose lives are far removed from the Christian and other religions.<sup>5</sup> This is not the case with church leaders/pastors today as they are either involved as perpetrators or victims of such vices in society. In this study, Baloyi's concern is that instead of pastoral leadership preaching peace and addressing issues related to moral regeneration, they are becoming part of the problem rather than the solution. Consequently, corruption and crime, among other vices, are the order of the day in the country.

Baloyi further quips that church pastors, as community leaders, have some responsibility for eliminating and reducing rather than dismissing or contributing to the moral degeneration engulfing South Africa. It is Baloyi's conviction that if pastors practice what

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<sup>2</sup>R. Ijabla. *Thoughts On The Abuse And Corruption In Nigerian Churches, And Why Religion Cannot Reform The World*, Retrieved 24/10/19 from 2016, 2016.

<sup>3</sup>Francis Osei-Tetteh. Challenges facing the Church in dealing with Moral Issues in Ghana: the way forward, Review Article | Open Access | [10.31586/ujssh.2024.934](https://doi.org/10.31586/ujssh.2024.934), 2024.

<sup>4</sup>Magezi Baloyi, E. 'The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective', In die Skriflig 58(1), a2993. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.2993>, 2024.

<sup>5</sup>Magezi Baloyi, E. 'The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective', In die Skriflig 58(1), a2993. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.2993>, 2024.

they preach, half of the fight against moral degeneration would be won through their exemplary lives.<sup>6</sup>

While in Zimbabwe, Chivasa eloquently affirms that a pastor is a spiritual leader whose responsibility is to provide pastoral care.<sup>7</sup> Much respect and dignity are accorded to the clergy in villages and townships by both congregants and the community at large. As a result, pastors' lives have been in the spotlight in most communities, and their mistakes are usually seen as reasons to disrupt the faith of those communities.<sup>8</sup> Besides their roles of evangelizing and building the church, pastoral leaders directly or indirectly play an important role in moral regeneration, for instance, by encouraging youth to avoid drugs and keeping them busy with church-related activities. Communities expect pastors to be helpful not only at funerals, but also during other disasters and unforeseen calamities.<sup>9</sup> The study, therefore, argues that the spate of moral decadence and other social vices in society today are pointers to the fact that church leaders are contributing to the increase of moral decadence in Blantyre Urban.

The level of moral decadence is disturbing and in whatever form, it distorts plans, programmes and spiritual life of Africa, and Malawi is not exceptional. Malawi, once called "the Warm Heart of Africa," with religious people registering 70% Christians, with the largest groups being Roman Catholics, followed by the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP),<sup>10</sup> the expectation was that its

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<sup>6</sup>Magezi Baloyi, E. 'The Pastoral Role in Moral Regeneration – A South African Perspective', In *die Skriflig* 58(1), a2993. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.2993>, 2024.

<sup>7</sup>N. Chivasa. 'Handling of pastoral misconduct and discipline: Evidence from Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe church', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), a4518, 2017.

<sup>8</sup>N. Chivasa. 'Handling of pastoral misconduct and discipline: Evidence from Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe church', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), a4518, 2017.

<sup>9</sup>N. Chivasa. 'Handling of pastoral misconduct and discipline: Evidence from Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe church', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), a4518, 2017.

<sup>10</sup>National Statistical Office. "Malawi National Statistical Office, September 2009. " *Quarterly Statistical Information*, National Statistical Office, Zomba, Malawi, 2009.

people would be morally upright. However, the country is full of moral decay being manifested in various ways, including corruption, killing of People with albinism, marriage breakdowns, character assassinations in politics, and prevalence of cybercrime cases. Church leaders are also involved in these cases, either as perpetrators or victims of moral decay, such as cybercrime cases.

In reality, church leaders are not only required to be sound theologically, but they are also required to be morally disciplined to move the church forward spiritually and numerically. Regrettably, while many church leaders give more attention to the spiritual and theological formation, insignificant attention is being given to moral discipline as such, the church reels in heartbreak, confusion and distrust as once respected church leaders are repeatedly exposed in sin and shame.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the Church is not speaking with one voice to support many voices (e.g., the media, judiciary, schools, special interest groups, etc.). This is worrisome because the question of moral decay is complex, hence the Church cannot afford to ignore or simply dismiss.

At the same time, the Church stands in a position of constant flux itself, hence cannot claim to observe morality from an objective perspective or treat morality as a static subject. The situation has gone so bad to the extent that what is mostly read and heard about the church today gives cause for alarm.<sup>12</sup> In Malawi, many studies have been conducted regarding the role of the church in various aspects, but little is said regarding the contribution of Church Leaders in the increase of Moral Decadence. The study, therefore, aimed at investigating the contribution of Church leaders in the increase of Moral Decadence in the selected Blantyre Urban Churches

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<sup>11</sup>E. Nihinola. *The Church in Nigeria and Moral Decadence: The Way Forward in Aderinto, O (ed). Nigeria Yesterday, Today and Beyond*. Ibadan: Baptist Press, 2014.

<sup>12</sup>J. Kamer. "Steward Leadership and Paul: Uyovwiewovwe. From Holy Workers to Profiteers in Luke 20:9-16: The Waning Values of Christian Leadership in Nigeria 39." *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership, Vol. 8(1), Fall, 2018*.

in Malawi, with focus on the sacred order using the Pastoral Epistles, particularly 1 Timothy 3:1-7 as a benchmark.

