

DOCTORAL PRESTIGE, SOCIAL STATUS, AND CHRISTIAN VIRTUE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In contemporary Nigeria, the doctoral degree functions not only as an academic qualification but also as a powerful marker of social prestige and cultural capital. The title “Doctor” often commands deference, authority, and elevated social status, reflecting a broader societal tendency toward credentialism and title consciousness. While this reverence has historical roots in post-independence aspirations for national development, it increasingly raises ethical and spiritual concerns, particularly within Christian communities where humility and service are central virtues. This paper critically examines the tension between doctoral prestige and Christian teaching on humility in the Nigerian context. Drawing on Christian virtue ethics and social identity theory, the study explores how the social meaning attached to the PhD shapes personal identity, professional conduct, and religious witness among Nigerian Christian academics. It argues that while academic excellence and intellectual achievement are valuable goods, they become morally problematic when transformed into instruments of pride, exclusion, or self-promotion. By engaging biblical texts, theological reflections, and insights from Nigerian scholars, the paper highlights humility as a counter-cultural Christian virtue that challenges the uncritical elevation of academic titles. The analysis further considers how group identity associated with doctoral status can conflict with, or be reoriented by, Christian discipleship. The paper concludes by proposing practical pathways through which Nigerian Christian scholars can integrate scholarly achievement with a humble, service-oriented witness, thereby reframing the doctorate not as a badge of superiority but as a responsibility for ethical leadership and social good.

Keywords: Doctoral prestige, Christian humility, Nigeria, virtue ethics, social identity theory

Introduction

In Nigeria today, the title “Doctor” (usually indicating a PhD holder) carries immense cultural weight. Commentators describe an almost “alarming trend” of title-obsession, where many people append long strings of acronyms (PhD, FCA, FICA, etc.) to their names as marks of status.¹ This “doctoral prestige” is widely regarded as a symptom of a deeply hierarchical

society where respect and advancement often flow more readily to those with lofty credentials than to those with proven competence.² For example, one academic noted that people in Nigeria “want to be seen as important before they are even competent.”³ Correspondingly, the doctoral degree is treated not only as a professional qualification but as a “symbol of prestige” and a signifier of membership in the intellectual elite.⁴ In early post-independence

¹ John Adeyemo, “Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige,” Nigeria Education News, November 18, 2025, <https://thenigeriaeducationnews.com/2025/11/18/why-nigerians-are-obsessed-with-titles-despite-poor-performance-inside-a-growing-culture-of-paper-prestige/>.

² Adeyemo, “Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige.”

³ Adeyemo, “Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige.”

⁴ Chike Onwuegbuchi, “The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral

Nigeria, earning a PhD was so highly regarded that entire communities would contribute funds to send one of their own abroad for doctoral studies.⁵ Today, thousands of Nigerians hold doctorate degrees and enjoy enhanced status and job opportunities.

Against this backdrop of credential-worship stands the Christian gospel, which consistently lauds humility and self-emptying service over pride and self-promotion. From the beatitudes to Paul's epistles, the New Testament repeatedly inverts social values, declaring that the last shall be first and that God "opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). In Nigeria's vibrant Christian communities, virtues such as service and humility are held up as central to discipleship.⁶ Yet culturally, even these virtues are often filtered through patriarchal and social lenses, and humility can paradoxically become a demand that reinforces status differences.⁷ Thus, Nigerian Christians face a tension: on one hand, they pursue high academic achievement, and on the other, their faith calls them to a counter-cultural modesty. This paper explores that tension in depth and examines the symbolic value of the PhD in Nigeria, and considers how the prestige attached to doctoral titles interacts with Christian teaching on humility. Drawing on theological virtue ethics and social identity theory, and citing Nigerian scholars and leaders wherever possible, the paper aims to clarify the stakes of this issue and sketch practical ways Christian academics might integrate their scholarly status with a humble witness.

Degree in National Development in Nigeria," Nigerian CommunicationWeek, July 28, 2023,
<https://www.nigeriacommunicationsweek.com.ng/the-nexus-between-academic-research-and-development-the-importance-of-doctoral-degree-in-national-development-in-nigeria/>.

⁵ Onwuegbuchi, "The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral Degree in National Development in Nigeria."

