

QUESTIONING THE PASTORAL OFFICE IN KENYA:

A WATCHMAN'S REFLECTION AFTER THREE DECADES OF MINISTRY**

Introduction: Power, Wisdom, and the Crisis of Leadership

Why does society repeatedly reward foolishness with power while silencing wisdom? Why do the loudest and most confident voices ascend to leadership, while reflective and scripturally grounded voices are dismissed as weak or divisive? These questions are neither cynical nor novel. They are ancient, philosophical, and profoundly theological.

More than two millennia ago, Aristotle warned that when societies abandon reason in favor of persuasion and emotion, they do not elevate their wisest leaders but their most convincing ones.¹ When rhetoric displaces virtue, leadership becomes performance, and authority becomes detached from character. This insight offers a penetrating lens through which to examine the contemporary crisis of pastoral leadership in Kenya.

I write as one who has been trained, licensed, and ordained, and who has served in pastoral ministry for over thirty years. What follows is not reactionary grievance but disciplined reflection—born of observation, participation, and sustained engagement with Scripture. As a watchman (Ezekiel 3:17), I write to warn, not to wound; to call the church to repentance, not to abandon it.

1. Pastoral Ministry: Gift, Function, or Institutional Office?

Scripture clearly affirms the existence of leadership gifts within the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). These gifts exist not to elevate individuals but to equip the saints and build up the body of Christ. The New Testament consistently presents pastoral leadership as functional rather than positional, relational rather than hierarchical, and accountable rather than autonomous.

Yet in the Kenyan ecclesial context, the pastoral role has increasingly been institutionalized into an office that mirrors secular power structures. The pastor is often perceived—and presents himself—as the unquestionable authority, insulated from critique, discipline, or mutual accountability. In practice, the pastor assumes a role closer to that of a judge in a courtroom, while congregants function as defendants awaiting spiritual verdicts.

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This stands in direct contradiction to Jesus' teaching: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them... It shall not be so among you" (Mark 10:42–43). Pastoral authority, when severed from servanthood, ceases to be biblical authority.

2. Institutional Abuse and the Burdening of the Flock

The institutional church in Kenya has, in many cases, reproduced the very systems of domination Scripture condemns. Members are frequently burdened with doctrines that lack clear biblical support—such as mandatory tithing framed as a condition for divine favor, the prohibition against questioning "the anointed," and the claim that pastoral authority is beyond evaluation. Such teachings not only misrepresent Scripture but also silence the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9).

The church building itself has become symbolic: stones are prioritized over souls; physical expansion over spiritual maturity. Worship spaces resemble courtrooms or corporate halls rather than communal gatherings of equals in Christ. This institutional mindset diverts attention from the church as an organic, living body (1 Corinthians 12:27).

3. Wealth, Performance, and the Commercialization of Ministry in Kenya

Recent Kenyan history offers sobering examples of pastoral abuse tied to wealth accumulation and performative spirituality. Public concern has intensified following high-profile scandals involving fake miracles, financial exploitation, and authoritarian control.² Calls by senior clergy for wealth audits of pastors underscore the depth of this crisis.³

The prosperity gospel—now deeply embedded in parts of Kenyan Christianity—has transformed churches into enterprises and pastors into religious entrepreneurs.⁴ Financial giving is framed as transaction rather than worship, with promises of miraculous returns. The poor, desperate for hope, are often the most exploited.

Scripture offers no support for this model. The apostle Peter explicitly warns shepherds against "shameful gain" and commands them to lead by example, not compulsion (1 Peter 5:2–3). Where wealth becomes the marker of spiritual success, the gospel is distorted.

4. False Miracles, Unchecked Authority, and National Tragedy

The dangers of unaccountable pastoral authority were tragically illustrated in the Shakahola Forest incident, where hundreds lost their lives under a self-styled religious leader.⁵ While extreme, this case exposed a broader cultural problem: charismatic authority without communal discernment or theological grounding.

The New Testament consistently demands that leaders possess character before charisma (1 Timothy 3). Authority without character is not merely ineffective—it is dangerous.

5. Title Versus Function: Recovering Biblical Leadership

One of the most destructive shifts in modern Christianity is the elevation of title over function. "Pastor" has become a rank, brand, and identity marker rather than a description of work. Biblically, pastors are elders—equals among equals—tasked with shepherding, teaching, and guarding the flock (Acts 20:28).

Aristotle observed that societies repeatedly mistake confidence for competence and performance for virtue.⁶ The church has not been immune to this error. When robes, posture, voice, and proximity to political power become markers of holiness, the church rewards appearance rather than godliness.

6. Church, Politics, and Misplaced Priorities

The Kenyan church's increasing alignment with political power further complicates its witness. Some clergy openly court politicians, receive patronage, and identify with power rather than the weak. Younger generations have begun to voice discomfort with this alliance, perceiving it as a betrayal of the church's prophetic role.⁷

People always strategize for what they prioritize. When pastors prioritize wealth, buildings, and influence, mission to unreached peoples becomes peripheral. Souls are neglected while stones are celebrated.

Conclusion: A Call to Repentance and Reorientation

The pastoral calling was never meant to confer prestige, privilege, or immunity. It was meant to produce faithful shepherds who reflect the character of Christ. The solution to the current crisis is not the abolition of pastoral ministry but its reformation—rooted in Scripture, accountability, and the priesthood of all believers.

If this article is to be refuted, let it be done with Scripture, not sentiment. Let us read carefully before reacting. As a watchman, I have warned. The responsibility now rests with the church to choose wisdom over noise, character over charisma, and faithfulness over performance.

Footnotes

- *Aristotle, Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998).
- K24 Digital, "Five Most Shocking Religious Scandals That Rocked Kenya," 2023.
- Kenya News Agency, "Nyeri Bishop Calls for Wealth Audit of All Clerics," 2023.
- Kenya Talk, "From Sanctuaries to Enterprises: The Rise of the Prosperity Gospel," 2024.
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- *The Kenya Times*, "Kenyan Gen Zs: What Drives Them to Occupy the Church?" 2024.

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