The study was informed by Anomie-Strain Theory postulated by Robert K. Merton (1910-2003) and the theory illustrates the active roles of deviant behaviour in criminality. Anomie theory focuses mainly on the “broad patterns of norm-violating behaviour rather than in the behaviour of individual deviants.”<sup>13</sup> Anomie theory maintains that the strive for success is not always easy and the need for people to better themselves, culture, goals and institutional norms as objectives held out as legitimate are blocked. This inconsistency leads to what Merton calls anomie (a state of normlessness).<sup>14</sup> Anomie as a social theory was used by Émile Durkheim (1933) to describe the loss of direction felt in society when social control of individual behaviour becomes ineffective especially during a period of profound social change and disorder which may create a bewildering sense of not belonging, dominating, sometimes threatening and oppressive.<sup>15</sup> Anomie is a situation where anything goes, probably because norms no longer direct behaviour and deviance is grossly encouraged.<sup>16</sup> Anomie can result from changes in society which disrupt existing relationships and bring existing values into question.<sup>17</sup> Moral revival can control the tide of moral decadence.

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<sup>13</sup>R.K. Merton. "Crime and the Antropologist." *An historical postscript*. In R.W. Rieber (Ed.). *Advances in forensic Psychology* (Vol. 1. pp. 171-173). Norwood,: NJ: Ablex, 1984.

<sup>14</sup>R.K. Merton. *Anomie, anomia, and social interaction: contexts of deviant behaviour*, In M.B. Clinard (Ed.), *Anomie and deviant behaviour*. New York: Free Press, 1964.

<sup>15</sup>J.R. Lilly, F.T. Cullen, & R.A. Criminological Theory. *Context and Consequences*. (4<sup>th</sup> edition). SAGE Publications. Thousand Oaks. London, 2007.

<sup>16</sup>O.O.C. Uche. *John the Baptist's message of repentance: Its lesson lessons in the quest for peace in Nigeria*. *Ideal International Journal* , VOL. 4, NO. 1. JUNE, 2017.

<sup>17</sup>R.K. Merton. *Social structure and anomie*. *American Sociological Review*, 3. New York. USA, 1938.

If the prescribed cultural norms and values are adhered to, anomie which describes the loss of direction in the society, would become effective, orderly, to address the identifiable gaps which do not hitherto encourage individual behaviour, the rule of law, justice, transparency, equity and filial bond in maintaining and sustaining high moral standard in religious, and socio-economic aspects of citizens. It is therefore this theory that best fits this study in an effort to bridge the gap created by the church leaders as manifested in distancing themselves from improving moral standards in Blantyre Urban. Anomie is also considered very relevant because of its impact on reviving the moral conscience of Malawians whose decadent behaviour contributes to the increase of moral decay in the country.

Paradigms present different ways of viewing the world and open up new understandings of social realities. Therefore, this study was grounded by social constructivism, often described as interpretivism.<sup>18</sup> In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences and meanings directed toward certain objects or things. According to Creswell and Poth, these meanings are varied and multiple, leading to the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas.

The study employed a case study research design. Using this design, the researcher developed an in-depth analysis of multiple cases. By doing this, much was learnt from studying one individual and one religious affiliation with various doctrines in Malawi.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, this study involved four different Churches with different beliefs in the country. This study satisfied these descriptions

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<sup>18</sup>N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011; & D.M., Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015.

<sup>19</sup>J.W. Creswell, & C.N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). International Student Edition, SAGE. London, 2018.

in that the researcher collected data in the natural setting. Bodgan and Biklen point out that qualitative researchers go to the particular setting of interest because they are concerned with context, and they feel that activities can best be understood in the actual settings in which they occur.<sup>20</sup> In this natural setting, the researcher collected data through observing behaviour and interviewing participants, accompanied by recordings. Finally, the researcher relied much on the interview-guide that he designed using open-ended questions.

The study was conducted in four churches. The churches involved in the study include one for Catholic, one for the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, one for Seventh-day Adventist, and the last one for Assemblies of God. The study involved a total of twenty participants. Each denomination was represented by five participants. Out of the 20 participants, 16 (80%) were male while 4 (20%) were female participants.

The study employed qualitative approach characterized by phenomenological traits. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun observe that a phenomenological approach investigates various reactions to, or perceptions of a particular phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> The choice of this approach was based on its preference for narrative description, assessment of validity through cross-checking sources of information (triangulation), preference for a narrative summary of results, unwillingness to tamper with naturally occurring phenomena, and preference for expert information (purposive) samples. Phenomenologists generally assume that there is some commonality to how human beings or institutions perceive and interpret similar situations and experiences.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>R.C. Bodgan, & S.K. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2007.

<sup>21</sup>J.R. Fraenkel, N.E. Wallen, and H.H. Hyun. *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*. (Ninth Edition). McGraw Hill Education: New York, 2015.

<sup>22</sup>J.R. Fraenkel, N.E. Wallen, and H.H. Hyun. *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*. (Ninth Edition). McGraw Hill Education: New York, 2015.

With respect to research ethics, permission to conduct the study was sought from the Church Ministers for the sampled Churches including Priests, Reverends, and Pastors. This means that permission was sought at the Diocese, Synod, Conference, and Regional Headquarters levels respectively depending on the nature of the Church. All names of participants and those of their Churches were represented with pseudonyms throughout this study following the standard research ethics requirements of MZUNIREC. For example, the four Churches studied were given pseudonyms "1", "2", "3" and "4". While the actual participants were given pseudonyms A-U. Consent to have the conversations recorded was also sought prior to the interview process.

Data analysis involves the researcher's understanding and interpretation of data that was collected to generate findings, make conclusions and recommendations on the phenomenon under investigation.<sup>23</sup> The results of the study were analyzed using thematic content analysis. This was done because data analysis in qualitative research relies heavily on description; even when certain statistics are calculated, they tend to be used in a descriptive rather than an inferential sense.<sup>24</sup>

### The Bible and Morality

Quote from **Gal 5:16-26**: "Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger,

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<sup>23</sup>A., Moser, & I., Korstjens, "Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 3: Data Collection and Analysis." *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 2018.

