

OVERCOMING MYSTIFYING LEADERSHIP CRISIS IN ALADURA CHURCHES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: The leadership crisis in Aladura churches in Nigeria stems from the complex interplay between their spiritual foundations and organizational weaknesses. Rooted in prophetic revelations and charismatic authority, many of these churches prioritize personal spiritual experiences over collective leadership and institutional order. As a result, succession disputes, doctrinal conflicts, and struggles over church assets often arise following the decline or death of founding leaders. The absence of well-defined administrative frameworks and succession plans has led to schisms, weakened unity, and diminished credibility among members seeking spiritual stability. This paper examines the mystifying leadership crisis within the Aladura movement, highlighting its underlying causes, manifestations, and consequences. It further emphasizes the need for holistic reformation that integrates spiritual discernment with leadership training, accountability, and organizational discipline. The study concludes that by adopting biblical servant leadership principles, transparent governance, and collective decision-making guided by the Holy Spirit, Aladura churches can overcome leadership crises, restore

harmony, and strengthen their prophetic witness in Nigeria's dynamic Christian landscape.

Keywords: *Mystifying, Leadership, Crisis, Aladura and Churches.*

INTRODUCTION

The leadership crisis in Aladura churches can be traced to the complexity of their spiritual and organizational structures. Many churches were founded on prophetic revelations and divine encounters, emphasizing personal charisma and spiritual authority over collective leadership and institutional order. Consequently, when founders or key prophetic figures pass away or lose influence, disputes often emerge regarding succession, doctrinal interpretations, and control over church assets. The absence of clearly defined leadership succession plans and inadequate administrative frameworks has led to factionalism and schisms within several Aladura denominations (Opayinka, 2023). This situation undermines the unity and credibility of these churches and creates confusion among members who look up to their leaders for spiritual guidance and stability.

Overcoming these crises requires a holistic reformation integrating spiritual discernment with practical leadership training, accountability, and organizational discipline. The Aladura churches must embrace transparent governance systems rooted in biblical models of servant leadership, where authority is exercised with humility and guided by the Holy Spirit rather than personal ambition. Emphasizing collective decision-making through councils, synods, and constitutionally guided processes can help to prevent autocratic tendencies and ensure inclusiveness in leadership transitions (Zaccaria, F. (2023). By fostering spiritual maturity, ethical responsibility, and administrative competence among leaders, the Aladura churches can reclaim their prophetic voice, strengthen their witness, and model unity in diversity within Nigeria's vibrant Christian landscape. Therefore, this paper explores the study by clarifying some contextual terms and discussing the characteristics, consequences, and ways of overcoming the challenges of Mystifying Leadership Crisis in Aladura Churches in Nigeria.

Contextual Terminologies

The Aladura Churches in Nigeria

The Aladura churches represent a significant stream within Nigeria's African Independent Church movement, emphasizing prayer, prophecy, divine healing, and reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit. According to Peel (1968), the term "*Aladura*," a Yoruba word meaning "*owners of prayer*" or "*praying people*," captures the movement's identity as a response to the perceived spiritual dryness and formalism of mission-founded churches. Emerging in the early 20th century, particularly during the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919, these churches arose as a protest against the lack of spiritual power in Western Christianity and as an affirmation of African religious identity. Scholars such as Ayegboyin and Ishola (1997) note that Aladura churches combined Christian doctrines with elements of African spirituality, leading to a contextualized form of worship that resonated deeply with indigenous worldviews.

In the Nigerian context, the Aladura movement encompasses a variety of denominations, including the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), and the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). These groups differ in structure and liturgical expression but emphasize holiness, revelation through dreams and visions, and symbolic rituals such as water, oil, and candles for spiritual purposes. Turner (1967) and Omoyajowo (1982) highlight that the Aladura churches combine Christian faith and African cosmology, providing spiritual solutions to existential problems such as sickness, poverty, and witchcraft—issues often neglected by mission churches. Their rapid spread across Nigeria and beyond demonstrates their relevance in addressing the holistic needs of African believers who seek spiritual and material well-being.

However, scholars such as Kalu (2008) and Ojo (2010) argue that while the Aladura churches have played a vital role in indigenizing Christianity, they also face internal challenges such as leadership disputes, doctrinal fragmentation, and a lack of standardized theological education. These issues have, at times, hindered their unity and public perception. Despite these challenges, the Aladura movement remains a

dynamic force in Nigerian Christianity, embodying the African quest for a spiritually potent and culturally authentic faith. Their continued relevance lies in their ability to balance charismatic spirituality with sound biblical doctrine and effective leadership structures, ensuring their distinctive contribution to Nigerian Christianity endures in the 21st century and beyond.