⁶ Godson Ikechukwu Egbuniwe et al., "Religion, Service, and Humility in Perspective: Women's Involvement and Challenges in the 21st Century Nigerian Religious Landscape," *GAS Journal of Religious Studies (GASJRS)* 2, no. 1 (2025): 21–27.

Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Framework

By doctoral prestige, the paper means the social esteem and influence that accrues to someone by virtue of holding a PhD. In Nigeria, this prestige is pronounced as a recent analysis notes that a PhD is treated "as the highest mark of academic excellence," conferring both honour and perceived competence on the holder.⁸ Doctoral graduates are expected to drive innovation and national development, and being a PhD holder often opens doors to senior academic and government positions.⁹ The title "Doctor" can thus become a form of social capital: it legitimates authority and intellectual leadership. Importantly, however, such ascription of status need not reflect actual productivity or virtue. In practice, critics warn, the frenzy to accumulate credentials can lead to an "illusion of expertise" in place of substantive achievement.¹⁰

This concept is juxtaposed with Christian virtue, specifically the virtue of humility. In Christian moral theology, virtue ethics emphasises traits of character – dispositions to good action. Classical Christian teaching (drawing on both Scripture and thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas) identifies humility as a cardinal virtue: the disposition to see oneself rightly in relation to God and others, avoiding all forms of pride and self-exaltation. Humility involves self-forgetful service, recognition of one's limitations, and willingness to learn (as in the famous injunction that the greatest must be "servant of all" in Mark 9:35). In this study we understand humility broadly as

⁷ Egbuniwe et al., "Religion, Service, and Humility in Perspective: Women's Involvement and Challenges in the 21st Century Nigerian Religious Landscape."

⁸ Onwuegbuchi, "The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral Degree in National Development in Nigeria."

⁹ Onwuegbuchi, "The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral Degree in National Development in Nigeria."

¹⁰ Adeyemo, "Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige."

“modesty, lack of pride” and prioritizing others’ needs over self-promotion.¹¹ Christian humility is rooted biblically in passages such as Philippians 2:5–11, where Christ “made himself nothing” and took the form of a servant. It also appears in Old Testament wisdom (“Pride goes before destruction” – Prov. 16:18) and in Jesus’ teaching that those who exalt themselves will be humbled (Luke 14:11).

To analyse how Nigerian academics negotiate these values, the paper employs two complementary theoretical lenses. First, virtue ethics (in its modern and biblical expressions) helps us articulate what true excellence looks like. Under virtue ethics, true scholarly distinction would be accompanied by humility, integrity, and concern for the common good, not merely a tally of credentials. This framework directs attention to character formation: how do Christian convictions shape an academic’s internal motivations and habits?¹² Second, social identity theory offers insight into how group identities – here, “PhD community” and “Christian community” influence behaviour. Holding a PhD confers membership in a respected social category. According to social identity theory, such group memberships can boost self-esteem but also create in-group favouritism or elitism.¹³ Thus, the question is: when a Christian scholar identifies strongly with the PhD cohort, does that group identity sometimes conflict with their identity as a follower of Christ? By blending virtue ethics, which focuses on ideals of Christian character, with social identity theory (focusing on

group dynamics), the author aims to capture both the internal and social dimensions of the issue.

Literature Review

The interplay between academic elitism and religious identity has attracted some attention globally, but mostly in fragmentary ways. A few studies in Western contexts have critiqued the elitist ethos of universities and raised concerns that academics can fall prey to a pride of place.¹⁴ Scholarship on religious identity (e.g. among Christians or other groups) often examines how faith shapes personal values, but seldom crosses into how specific professional statuses (like being a PhD holder) interact with spiritual life. In Africa, the literature on Christianity and social hierarchy is richer, though not directly focused on this question. For example, sociologists and theologians have noted how communal and familial hierarchies influence behaviour among Christians. Some Nigerian studies of church leadership, for instance, document a pattern of clerical pride and power-hunger among ministers. In Nigeria, earning a PhD is widely seen as the apex of education and carries heavy prestige. Doctoral holders are “revered” as intellectual elites, and a PhD “adds to the social status” of its bearer.¹⁵ Observers describe Nigeria as a “title-driven society” where the prefix “Dr” commands respect.¹⁶ Critics warn that this “obsession with titles” can dilute genuine merit.¹⁷

Other scholars address the tension between Christian ethics and African cultural norms more generally. For instance, Olusegun Olulowo and Elijah Ashafa point out that Christian moral

¹¹ Egbuniwe et al., “Religion, Service, and Humility in Perspective: Women’s Involvement and Challenges in the 21st Century Nigerian Religious Landscape.”