<sup>24</sup>J.R. Fraenkel, N.E. Wallen, and H.H. Hyun. *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*. (Ninth Edition). McGraw Hill Education: New York, 2015.

quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Gal. 5:16-26 simply introduces readers to the Trinity in which the Spirit forms part of God. As such, the passage encourages all Christians and readers of this article that it is difficult for humankind to impress God without being led by the Holy Spirit. Even Jesus Christ acknowledged the key role of the Holy Spirit when He was ascending to Heaven in Acts 1: 4-8. In verse 4, Jesus talks of the Holy Spirit as God's gift, while verse 8 introduces the readers to the role of the Holy Spirit, which is to strengthen believers to speak boldly in their task of spreading the gospel about Jesus Christ. This follows that it is difficult for all human race to be morally upright in the absence of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul places at the heart of morality a person, Jesus, who is the center for everyone (John 14:6). It has been argued that majority of people believe that morality is utilized to limit people's freedom of choice.<sup>25</sup> The will of God is the supreme and ultimate source of all obligation. That is, man has but one duty, namely, to obey the divine law. This law, according to St. Paul, "is charity, from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith".<sup>26</sup> Jesus' paschal mystery reconciles us to God, to one another and to all creation. Christian life is first of all a matter of personal following of Jesus Christ. Christ, through the Holy Spirit, gives us the inner capacity to transform our lives in conformity with the Father's will for us. Jesus the way, truth and life (John 14:6) is the universal objective norm of

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<sup>25</sup>O'Connor, Timothy, & C. Franklin. "Free Will". *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2022 Edition)*, N. Edward Zalta (ed.). URL, 2022.

<sup>26</sup>S. Hagop. "Folk Platitudes as Explanada of Philosophical Metaethics: Are They Accurate? And Do They Help or Hinder Inquiry?" *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 34, vol. 34." 2017.

human existence. Jesus related all of morality to the great commandment of love and calls us to love one another as he loves us.

The exegesis of John 14:6 is that everyone who desires to enter God's Kingdom should abide by the guidelines provided by Jesus during His stay on earth. Jesus lived a perfect life, hence needs to be regarded as a role model. The verse further implies that it is only through adherence to the teachings of Jesus Christ, Par Excellence, that every humanity can achieve holistic growth. This is the most positive, worthwhile way to live. Man is both an individual and a member of society, and hence his duties pertain to two different spheres. In this regard, the three classes of obligations mentioned, therefore, may be considered from two distinct points of view, namely, (a) that of the individual and (b) that of society.

### Attributes of Godly Leaders

The characteristics church leaders should possess, be it in the church, family, or society, are best epitomized in the dual pastoral letters traditionally attributed to Apostle Paul to Timothy and Titus, Bishop at Ephesus and the Island of Crete respectively. The letter is called pastoral because it was addressed to individuals with pastoral oversight of churches. Apostle Paul wrote in order "... that they may know how they ought to conduct themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15; Titus 1:4-5). Both Timothy and Titus were given explicit directives on how to shepherd their congregations, behave themselves and guide their churches.<sup>27</sup>

The directives and advice given to Timothy and Titus still apply more to the contemporary church leaders in this present age. Apostle Paul remarks, "This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not

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<sup>27</sup>J. Adeniji. *Nigerian Leadership: The Bane of National Development in Aderinto, O (ed). Nigeria Yesterday, Today and Beyond.* . Ibadan: Baptist Press, 2014.`

covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?

They must fight the good fight of faith against false knowledge and false doctrine, and at whatever cost, keep themselves pure to deal severely against false teachings and false teachers. Also, they are to be monogamous, married only to one wife (3:2b). This implies that there must not be room for an extramarital relationship.<sup>28</sup> Concerning themselves, the church leaders must practice self-control (1 Timothy 3:2c). They must not indulge in excessive wine drinking or quarrel or an unhealthy love of money; this implies that their motivation for life and ministry must not be for material acquisition or ostentatious lifestyles.

Any church leader who is unable to manage his family, which is seen as one of the strongest socio-political institutions from which all public life emerged in the fear of God by maintaining Godly morals is not fit for the leadership of the church. The church leaders must not also be new converts, to avoid the temptation of pride.<sup>29</sup> In addition to the above qualities, church leaders must avoid all vices such as covetousness, pride, and arrogance, wickedness, hatred and struggle to be real men/women of God, the sense in which Timothy and Titus were so addressed by following after “righteousness, love, godliness, faith, love and meekness” (1 Timothy 6:1-11). These are necessary qualities needed for those who desire to become or have already become leaders in the church.<sup>30</sup>

### Being Confident in Christ

Similarly, the apostle Paul further makes this bold statement in the preceding chapters, “I know whom I have believed, and am

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<sup>28</sup>Church Workers’ Handbook on Leadership and Human Relations, 2009.

<sup>29</sup>Church Workers’ Handbook on Leadership and Human Relations, 2009.

<sup>30</sup>E.O. Onuoha. *Spirituality or Materialism: The dilemma of contemporary church in Nigeria. Aspects of Religious studies and Philosophy* (Ed) Okereke C.C and Nwoko.M. N. Owerri: Skillmark Media limited, 2 011.

convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day” (2 Tim.1:12). There is propelling force from within, driving the believer to reaffirm his faith and commitment to the one who has called him to leadership. The ability to stand for the right purpose firmly to the end is an expression of the leaders’ confidence.<sup>31</sup> The attribute cited above has its roots in the Old Testament (O.T.), where Daniel remained resolute in the land of Babylon. He knew what the king’s portion was and decided not to partake in the sumptuous meal served at table. He, along with the other Hebrew boys, chose to remain uncontaminated (Daniel 1:8).

