

THE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES OF JESUS AS MODEL FOR NIGERIAN CHURCH LEADERS IN FOSTERING GOOD GOVERNANCE

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Abstracts

This work takes a critical work at leadership succession among Nigerian Pentecostal churches or the New Generation church. The biblical teaching of Jesus Christ on leadership in Matt 20 vs 20-28... is most of the time not followed in choosing a successor. This article will therefore, postulate that, this is one of the main problem facing Nigerian churches which make some of the churches to lose focus of the assignment God has called them to do. The methods adopted in this paper are historical, theological and analytical. The main objective of this work is to look at the servant-master leadership as described by Jesus Christ and the leadership style of the contemporary church leaders. This work focuses on the servant leadership style of Jesus Christ and the contemporary church leaders in Nigeria. There are some distinctive traits of Jesus Christ that every team leader can learn from. What are the challenges faced by the church leaders? What is servant Leadership? The paper concludes by saying Jesus' teaching on leadership focuses on two examples from experiences common to His disciples; one is "lords it over them" and the second is "exercise authority." The findings of this work are that both models are still prevalent as natural styles of leadership in the contemporary Nigerian church; and as Jesus condemned them, they should be discourage in all ramifications and replaced with servant leadership.

Keywords: *Servant leaders, Leadership, Authority, Shepherd.*

Introduction

Leadership is very important to the fields of administration, organizational behavior and the development of any society. Leadership is a broad topic that has been conceptualized in various perspectives by considerable scholars who have done wider research on the subject, but there is no universal distribution of leadership. Hence, there are different meanings by scholars. Ukeje, Akabogu and Ndu posit that leadership is a process where an individual influences a group toward the achievement of group goals by planning, organizing, directing, and integrating the institutional demands and the needs of members in a way that will be both productive and individually fulfilling.¹

Gary Yuki, defines leadership as the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it and the process of facilitating individuals and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.² Lovelt Weems define leadership as the development and articulation of a shared vision, motivation of those key people without whom that vision cannot become a reality, and gaining the cooperation of most people involved.³ In essence, leadership is a process that involves an individual or a group of persons who influence members of an organization or a society to key into the objectives or goals of the organization and actively contribute their quota in achieving the goals of the organizations.

The art and act of leadership has been misconceived and misunderstood by some church leaders and even the members. Leadership is one activity that controls every aspect of our lives. These misconceptions about leadership have negatively influenced some church leaders and Nigerians in general whose actions have contributed immensely to the challenges confronting the nation at large. Therefore, this work is set out to use Jesus teaching in the synoptic gospels of Mark 10:35-45, Mathew 20:20-28 and Luke: 22: 24-27 on servant leadership to help correct this wrong conception of church leaders in the contemporary society in Nigeria.

Leadership and Service

The service leadership concept is based on the philosophy of servant leadership, a term coined by Robert K. Greenleaf, to define a leader who is servant first. It began with natural feeling that one wants to serve first.⁴ A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and wellbeing of the people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the top of the pyramid, servant leadership is different. The servant leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people to develop and perform as highly as possible.

Leadership in the church is the noble art of cooperatively planning and uniting to achieve the goals God has set for humankind in the life, teachings, death, resurrection and the coming back of Jesus, the Christ. This, indeed, is Christian leadership. In the life of the church, leadership is far more than methods and machinery or techniques or holding an office. In essence, a leader in a church is a Christ-like personality whose wisdom, self-sacrifice and labour cooperate with others in finding and doing the will of God. The kind of leadership required by any church will depend largely on the size,

membership, the nature of its community, the extent of its present programme and the range of its opportunities.

Four indispensables are to be found in every successful church. They are programmes, organization, morale and leadership; but the greatest of these is leadership. If the leaders, ministerial and lay, display vision, devotion and energy, their church will grow and prosper. If they show indifference, lassitude and lack of faith and non-reliance upon the Holy Spirit, their church will languish and fail; the securing of able, devoted trained leadership is the master key that opens every door of successful administration in a church.

Church leadership therefore, refers to all those who exercise influence, guidance and direction to those in the church towards fulfilling the church's goal. With this in mind, in order to be effective, each leader needs to be; a person of vision, action, steadfastness, servant-hood, and dependence. Church leadership effectiveness requires that these God-given leadership characteristics be developed to the honor and glory of God. If God in His Sovereign design determined that you are a leader in a church, you must develop those basic characteristics.