Concept of Mystifying Leadership Crisis

The **mystifying leadership crisis** occurs when leadership conflicts and dysfunctions within an organization or religious community become deeply complex, concealed, or spiritualized to the point that their root causes are misunderstood or ignored. In the church context, particularly among African Indigenous Churches such as the Aladura movement, leadership crises are often "mystified" when they are attributed solely to supernatural or spiritual causes rather than to human factors like pride, poor administration, or lack of accountability. According to Max Weber (1947), such mystification is typical in charismatic systems of authority, where leadership is grounded in perceived divine calling and spiritual gifts rather than institutional legitimacy. It makes leadership disputes appear as spiritual warfare or divine tests rather than organizational challenges that require structural solutions.

Scholars like Kalu (2008) and Ojo (2010) observe that in many African-initiated churches, including the Aladura, the line between the sacred and the administrative is blurred, allowing leaders to use spiritual claims to justify authority or resist accountability. When leadership authority is mystified, it often leads to authoritarianism, succession disputes, and schisms, as followers find it difficult to question or evaluate leaders who claim divine sanction. Afolayan (2011) notes that a lack of codified leadership structures, theological education, and transparent governance models intensifies such crises. In this context, the mystification of leadership becomes both a cause and a symptom of institutional weakness—perpetuating cycles of division, mistrust, and instability within the church.

To demystify leadership crisis, scholars such as Nwachukwu (2015) and Ayegboyin & Ishola (1997) advocate a return to biblical models of servant leadership that emphasize humility, accountability, and collective decision-making. They argue that

while spiritual authority remains central to church leadership, it must operate within sound administrative practice and scriptural ethics. Effective leadership in the church should not depend solely on charisma or prophetic authority but should balance spiritual gifts with organizational competence and moral integrity. Therefore, overcoming mystifying leadership crises requires theological clarity, institutional reform, and a conscious effort to separate genuine spirituality from manipulative claims of divine endorsement in leadership struggles.

Characteristics of Mystifying Leadership Crisis in Aladura Churches in Nigeria

1. Charismatic and Personality-Based Leadership

One of the significant factors characterizing mystifying leadership crises in Aladura churches is the dominance of *charismatic and personality-centered authority*. According to Max Weber (1947), charismatic leadership derives legitimacy from the leader's perceived divine gifts or spiritual endowment rather than from institutional authority. In the Aladura context, founders and spiritual leaders often wield near-absolute power, claiming divine revelation as the basis of their leadership. Peel (1968) and Omoyajowo (1982) note that such dependence on charismatic authority makes succession difficult, as followers view leaders as irreplaceable spiritual figures. When these leaders die or lose influence, disputes often arise over who inherits their spiritual mantle—creating divisions and factionalism within the church.

2. Absence of Clear Succession Plans and Administrative Structures

Another critical factor is the lack of codified leadership succession plans and administrative frameworks. Many Aladura churches emerged from revival movements rather than from structured institutions, leading to weak organizational governance. Ayegboyin and Ishola (1997) observe that most African Indigenous Churches, including Aladura, prioritize spiritual gifts over administrative competence. Consequently, when leadership transitions become necessary, there are no clear procedures for selecting new leaders, leading to contestations and schisms. Afolayan (2011) adds that this absence of administrative structure often results in personal rivalries and struggles for power, which are then mystified as spiritual battles rather than administrative failures.

3. Spiritualization of Leadership Conflicts

A defining feature of mystifying leadership crises is the tendency to interpret conflicts in purely spiritual terms. Disagreements over power, resources, or doctrine are often seen as manifestations of witchcraft, demonic attack, or divine punishment rather than human mismanagement or ambition. Kalu (2008) and Ojo (2010) note that this over-spiritualization of leadership issues prevents honest dialogue and institutional reform. In Aladura churches, where dreams, visions, and prophecies are central to decision-making, rival factions may each claim divine backing, making reconciliation difficult. Such spiritualization clouds rational judgment and reinforces divisions under the guise of spiritual warfare.