Other attributes of Godly leaders can be traced from the O.T. as already alluded to. It becomes an understatement if people begin to cry out loud on the need for leaders to maintain personal integrity. People commonly find in different societies men of low esteem, not because they are not of full age but rather, they lack integrity. The Bible holds the account of Samuel’s farewell speech to the children of Israel (1 Sam. 12:3). He made bold to say that he would repay. Also, the account of Job shows that he was a man of integrity; the ordeal he went through was enough for him to make a change of heart but he did not. His family and friends encouraged him, they tried to influence his character, and he remained resolute, so confident that his Redeemer is alive.

The word peace becomes a compound word when people discover that it goes beyond the absence of war. It is the manifestation of the innermost thought and expression of confidence, trust, assurance, love, patience and self-control.

A Godly leader must be enthusiastic and passionate about the office. It has become a common phenomenon among youths today to seek the apian way of attaining success. The society has become anxious, men, women and youths who are driven desperately for quick success. It becomes enigmatic to find youths who are citizens of this country indulging in heinous crimes all for

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<sup>31</sup>H. Herring, *Characteristics of a Godly Leader*, 2019. Retrieved from <https://haroldherring.com/blogs/haroldsblogs/richthoughts/21-7-characteristics-of-a-godly-leader>, [http://saharareporters.com/thoughts-abuse-andcorruption-nigerian-](http://saharareporters.com/thoughts-abuse-andcorruption-nigerian-.). 01/ 12/, 2016/. (accessed 10/ 24/, 2019).

money. Apostle Paul knew the spirit of the age; he admonished Timothy to steer clear. (1 Tim. 6:11). While the world is being driven with crazy passion for materialism, the child of God is driven with enthusiasm. This is the reason why forgiveness and love stand out among Christian leaders, because the psyche is not subject to evil vices.

### **Societal Anticipation from Church Leaders**

One of the virtues anticipated from church leaders in society is integrity in all human endeavours. Integrity in this respect cuts across the ministry to those being ministered to, the family and the church. Church leaders are expected to be honest, upright, sincere and truthful in life and character and live the truth of the scripture they teach modelling the life of Christ in a very sound and robust way that befits their calling.<sup>32</sup> Church leaders are required by society to lead their lives in the community to conform to the gospel they preach (Philippians 1:27). Church leaders are not only to be salts of the earth and light of the world but tasty salts and shining lights to the society (Matthew 5:13-14).

This implies that they are to keep themselves away from the pollution of the world; be agents of positive change. Besides, they are to be good examples to the society in speeches, conduct, love, faith and purity as expressed by Saint Paul (1 Timothy 4:12). The church leader who behaves unbecomingly brings reproach to himself, the church and the Lord of the Church (Ephesians 5:1-12). Whenever the character of a church leader becomes questionable, the propensity to influence society positively is minimized.

### **Contextualizing Integrity among Church Leaders**

Church leaders must preach and teach God's word in its undiluted manner. The whole counsel of God must be proclaimed with sincerity of purpose. The preaching and teaching of God's word must be to recover lost souls, rebuke, correct and exhort where

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<sup>32</sup>J. Kamer. "Steward Leadership and Paul: Uyovwiewyovwe. From Holy Workers to Profiteers in Luke 20:9-16: The Waning Values of Christian Leadership in Nigeria 39." *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, Vol. 8(1), Fall, 2018.

necessary and not for selfish ambition (2 Timothy 4:2-4), in other words, the gospel of Christ must not be commercialized (Philippians 3:18-19). By prosperity preaching and teaching, some church leaders have turned the church of God into a den of robbers where members are cheated and exploited under spiritual guise not minding the source of their resources.

The church is a mixed congregation of both males and females thus, Church leaders are required to relate with the opposite sex whether they be male or female with decorum in and outside the church. Not relating decorously with the opposite sex has caused many church leaders to lose their integrity and some have been involved in illicit sexual misconduct. In the electronic and print media, there are cases of sexual scandals and immorality, fraud, and cultic practices by some church leaders in contemporary times.

Money is good and not evil but can be tempting if not prudently managed. Money is essential to serve the basic needs of humanity. No institution can thrive without money. The church, family, school and government need money to function effectively and efficiently. The poor management of finances is one major area some church leaders in the present age have fallen short of their Christian spirituality.

In the catechism of the Catholic Church, the common good is to be understood as the “total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. Jesus Christ begins his preaching by proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is at hand. His Kingdom, open to all and for all is a Kingdom of truth and justice, peace and love. In Malawi, church leaders squander and loot the money meant for the smooth running of God’s church. In fact, the cancer called corruption or bribery which can be found in all spheres of Malawian life is largely responsible for the stunted economic growth of the country and for the mass poverty that reigns in the land.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Suleiman, T. The Cancer called Corruption. *Tell Magazine*. May, 2011.

The main objective of the study was to investigate the contribution of Church Leaders in the increase of Moral Decadence in Malawian Society, specifically in Blantyre Urban. Data analysis led to the following key themes: Appeasement policy, false teachings, consulting mediums, selfishness/greed, drunkenness, priesthood through inheritance, selective justice, prostitution, and quest for wealth. These findings are presented in detail in the sub-sections below:

### Appeasement Policy

Data revealed that out of twenty (20) Church Leaders involved in the study, sixteen (16) claimed that most of God's women are wearing mini-skirts, necklaces, rings in their fingers, hair make-ups, trousers etc. The 16 participants represent 80% views of the sampled population in this study. According to these respondents, the motive behind this type of dressing is to seduce men. This problem is attributed to Church leaders because they tolerate this even during church services. For example, participant "B" of church "1" maintain that, *"Some church leaders are applying the appeasement policy on both women and men who are the spouses for those women by not disciplining the behaviour."*