¹² J. L. A. Garcia, “Virtue Ethics in Social Theory,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2023): 329–40, <https://doi.org/10.5406/21521123.60.4.02>.

¹³ A. Demirden, “The Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory,” *Politik Psikoloji Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (2021): 39–56.

¹⁴ Mark Stephen, “Christian Elitism,” *Journal of Biblical Missiology*, February 8, 2012, <https://biblicalmissiology.org/blog/2012/02/08/christian-elitism/>.

¹⁵ Onwuegbuchi, “The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral Degree in National Development in Nigeria.”

¹⁶ Oluwafemi Mayowa Olusola, “Nigeria’s Honorary Doctorate Craze: Between Recognition and Ruin,” *Businessday NG*, September 25, 2025, <https://businessday.ng/education/article/nigerias-honorary-doctorate-craze-between-recognition-and-ruin/>.

¹⁷ Olusola, “Nigeria’s Honorary Doctorate Craze: Between Recognition and Ruin.”

values (love, justice, honesty, humility, etc.) sometimes conflict with local traditions and social expectations.¹⁸ They call for a contextual theology that honours Scripture while engaging African cultural realities. Likewise, gender scholars have critiqued how virtues like humility are framed in Nigerian religious culture, sometimes reinforcing patriarchal structures.¹⁹ These works highlight how Nigerian Christians must navigate between biblical imperatives and powerful social currents.

However, a specific gap remains: almost no published study directly examines the doctoral identity of Nigerians and how it collides with Christian moral teaching. We find many accounts of Nigeria's prestige-obsession with certificates, and many accounts of Nigerian Christians' striving for spiritual authenticity, but no analysis tying the two together.²⁰ This paper aims to fill that void. In summary, international literature on academic credentialism and group identity provides background, African theological literature warns of value-conflicts (including in ecclesial settings), but we must extend these insights to the niche case of PhD-driven prestige among Nigerian Christians.

The Social Meaning of the PhD in Nigeria

The doctorate's cultural significance in Nigeria has deep roots. The first modern PhDs in Nigeria were awarded in the 1960s: for example, the University of Ibadan (established 1948) conferred its first Nigerian PhD in 1964.²¹ Since then, doctoral programs have proliferated, and by 2020, there were over 76,000 Nigerian PhD holders, and tens of thousands more in training. Nigerians take

pride in this educational climb.²² In the early decades after independence, communities often celebrated whenever one of their own earned a doctorate. It was "seen as a communal achievement and status symbol that a community had produced a doctor".²³ Many saw a PhD as not just personal advancement but evidence that one's family or locality had contributed to national progress.

Public perception mirrors this reverence

Universities laud their new PhDs as newspapers and online sites highlight stories of degree-success. The Nigerian Communications Week notes that obtaining a PhD "sets one apart" and marks one as a specialist to be consulted.²⁴ Graduands wear special regalia on convocation day, and academic ceremonies often formally acknowledge the honour of the title. Outside academia, even employers or officials may give deference to candidates with PhDs. Because of this, the doctorate often plays the role of a social badge. It is not uncommon for individuals to list "PhD" before their name or for the media to prefix educated figures with "Dr." in headlines.

Media and religious institutions have also reinforced the prestige of doctoral titles. Nigerian church and mission schools (many founded by foreign missionaries) have historically promoted Western-style higher education, valuing the preacher who can also say he holds advanced degrees. In Pentecostal circles, it is common to address senior pastors as "Dr." once they earn a degree (even honorary ones), merging spiritual

¹⁸ Olusegun A. Olulowo and Elijah Rotimi Ashafa, "A Theological and Ethical Examination of the Tension Between Christian Moral Values and African Cultural Identity in Contemporary Nigerian Society," *Wukari International Studies Journal* 9, no. 5 (2025): 294–306, <https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v9i5.23>.

¹⁹ Egbuniwe et al., "Religion, Service, and Humility in Perspective: Women's Involvement and Challenges in the 21st Century Nigerian Religious Landscape."