4. Doctrinal Fragmentation and Prophetic Rivalry

Doctrinal disagreements and competition among prophets also contribute significantly to leadership crises. The prophetic and revelatory nature of Aladura worship makes it easy for multiple voices to claim divine inspiration. Turner (1967) explains that in movements where revelation is ongoing, conflict arises when prophets' messages contradict each other or challenge existing authority. Omoyajowo (1982) further observes that prophetic rivalry often leads to the emergence of splinter groups, each claiming to be the proper custodian of divine truth. This doctrinal fragmentation undermines organizational cohesion and perpetuates leadership instability within the Aladura fold.

5. Materialism and Struggle for Control of Church Resources

Finally, the struggle to control church wealth and assets has become a major factor fueling leadership crises. As Aladura churches have grown in membership and financial strength, leadership roles increasingly carry economic and social benefits. Ojo (2010) and Nwachukwu (2015) point out that material interests are often concealed behind spiritual rhetoric, making leadership disputes appear mystified while the underlying issues concern resource control. This has led to multiple court cases, the fragmentation of church properties, and the loss of credibility among members. The crisis becomes mystified and morally compromising when leaders use spiritual claims to justify personal enrichment or authority.

Consequences of mystifying leadership crisis in Aladura churches in Nigeria

1. Church Fragmentation and Proliferation of Splinter Groups

One of the most visible consequences of the mystifying leadership crisis in Aladura churches is the *fragmentation of denominations* and the emergence of numerous splinter groups. According to Peel (1968) and Omoyajowo (1982), disputes over succession, authority, and prophetic legitimacy have led to the establishment of multiple offshoots from original Aladura bodies such as the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), the Church of the Lord (Aladura), and the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). When leadership conflicts are spiritualized—interpreted as divine will or prophetic disagreement—schism becomes justified in the name of revelation. This proliferation of factions weakens the collective witness of the Aladura movement, causes duplication of efforts, and fosters disunity within the body of Christ in Nigeria.

2. Loss of Spiritual Credibility and Public Trust

Mystifying leadership crises often erode church leaders' moral and spiritual authority, leading to declining credibility among members and the public. Kalu (2008) notes that the repeated occurrence of leadership disputes, court cases, and mutual accusations of witchcraft or spiritual manipulation among Aladura leaders has caused many believers to question the authenticity of their leaders' spirituality. Similarly, Ojo (2010) observes that when leadership issues are overly spiritualized, members may perceive leaders as manipulative or self-serving, diminishing the church's prophetic voice in society. Losing trust affects membership retention and damages the public image of Aladura churches as models of holiness and divine power.

3. Decline in Membership and Evangelistic Impact

As a result of persistent leadership crises, many members become disillusioned and withdraw from active participation or migrate to other denominations. Ayegboyin and Ishola (1997) assert that instability at the leadership level creates confusion and discouragement among the laity, leading to spiritual apathy and numerical decline. The distraction caused by internal conflicts also diverts attention from evangelism,

discipleship, and community outreach. Afolayan (2011) further emphasizes that in many cases, energy that should be directed toward soul-winning and spiritual growth is wasted in factional rivalries, court litigations, and leadership propaganda. Consequently, the evangelistic influence and mission focus of the Aladura movement are weakened.

4. Doctrinal Confusion and Theological Instability

Another significant consequence of the mystifying leadership crisis is *doctrinal inconsistency* within the movement. Because conflicting prophecies and revelations justify many leadership disputes, each faction often develops its own version of doctrine, worship style, and spiritual practices. Turner (1967) and Omoyajowo (1982) explain that the prophetic and revelatory orientation of Aladura worship allows for diverse theological interpretations, but when left unchecked, this diversity becomes chaotic. The resulting doctrinal confusion undermines theological unity, weakens catechesis, and makes it difficult to sustain a coherent identity across the different Aladura denominations.

5. Disruption of Church Development and Socio-Economic Progress

Finally, mystifying leadership crises disrupt the administrative and developmental growth of Aladura churches. Prolonged conflicts often lead to the mismanagement of resources, division of church properties, and suspension of building or educational projects. Nwachukwu (2015) and Afolayan (2011) point out that internal strife consumes time, money, and human resources that could have been invested in ministry, education, and social development. Furthermore, legal battles over church ownership or leadership legitimacy drain financial resources and tarnish the church's reputation before the public. It hinders spiritual and socio-economic progress, leaving the church weaker and less effective in its mission.