These findings are in line with the findings of the Sahara Reporters who observed that some church leaders in the twenty-first-century church have bastardized the gospel, preaching and teaching for personal gains and living big with the gospel of prosperity and less on the message of No Cross, No Crown. Since sin is hardly condemned or preached against from the pulpit to the pews by such preachers, sinners become more comfortable in their sins even in the church. The prosperity gospel and such preachers who emphasize material acquisition and less on soul winning and transformation have now become the order of the day.<sup>34</sup>

The contemporary church is warned that the church should be reading Scriptures and understand the message clearly because some of these pastors and other servants of God use the same

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<sup>34</sup>(<http://saharareporters.com/thoughts-abuse-andcorruption-nigerian-churches-and-why-religion-cannotreform-world> 2016).

scriptural passages based on giving and nothing more than giving. For instance, “Give, and it will be given unto you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom” (Luke 6:38), “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19), “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). This is accomplished by creating an atmosphere of bliss to their followers while tactically relieving them of their hard-earned resources. Also, this is usually done by re-interpreting scriptural passages to suit their motives of extortion.

### Strange/False Teachings

The findings of the study further revealed that twelve (12) out of twenty informants representing 60% stated that some church leaders are busy preaching false messages to their church members claiming that it is the revelation from God. When asked how church leaders contribute to moral decadence, participant “G” of church “2” was quick to say in vernacular, *“Atumiki ena matsiku ano ndi Aneneri Onyenga, amaphunzitsa ziphunzitso zabodza kunamidzira kuti alandira Vumbulutso kuchokera kwa Mulungu”*. Meaning that, *“Nowadays some church ministers/ leaders/pastors are fake prophets and preachers who teach contrary to the gospel claiming that they have received a revelation from the living God”*.

Respondent “G” further opines that, *“A certain so-called man of God appeared claimed that God has revealed to him to tell people all over Malawi and elsewhere that for one to be saved, people should eat their excrement. The preacher demonstrated eating his own excrement in the townships of Ndirande and Machinjiri in the presence of the multitude. He demonstrated eating his excrement to justify his strange teaching”*.

Similarly, participant “Q” of church “4” narrated a story that took place in one of the Pentecostal Churches in Bangwe Township in the city. The story was that a certain man of God who combined both pastorhood and prophethood consulted a widow in the township and begged for an intimate relationship, claiming that he had received God’s revelation to take care of her and her siblings. This sounded strange to the widow because the man of God had a

wife at home. In response, the widow told the prophet that she would wait until the same God who appeared to him comes and confirms the revelation to her before rushing to accept the proposal. The prophet insisted and started bringing her some basic needs to support her siblings, an act that displeased the widow, causing her to report the man of God to his congregants. Finally, the pastor/prophet was chased away from the township.

These findings contradict Nath, who highlighted that ethics studies values in the realm of human conduct. It evaluates human habits, character, and voluntary determination and their propriety. Ethics deals with questions as: (a) what is good for all men? (b) How should one behave in a society? (c) What is right? (d) What is morally wrong?<sup>35</sup> This clearly shows that this preacher lacks good morals that can help him impart to his followers to inherit God's Kingdom because eating your own excrement cannot be a guarantee for God's salvation. As such, he is misleading people, thereby encouraging moral decay in society.

### Consulting Mediums

The study also revealed that five (5) out of twenty participants (25%) are of the view that church elders, reverends, and pastors quarrel against each other over various issues. Some church leaders quarrel over positions while others quarrel because of advancing different ideologies on certain church matters. For example, participant "A" of church "1" complained that, *"I refused to serve as the Church Treasurer this year (2024) because one member within the church consulted the traditional doctor to eliminate my life. I was almost dead to the extent of being paralyzed with stroke as you can see me now. She did that because she has been used by the church for so long as a Church Treasurer before my coming at this Prayer House. This year, she is the Church Treasurer and now am recovering and I promise never to accept this position again."*

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<sup>35</sup>R. Nath, & Y.K. Singh. *Education in Emergimh Imdian Society*. New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2008.

The findings are in agreement with the teachings of a Seventh-day Adventist Evangelist who teaches the message of Three-Angels in Zomba district, who confirmed that most pastors in Malawi are at loggerheads with him because of his teachings in which he preaches the true gospel regarding the true Sabbath observance, proper dressing of women, hair styles for both men and women. He further said that some pastors hate him because he rebukes them publicly about sexual immorality, in which some pastors are involved to the extent of impregnating church members or causing marriage breakdowns within the church. Finally, the Evangelist mentioned and has been repeating in his continuous preaching that some pastors have been planning to kill him thirty times, but it proved futile.<sup>36</sup>

The extract above and the justification show that the Church Treasurer being accused in the passage and the concerned pastors are either knowingly or unknowingly fulfilling the Scripture as indicated in Mark 7:21-23 (GNB) saying, *“For from the inside, from a person’s heart come the evil ideas which lead him to do immoral things, to rob, kill, commit adultery, be greedy, and do all sorts of evil things, deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride, and folly, all these evil things come from inside a person and make him unclean.”* All these are indicators that church leaders are in the forefront encouraging moral decadence in Blantyre Urban and in Malawi as a country.

### Selfishness/Greed

The findings of the study indicate that six (6) out of twenty (20) sampled churches cited selfishness as another deficiency in church leaders in Blantyre Urban Churches. This represents 30% of the total sample size. According to participant “E” of Church “1” most ordained pastors are selfish. When asked to explain the role pastors play in the increase of moral decadence in society, participant “E” said that, *“most ordained pastors influence church members to contribute airtime for them on monthly basis. When these pastors are sent by the Conference to conduct Camp Meetings which lasts one week, most pastors force church members in the local churches to prepare them delicious*

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<sup>36</sup>Evangelist Golden O. Saidi Lapani. The Three-Angels’ Online Message on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2024. Country Living, Zomba: Malawi, 2024.