²⁰ Adeyemo, "Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige."

²¹ Onwuegbuchi, "The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral Degree in National Development in Nigeria."

²² Onwuegbuchi, "The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral Degree in National Development in Nigeria."

²³ Onwuegbuchi, "The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral Degree in National Development in Nigeria."

²⁴ Onwuegbuchi, "The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral Degree in National Development in Nigeria."

authority with academic honorific.²⁵ Conversely, some Christian educators warn against this as they encourage using one's degree modestly, remembering that all wisdom is ultimately God's gift. Still, the general cultural tide is one of respect: as one commentator puts it, a doctorate "adds to the social status of the holder, having demonstrated exceptional ability" and even prompts communities to sponsor promising youth through PhD programmes.²⁶

Doctoral Prestige and the Challenge of Pride

Christian teaching raises clear concerns about pride in any form of social elevation. In Scripture, pride is repeatedly condemned (e.g. Proverbs 16:18, James 4:6), and humility is upheld as the pathway to divine blessing. In the Nigerian church context, leaders emphasise that greatness is measured by service, not by titles. A recent qualitative study of Nigerian pastors found that the prevailing alternative model (sometimes called the "prosperity gospel" or "dominican ideology") is fundamentally about claiming power and status.²⁷ In that study, nearly half of the respondents agreed that many pastors crave prestige and even display credentials prominently on screens during services to convince congregations of their special anointing.²⁸ Such behaviour, in that religious setting, is striking precisely because it runs counter to the humility modelled by John the Baptist and the apostles. Indeed, the study contrasts these pastors' thirst for "being in charge" with the biblical model: John the Baptist famously said of himself, "I am not the Christ" and felt unworthy even "to untie the strap of [Jesus's] sandal". And Paul, writing to the Philippians, disavowed any independent merit: "I

can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). These New Testament exemplars present power flowing only "through a humble heart that kneels daily at the foot of the cross."

In Nigeria's academic sphere, the manifestations of pride can be more subtle but still significant. Doctoral prestige may embolden some to project superiority in collegial settings. Senior lecturers or professors with PhDs may expect deference; some might use their title as a de facto filter ("the post-nominals offered [become] badges of prestige," in the words of observers).²⁹ A Nigerian Education News investigation found that in corporate and academic circles, many individuals "hide behind long titles to avoid scrutiny" and treat credentials as credibility shields.³⁰ In practical terms, this can mean emphasising one's degree during meetings, insisting on formal address, or speaking down to those lacking similar qualifications. Such behaviours resonate with the same status-driven mindset noted among pastors: a desire to "be seen as important" first, with substance secondary.³¹

Power dynamics also come into play

In Nigerian universities, PhD holders often occupy key positions (heads of departments, senior research roles, etc.), which means they wield real authority. The symbolic prestige of the degree thus translates into decision-making power. When a PhD is equated with unquestionable expertise, it can lead to a culture where junior scholars feel they must defer to any "Dr.", even if the work of that person is lacklustre. In such an environment, the sin of pride – subtle though it may be – can flourish alongside

²⁵ Wilfred Jibril, "Pastor Kumuyi Bags Second Honorary Doctoral Degree," Facebook Deeper Life Campus Fellowship Akwopoly, October 17, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/376573928438065/posts/825955666833220/>.

²⁶ Onwuegbuchi, "The Nexus between Academic Research and Development: The Importance of Doctoral Degree in National Development in Nigeria."

²⁷ Joel Kamsen Tihitshak Biwul, "A Paradigm Shift in Pastoral Ministry in Twenty-First Century Nigeria: An Examination of the Trends, Causes and Its Implications," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 4, no. 1 (2018): 91–111.

²⁸ Biwul, "A Paradigm Shift in Pastoral Ministry in Twenty-First Century Nigeria: An Examination of the Trends, Causes and Its Implications."

²⁹ Adeyemo, "Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige."

³⁰ Adeyemo, "Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige."