Overcoming Mystifying Leadership Crisis in Aladura Churches in Nigeria.

1. Institutionalizing Biblical Servant Leadership

One of the foremost ways to overcome mystifying leadership crises in Aladura churches is by adopting *biblical servant leadership* as the foundation for ministry

governance. Servant leadership emphasizes humility, accountability, and service rather than personal ambition or dominance. Greenleaf (1977) introduced this model to highlight leadership as stewardship. Nwachukwu (2015) applies it to the African church context, emphasizing that leaders must see themselves as caretakers of God's people, not owners of divine power. In the Aladura context—where leadership is often seen as a sacred privilege—this model encourages leaders to exercise authority with compassion and responsibility. Aladura churches can demystify spiritual authority by promoting servant leadership and making it more transparent, participatory, and biblically accountable.

2. Strengthening Administrative and Constitutional Structures

A second vital step is establishing and enforcing clear *administrative and constitutional frameworks* to guide leadership transitions, accountability, and church governance. Ayegboyin and Ishola (1997) note that many African Indigenous Churches lack well-defined administrative systems, making them vulnerable to conflicts when leadership disputes arise. Instituting written constitutions, leadership handbooks, and church councils helps to regulate power and minimize arbitrary decisions. Afolayan (2011) emphasizes that having a codified constitution ensures leadership succession based on agreed procedures rather than personal charisma or spiritual claims. Such structures bring predictability, order, and fairness, reducing the tendency to spiritualize administrative conflicts.

3. Theological and Leadership Education for Clergy

Another effective solution is *theological and leadership training* for church leaders to enhance their spiritual discernment, management competence, and interpersonal skills. Kalu (2008) and Ojo (2010) stress that leadership failure in African-initiated churches often stems from limited theological depth and a lack of administrative education. Through systematic leadership training programs, Bible college education, and conflict resolution and governance workshops, leaders can develop a balanced understanding of spirituality and management. Nwachukwu (2015) adds that theological education not only equips leaders to handle doctrinal and spiritual issues

responsibly but also curbs the tendency to interpret every disagreement as a spiritual attack.

4. Promoting Collective Decision-Making and Accountability

The practice of *collective leadership and accountability* is essential for minimizing autocracy and preventing the concentration of power in one individual. Weber (1947) warned that charismatic leadership, if unchecked, can lead to authoritarian tendencies. Therefore, Aladura churches should adopt a synodal or conciliar model where decisions are made collectively through representative councils and committees. Afolayan (2011) recommends regular audits, transparent financial reporting, and council oversight to ensure integrity and trust. Such structures encourage dialogue, inclusiveness, and mutual respect among leaders and members, reducing the mystification of leadership authority.

5. Fostering Reconciliation and Unity through the Holy Spirit

Finally, overcoming leadership crises requires a renewed focus on *spiritual unity, forgiveness, and reconciliation* guided by the Holy Spirit. Kalu (2008) and Ojo (2010) affirm that the true power of the African Indigenous Church lies in its spiritual vitality and reliance on divine guidance. Leaders must therefore seek the Spirit's direction not for personal validation but for communal peace and restoration. Organizing reconciliation meetings, joint prayers, and inter-factional dialogue can foster healing and rebuild trust among divided groups. As Afolayan (2011) notes, genuine spiritual renewal, anchored on humility and repentance, helps restore the credibility and moral authority of the church. When the Holy Spirit governs leadership relationships, mystified conflicts give way to transparency, unity, and growth.

Conclusion

The leadership crisis in Aladura churches in Nigeria reflects the tension between their deep spiritual heritage and weak organizational structures. The reliance on prophetic authority and personal charisma, without adequate institutional frameworks, has led to recurrent conflicts over succession, doctrine, and control of

resources. These challenges have fragmented the Aladura movement, undermined its unity, and diminished its credibility as a spiritual force in Nigerian Christianity. However, the way forward lies in embracing a balanced model of leadership that integrates spiritual discernment with sound administration and accountability. By institutionalizing biblical servant leadership, ensuring transparent governance, and promoting collective decision-making guided by the Holy Spirit, Aladura churches can overcome the mystifying nature of their leadership crises. Ultimately, reforming leadership practices along biblical and organizational lines will restore harmony and credibility and empower the Aladura movement to fulfill its divine mission and serve as a unity and spiritual maturity model within the broader Christian community.

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