*meals, transport to and from, proper beddings.*" These findings are consistent with the preaching of Evangelist Lapani, who preaches that contemporary church ministers are greedy in that they demand more from the flocks they are looking after. According to him, instead of serving Christians, they are being served by Christians who have nothing to support their families.

When they are sent by the Conference to go and minister during Camp Meetings, Revival and Reformation Meetings, they demand more from the local churches despite being provided with everything by the Conference that assigned them there. The Evangelist lamented the unnecessary financial demands by the pastors from the poor church members despite being on the payroll.<sup>37</sup> Some of the financial demands include provision of tablets of soap for bathing, surf for laundry, tooth brushes, tooth pastes, milk for breakfast, soft drinks like Sobo etc. At the end of the meeting, it is a norm that the local church should prepare gifts for all pastors who were sent to minister during the meeting.

He further preaches that all these happen yet all the pastors are paid monthly by their employers using the tithe realized from the same poor people in local churches leaving the local churches in dire need to improve the quality of their infrastructures and even to feed their families in their respective homes.<sup>38</sup> Lapani blames these ordained pastors for being parasites to the already poor church members by even asking them to contribute fuel for their vehicles hence forcing some weak church members to stop congregating with other members or to find dubious means of getting money to give pastors. The Evangelist has also been preaching against the system of Pastors' Appreciation Day. This is the system being practiced by several churches in Malawi where church members are advised to contribute assorted food items, clothes and other basic needs.

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<sup>37</sup>Evangelist Golden O. Saidi Lapani. The Three-Angels' Online Message on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2024. Country Living, Zomba: Malawi, 2024.

<sup>38</sup>Evangelist Golden O. Saidi Lapani. The Three-Angels' Online Message on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2024. Country Living, Zomba: Malawi, 2024.

After contributing them, all the items are packaged together by a number of church members with some church leaders to go and deliver them to the pastor's house. The worst part of this is that, among the church members who contribute these items, some of them are not employed, rather, they are just peasant farmers who contribute the little they had on condition of abiding by the church directives.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, research shows that the absence of sincerity, selflessness and visionary leaders, leadership becomes a challenge of social, political and economic, and spiritual development of any nation. The emphasis on economic gains/benefits has resulted in the loss of leadership authority.<sup>40</sup>

### Drunkenness

Data further revealed that some church leaders and pastors are drunkards. Out of twenty (20) participants, fourteen (14) confirmed that most church leaders take beer. For instance, participant "M" of church "3" explained that, *"there was one Sunday when I was coming from the church, it happened that I was accompanied by my fellow colleague (church leader) from a different church. He stopped at a certain Bottle Store to take some beer before reaching home. This was done in the public. When I asked him the reason for doing that, the church elder was quick to say, our denomination allows us to take a little beer."* These findings are in contradiction with the study conducted by Arora who discovered that religion emphasizes self-control and conservation of values i.e., individual, social, and spiritual values. Axiology can guide human life, individual as well as social, secular as well as non-secular, in the right direction.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the findings are

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<sup>39</sup>Evangelist Golden O. Saidi Lapani. The Three-Angels' Online Message on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2024. Country Living, Zomba: Malawi, 2024.

<sup>40</sup>B. Wahab. *Top 10 universities owned by churches and their tuition fees*. Retrieved 24/10/2019.from <https://www.pulse.ng/communities/student/top-10-universitiesowned-by-churches-and-their-tuition-fees/3qz755v>, 2018.

<sup>41</sup>N. Arora. *Educational Philosophy*. Delhi: Saurabh Publishing House, 2010.

in line with the preaching of Pastor Y. Grant, who warned the Church members against drinking beer, including church leaders.<sup>42</sup>

In the extract from my field notes above, we stand to agree with the observation of one of the fathers in the area of Theology and Religious Studies, Desmond Tutu. In *Christianity and Ethics*, Tutu asserts that it may be impossible to know what is morally good or bad from the bible since there are discrepancies, incongruities, inconsistencies and paradoxes that are replete in the bible.<sup>43</sup> These discrepancies accompanied by differences in doctrines by various Christian Churches, bring confusion to the followers of Christianity hence creating a vacuum for moral decadence in society. This is the long-lasting deficiency planted by the White Missionaries in Africa. It could be necessary that all Christian Churches should reconcile and speak with one voice regarding what is wrong or right before God to avoid confusing their followers.

Findings of the study are further supported by Proverbs 23:29–35. These verses give a clear indication that immoral practices are likely to occur when someone is under the influence of alcohol. When a person starts drinking heavily, it affects their judgment negatively. Proverbs 23: indicates that the eyes of a drunkard become less discerning, and they see bad things which could ‘invite’ them into wrongdoing. Their speech is no longer judicious, and their language and vocabulary are no longer good and acceptable; instead, they speak about anything, bad or good.

Adeboye warns such people, saying: Ephesians 5:18 (The Holy Bible) says you should be filled with the Holy Spirit and not with wine. If you truly want Jesus Christ living in your house, remove all thrones you have created for the devil.<sup>44</sup> In other words,

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<sup>42</sup>Pastor Y. Grant. Bible Study conducted at Kasupe SDA Church in Blantyre in October, 2022.

<sup>43</sup>Desmond Tutu. *The Theology of Liberation in Africa*. In Stump, E., & Murray, M.J. (Eds.). *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*. USA: Blackwell Publishing Limited. 1999.

<sup>44</sup>E.A. Adeboye. ‘Alcohol and Immorality’, Nairaland, viewed 20 May 2014, from [www.nairaland.com](http://www.nairaland.com), 2014.

anything that will tempt you to drink should be removed. This is sage advice, because alcohol and drugs have destroyed many church leaders and, if nothing is done, will ruin their lives both as individuals and in the ministry.