³¹ Adeyemo, "Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige."

otherwise commendable scholarship. Christian ethics would warn that a doctorate, like any gift, can be misused if it engenders “inordinate ambition or self-seeking.” The Nigerian context, with its colonial legacy of status-consciousness and contemporary credentialism, poses a clear challenge. Can a Christian scholar hold a PhD without succumbing to the temptation of pride?³²

Christian Humility as Counter-Cultural Virtue

The New Testament not only warns against pride but explicitly offers a counter-cultural model of humility. Central to this is the person of Jesus Christ. Philippians 2:5–11 (a text beloved by Nigerian preachers) describes Christ as the supreme exemplar: “though he was in the form of God, [he] emptied himself by taking the form of a servant”.³³ In practical terms, Jesus repeatedly associated with the lowly, washed his disciples’ feet (John 13), and rebuked religious rulers for seeking titles (Matthew 23:11–12). Femi Oye-Oluwafemi emphasises that servant leadership, “as exemplified by Jesus Christ, emphasises humility, service, and the well-being of others,” and illustrates the point by Christ’s self-emptying sacrifice³⁴. In other words, true greatness in God’s economy is measured by self-giving love, not by degrees or honours.

The apostolic witness reinforces this. The prototypical humble servant, John the Baptist, actively downplayed his role: he declared “I am not the Christ” and acknowledged himself unworthy of a menial task like untying Jesus’s sandal. Likewise, Paul the Apostle could claim no credit for himself: his statement “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” tacitly rejects any boast in his own learning or status. This Christian framework means that a doctorate

should be held *in trust*. The degree enables service – teaching, research, and administration, but it never justifies arrogance. Beyond these New Testament examples, Christian humility involves concrete acts of service and accountability. It manifests when scholars with PhDs mentor younger colleagues without condescension, when they credit collaborators and divine providence in achievements, and when they remain teachable despite their rank. In Nigeria’s communal culture, humility is also tied to respect: honouring elders, acknowledging debts, and sharing successes with one’s community. As one Nigerian Christian educator put it, “to be human is to be relational... [and] we also need to be... human in terms of serving people.”³⁵ Humility thus means that academic expertise is not wielded for self-promotion but for the upliftment of others – students, church members, and society at large.

Negotiating Academic Status and Christian Witness

Given this tension, can a Nigerian Christian scholar genuinely balance the two identities of “Doctor” and “disciple”? The evidence suggests yes, but it requires intentional strategies. First, one can consciously frame the doctoral title as a form of stewardship. Instead of using “Dr.” to elevate oneself, a Christian academic might always attribute successes to God or point to the contributions of colleagues and predecessors. In public, Nigerian professors could model humility by introducing themselves without immediately citing their credentials, focusing on relationships rather than rank. Second, institutions can help as faith-based universities like Babcock University explicitly integrate Christian values into their curricula. Babcock’s philosophy, for example, is to shape students into the “image of God” by

³² Adeyemo, “Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige.”

³³ Femi Adetunji Oye-Oluwafemi, “Servant Leadership and the Entitlement Mentality in Ministry in the Context of Philippians 2:5-9,” ResearchGate, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387264402_SERVANT_LEADERSHIP_AND_THE_ENTITLEMENT_MENTAL

ITY_IN_MINISTRY_IN_THE_CONTEXT_OF_PHILIPPIANS_25-9/citation/download.

³⁴ Oye-Oluwafemi, “Servant Leadership and the Entitlement Mentality in Ministry in the Context of Philippians 2:5-9.”

³⁵ Emiola Nihinlola, “You Are Human When You Serve Others: Emiola Nihinlola,” *Scholar Leaders*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.scholarleaders.org/you-are-human-when-you-serve-others/>.

imparting moral values alongside academic skills.³⁶ The university even lists integrity (a cardinal virtue related to honesty and humility) as a core value in its programs. Such environments demonstrate how scholarly excellence and Christian character formation can go hand in hand. A graduate of a Christian institution may thus leave not only with academic competence but also with a strong commitment to servant leadership.

Third, Christian communities can encourage their academic members. Churches and fellowships should honour intellectual gifts but also exhort those who are learned to use their gifts humbly. Nigerian church leaders might celebrate a congregation member's academic achievement alongside stories of their community service or faithfulness. They might caution against thinking degrees alone guarantee honour before God. Social identity theory suggests that people have multiple group affiliations. If a scholar's foremost identity is as a Christian (with the church as an in-group), then achievements in the academic group can enhance the church's witness rather than inflate the scholar's ego. Conversely, the church can discourage any hint of academic elitism by emphasising the unity of all members in Christ (Galatians 3:28) and by downplaying titles in spiritual settings.