### Priesthood by inheritance

The findings of the study revealed that most of the pastors in Blantyre Urban are related by blood, making the ministry belong to a certain lineage. Fourteen (14) out of twenty (20) participants gave this as another major contributing factor to moral decadence by church leaders. This implies that 70% of the participants support this line of thinking. In justifying his claim, one participant stated that, *“most of the times you will discover that four or five members from the same family are ordained Fathers, Reverends, or Pastors, all serving under the same denomination in different areas. The participant further mentioned that, the same names that have been known in various denominations for leadership positions, continue existing in-service for more than two decades even after some of them are retiring from active service or after death.”*

According to respondent “C” of church “1”, priesthood by inheritance is more pronounced in the Roman Catholic and Seventh-day Adventist Churches, respectively. In the Roman Catholic, same names of the Fathers who were there around 1990s, also exist today as Fathers and Priests in various Dioceses in the country. Similarly, same names who served as Pastors in Seventh-day Adventist Church are currently serving as ordained District Pastors nationwide, and these names mainly originate from Ntcheu, Zomba, and Thyolo Districts. Careful investigation of the similarities between the names reveals that these ministers are related by blood, either as sons or grandsons of the previous church ministers.

These findings are in agreement with the results of the study conducted by Onah in Nigeria. In his study, Onah observes that unemployment has driven many into the priesthood without seeing it as a calling that needed to be trained. Such pastors are in the ministry because they were once jobless and needed any lucrative job

to earn a living.<sup>45</sup> In most cases, activities of such pastors are enmeshed in immorality and fake doctrines because they are assured of continued work even if they are involved in any immoral act. As a result, any example of immorality done by a church leader is regarded a trivial offence to some followers hence increase in moral decadence. In other words, these immoral behaviours mislead church members and other people in society into immoral activities.

The findings of this study do not in any way contradict the results of the research conducted by Adeyemo in Kenya. According to Adeyemo, the traditional African model of hereditary leadership has influenced the church in the country.<sup>46</sup> In a hereditary model, new leaders take control even though they may not possess the same leadership qualities as their predecessors. Adeyemo further observes that these church ministers are elevated to power simply because of their biological connection to previous leaders.<sup>47</sup> This has proven to be one of the root causes of the current moral leadership crises in the evangelical churches in Kenya. As a result, this malpractice negatively affects the more qualified new leaders and privileges who merely inherit leadership roles without regard to their leadership capacity.<sup>48</sup>

### Selective justice

Data revealed that eleven (11) out of twenty (20) participants declared that church leaders including pastors, church elders, and deacons, are selective in administering justice to their church members. This follows that 55% of the respondents agreed that religious leaders in Blantyre Urban Churches are selective when it comes to passing judgment or when conducting home visits to

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<sup>45</sup>J.N. Onah. *Religious Fanaticism in Nigeria and its Implication to National Development. A Seminar Paper Presented to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies*, Nsukka. University of Nigeria, 2014.

<sup>46</sup>Tokunboh Adeyemo. *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006).

<sup>47</sup>Tokunboh Adeyemo. *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006).

<sup>48</sup>Tokunboh Adeyemo. *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2006).

church members. For instance, Church Elder “P” of church “4” had this to say, “we received a sexual immorality at our church in 2023 which involved our church members. A married man discovered his wife with another man on his bed upon arrival from work on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2023. The man launched his complaint to the deaconry for action. Surprisingly, the pastor was quick to forgive the accused woman. The Church pastor commanded the church elders and deacons that the woman was to be forgiven and given the last warning, while the man was to be excommunicated from the church immediately.

These findings concur with the findings of the study conducted by Onah in Nigeria. According to Onah, failure of some pastors to punish or correct erring members for wrong doing is another cause of moral decadence in Nigeria. The elite class in the church is not readily rebuked for the wrong done.<sup>49</sup> The directive from the pastor angered the church elders and the deacons not only because justice was denied, but also that, the pastor intervened the duty that did not belong to his office. He was supposed to wait for the deaconry hearing through the church elders, and then, he proposed his suggestion on the matter. This incident was the talk of the people in the catchment area thereby denting the image of the entire church such that if the church elders and deacons accepted the wrong directive from the church pastor, it could encourage sexual immorality at that particular church and even areas beyond, thereby promoting moral decadence in Blantyre Urban.

### Prostitution

Out of twenty (20) participants who were involved in this study, eight (8) participants representing 40% stressed that some church leaders, including Church Elders, Clerks, Treasurers, Deacons, Dorcas, other Women Leaders, Bishops, Sisters, Priests, Reverends, and Pastors, are involved in sex scandals. These scandals take place either within or outside churches. For example, participant “K” of church “3” narrated that, “*sometime back there was a sex scandal*

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<sup>49</sup>J.N. Onah. *Religious Fanaticism in Nigeria and its implication to National Development. A seminar paper presented to the Department of Religion and Cultural studies*, Nsukka. University of Nigeria, 2014.

that involved a certain male and female prominent leaders belonging to the same church. The two were found indulging in sexual behaviour in the vehicle close to one of the well-known Airports in the country." This alarmed the nation as many listeners were saying, if this is happening with the so-called green wood, what about with the dry wood? Here, the argument was that, if the servants of God are engaged in sexual intercourse, what about the followers?

The Sahara Reporters reported that the church is a mixed congregation of both males and females and thus, Church leaders are required to relate with the opposite sex, whether they be male or female with decorum in and outside the church. Not relating decorously with the opposite sex has caused many church leaders to lose their integrity and some involved in illicit sexual misconduct.<sup>50</sup> Church leaders are expected to be honest, upright, sincere and truthful in life and character and live the truth of the scripture they teach modelling the life of Christ in a very sound and robust way that befits their calling.<sup>51</sup> This means that church leaders should be exemplary so that their followers regard them as their role models.

The findings of this study are akin to Chivasa's findings who opines that pastoral counselling for immoral pastors which focused on the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in Zimbabwe and related church policies, offers a good vision for helping the church deal with the immoral lives of pastors. At the same time, Chivasa reminds the readers that churches differ in terms of the policies governing their management and leadership, allowing some pastors to become 'gods'. Therefore, pastors need other pastors to help them in this regard.<sup>52</sup> The one-on-one conversation between pastors may

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<sup>50</sup>(<http://saharareporters.com/thoughts-abuse-andcorruption-nigerian-churches-and-why-religion-cannotreform-world> 2016).

<sup>51</sup>J. Kamer "Steward Leadership and Paul: Uyovwiewovwe. From Holy Workers to Profiteers in Luke 20:9-16: The Waning Values of Christian Leadership in Nigeria 39." *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, Vol. 8(1), Fall, 2018.

<sup>52</sup>N. Chivasa. 'Handling of pastoral misconduct and discipline: Evidence from Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe church', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), a4518, 2017.

sometimes be difficult, but in situations where one pastor is immoral, it should be prioritized. The caregiver first needs to ensure that the immoral pastor accepts the reality of being involved in affairs outside of marriage or in misappropriating funds without resisting or denying the truth. This open acceptance will open doors for discussion on how to end such practices.

According to Stafford, sexuality, like everything else created, has fallen into trouble. People are more vulnerable than ever, living in a society that crowds sexual innuendoes into every available space, whether billboards or office conversations. It has become just anything. Unquestioned acceptance of both premarital and extramarital sex has become a part of the culture's values, reinforced by television, practised by millions, and criticised by almost no one including church leaders.<sup>53</sup> Stafford also contends that sex is no longer something that may be right or wrong; rather, it is a little more than a pleasurable way for two people to interact with each other.<sup>54</sup>

### Quest for Wealth

Finally, data collected from this study revealed that seventeen (17) out of twenty (20) respondents maintained that the contemporary church leaders are pretending to serve God, yet they have economic motives in mind. The percentage is so alarming as it represents 85% of the targeted sample size. According to respondent "L" of church "3", some of the church leaders are not ready to start from the grassroots, but to accumulate wealth within a short period. Another respondent stated that, *"some pastors, reverends, and bishops strive to meet up with their rich counterparts by engaging in begging maize bags, money and other favours from rich church members. He further said that this behaviour is common in cities where the living standards are too high for some church leaders."* These findings are inconsistent with the results of the study by Agha in Nigeria, who maintains that excessive material acquisition and consumerism is other causes of moral decay

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<sup>53</sup>T. Stafford. Great Sex: Reclaiming a Christian Sexual Ethic. Christianity today, 31(2), 1987.

<sup>54</sup>T. Stafford. Great Sex: Reclaiming a Christian Sexual Ethic. Christianity Today, 31(2), 1987.

in society. The mentality of making money and becoming somebody (the richest man) through dubious means is common.<sup>55</sup>

Materialism is viewed as the acquisition of money and material wealth at the expense of others. This behaviour has invaded and permeated every aspect of human nature be it political, socio-economic, and religious gatherings. In addition, materialism has been treated as an enemy by the church and the moralists.<sup>56</sup> The Bible says, 'so then, if we have food and clothes, that should be enough for us. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and are caught in the trap of many foolish and harmful desires, which put them down to ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a source of all kinds of evil. Some have been so eager to have it that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows' (1 Timothy 6:8-10).

Overall, the findings of the study unearthed a number of moral violations perpetrated by church leaders in Blantyre Urban Churches. Presenting these moral violations according to their occurrence include economic motives with 85% scores, appeasement policy with 80%, drunkenness and priesthood by inheritance placed at equal footing with 70% each. Additionally, strange/false teaching with 60% frequency, and selective justice placed at 55%. On the other hand, selfishness and consulting mediums are less committed by church leaders at 35% and 25% respectively.

## Conclusion

This study, in its small-scale nature, has attempted to bring an understanding of the contribution of Church Leaders in the increase of Moral Decadence in Malawian Society: The Case of Selected Blantyre Urban Churches. Some of the contributions include the appeasement policy, false teachings, consulting mediums, selfishness/greed, drunkenness, priesthood by inheritance, selective justice, prostitution, and the quest for wealth. In a nutshell, integrity

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<sup>55</sup>U.A. Agha. *Religious Experience of Materialism in Contemporary Nigeria. Society*. 2019.

<sup>56</sup>U.A. Agha. *Religious Experience of Materialism in Contemporary Nigeria. Society*. 2019.

has been viewed as cardinal to everyone who wishes to win the heart and confidence of those around him or her. More significantly, integrity is very crucial to the church leaders if they intend to impact their adherents optimistically and gain both divine and human applause.

Lastly, it must be pointed out that both God and society expect something good from church leaders. This anticipation will never be unnoticed by God, but church leaders will be rewarded in the here-after. Just as the Holy Scripture is replete with examples of church leaders who lived up to their divine expectations before God and humanity and were so rewarded. Men like Stephen (Acts 6:3-7; 7:59-60), Saint Paul and Timothy (2 Corinthians 1:12-2:11), Noah (Genesis 6:9), Jesus Christ, Job (Job 1:1; 2:3), Joseph (Genesis 39:7-9) just to list a few are worth mentioning. Therefore, the society expects the church leaders to conduct themselves in the family, church and society in a way that the ministry is not blamed (2 Corinthians 6:3).

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations have been suggested for church leadership. A church leader must be a person of unquestioned moral integrity, recognized as such by society, church authorities, critics, and their own conscience. They must strive to offer a life of purity that leaves no loophole for criticism, serving as a model of righteousness for the world. Additionally, church leaders should undergo thorough training and be deeply grounded in the scriptures to ensure that they do not mix fables with the gospel, thereby preserving the authenticity and integrity of their teachings.

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