Practically, Christian academics might cultivate habits like mentoring students, serving in church ministries without expecting special treatment, and holding one another accountable. Departments could adopt codes of conduct grounded in virtue ethics, encouraging faculty evaluations not only on publication count but on collegiality and character. In Nigeria's churches, sermons on scriptures like Philippians 2 or Mark 10 (the teaching on servanthood) can directly address the pitfalls of pride. When Nigerian Christians with doctorates see their pastors and leaders living out humility – even calling themselves simply "Pastor John" despite holding

doctorates – the double identity of "Dr. and Disciple" becomes more harmonious.

Implications

This analysis has broad implications for Nigerian society. Church leadership is one area of concern. Many pastors themselves hold PhDs or other titles. Leaders must guard against the subtle idolization of academic prestige. They should exemplify humility (as John the Baptist did) and encourage fellow clerics to do likewise. Seminaries and Bible colleges might include courses on integrity and character (virtue ethics) in their training, so that future leaders see scholarship and humility as complementary rather than conflicting. The Naira profit-driven mindset prevalent in some congregations – which prizes flashy success – must be reoriented to honour the quiet virtues of sacrifice and service.

In higher education and professional ethics, the church's voice can also be influential. Christian academics can spearhead reforms that promote virtue in academia, for example, by refusing to lend their names to unearned degrees, by calling out plagiarism and credential fraud (which some studies show are distressingly common in Nigeria), and by rewarding genuine scholarship over title-hunting.³⁷ University administrators, both in public and private institutions, might incorporate character and community engagement into promotion criteria. As Nigeria Communications Week notes, Nigeria's progress requires focusing on innovation and genuine outputs rather than mere credential accumulation.³⁸ Christian scholars can thus advocate policies that align with their faith: emphasising competence, mentorship, and societal contribution as the true markers of a doctorate, not just the letters behind one's name.

At the societal level, the tension highlights a need to reorder values. Economists and sociologists warn that in Nigeria's difficult economy, titles

³⁶ Babcock University, "About-Us," 2025, <https://babcock.edu.ng/about-us>.

³⁷ Isaiah Abolarin and James Babalola, "Christian Religious Education and Integrity: A Case Study of Babcock University, Nigeria," *Koers - Bulletin for Christian*

Scholarship 85, no. 1 (2020): 2494, <https://doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.85.1.2494>.

³⁸ Adeyemo, "Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige."

have become psychological compensation for wider failures. But this can fuel public cynicism. If citizens see that many “Drs” cannot substantiate their claimed expertise, trust in institutions erodes. Christian and civic leaders alike might therefore campaign to restore a culture of authenticity. As one observer pointedly concludes, Nigeria must “reorient its value system away from titles and toward measurable performance”.³⁹ Ultimately, a society that once celebrated a village’s first PhD could rather celebrate the servant-hearted scholar who uses that degree to uplift others. Churches, schools, and media can collaborate to tell stories of such people – reversing the current “alphabet-soup” paradox and shining a spotlight on virtues like humility and integrity as the true path to collective progress.⁴⁰

Conclusion

In summary, the PhD in Nigeria carries both “crown” and “cross” potential. It is a crown of scholarly achievement that commands respect, but the cross of humility demands that the academic Christian bear it lightly. Through this paper, we have seen that Christian doctrine reserves its highest praise for the humble and explicitly challenges believers to pour themselves out for others. Nigerian Christians are called, therefore, to resist any conflation of doctoral status with personal worth. Instead, they should see their scholarly titles as tools for God’s service – opportunities to teach, to serve, and to love, rather than to lord it over others. Humility must be reclaimed as central to the Christian vocation. Only by subordinating prideful ambition to the example of Christ can Nigerian church leaders and academics truly honour God and contribute to society. The paper echoes the call of commentators and pastors: let Nigeria rebuild a culture that esteems competence and character over cosmetic prestige. In that reordered paradigm, the doctorate will be valued not as a badge of personal status, but as a solemn

responsibility – a scholarly privilege exercised with a servant’s heart.

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³⁹ Adeyemo, “Why Nigerians Are Obsessed with Titles despite Poor Performance: Inside a Growing Culture of Paper Prestige.”

⁴⁰ Abolarin and Babalola, “Christian Religious Education and Integrity.”

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