Theology of Leadership

In Christian life and pilgrimage, we must always turn to biblical belief for whatever the issue is. What does God's word say about leadership? There is no doubt that the Bible speaks to all of human spheres and situations and in all ages. A large part of the Bible account and the history of the church speaks of God's calling people to lead in different circumstances but with the ultimate goals of glorifying Him. O.A. Adetunji asserted that "Leadership is one of the indispensable attributes of a ministry that transforms lives."⁵ George Barna has found that what facilitates significant Spiritual development within their people is the claim of thought of leadership by some pastors.⁶

Leadership is a spiritual gift as it falls into the domain of management administration. The Bible is replete with people who were examples of those who held leadership positions. Many of them performed exceptionally well and with outstanding results. Joseph was governor in Egypt. His administrative and leadership acumen was great for all generations. Moses was called and commissioned by God to lead the Israelites out of the Egyptian bondage to the wilderness. He was used by God as a competent and effective leader to make Israel a theocratic state. Moses-Jethro model of judicial administrative leadership style has been a great contribution in history.

David was also one of the greatest men and leaders in the Old Testament. He was a shepherd, poet, the greatest king of Israel, statesman and an ancestor of Jesus Christ. He has many great qualities many leaders would want to have. He was remembered and respected for his heart for God. His greatness was described by the Bible Chroniclers as "a man after God's own heart".⁷ He was a leader who often learned from his mistakes or the consequences that resulted from his mistakes. He was such a great leader that he was listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews Biblical examples of leadership are important because God himself is the creator, sustainer and controller of the universe.

Lord it over them and Exercise Authority Syndrome

James and John requested honoured places in Christ kingdom. James and John understood that in any kingdom. The places closest to the king had to have more power and prestige attached to them.⁸ They wanted the highest position in Jesus kingdom so as to control others. Jesus did not ridicule them for asking but he denied their request. Most business organizations and institutions measure greatness by high personal achievements. In Christ kingdom, service is the way to get ahead. Jesus response to James and John is the bases of Christian's concept of leadership, use of power, influence and authority. Leadership is servanthship. In the mind of Christ, it means leaders should learn to follow rather than seek positions. Contemporary observers of leadership also acknowledge the need for leaders to be followers. Douglas K. Smith writes along this line: "In the twenty first century organization, all leaders must learn to follow if they are to successfully lead. Leaders at all levels in all situation must pay close attention to situations in which their most effective option is to follow, not because the hierarchy demands they "obey" but because performance requires them to rely on the capacity and insights of other people."⁹ Calvin Muller has noted that servant leadership is nurtured in the spirit by following Jesus. Servant leaders generally are created not in commanding others but in obeying their commander. In such a mystique, executive arrogance is not possible. The yielded leader is an incarnation of Christ, the real leader of his church, the key concept in Muller's observation is "obeying". Obedience is the basis for following Jesus.¹⁰

When the two brothers' request got to the other ten disciples, a turf war broke out. The ten did not like James and John getting in front of them to receive recognition when Jesus kingdom was set up. Jesus called his disciples and laid down the ground rules: "you know that those who are regarded as

rulers of the gentiles' lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them" (Mark 10:42). The preceding verse said "so shall it not be so among you". Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all for even the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.¹¹

Jesus redefined the vocabulary of leadership among God's people when he spoke to his disciples that day. Jesus knew that his followers were trapped in the world's way of seeing things. Part of his service to them was to lead to a new view of God's kingdom.¹² He began his lesson about leadership but noting the prevailing attitudes toward greatness and competition the disciples did not have to look far to find the negative and positive models of leadership Jesus would use to teach them. Part of the power of Jesus' leadership is that, he understood and articulated the culture around him. He chose examples from his followers' culture to make them understand him.¹³

Jesus made it clear that authentic approved rulers by God do not evoke thus styles of leadership. They do not impose their power, authority over their followership. To "lord it over them" means to subject that person in one's own power. It implies that someone sits, he is master and someone else is the subject. This is a very effective style of leadership for past political leaders like Idi Amin or Sanni Abacha. This concept of "lord it over them" implies absolute power over another. One does not have to deal with questions or dissensions among the followership. One leads people together and tell them what to do. If they disagree, one eliminates them. This style of leadership was common in Jesus' days and is still common today. Sad enough, even among Christian leaders. Even today, government and organizations know how to subject people to their power, including some so called charismatic church leaders, Rev. King of Lagos, Christian higher institutions and organizational leaders. Jesus used "lord it over them" as negative model of leadership. Jesus knew that leadership without compassion breeds abuse, arrogance and power foster tyranny.¹⁴

'Exercise authority' is another negative leadership model. This leadership style involves using the authority of one's position to make things happen. This concept fits James and John's request of Jesus. They thought that if they could get the positions, they could exercise authority over others. Indeed, authority is a leader's vehicle of power in which he or she rides. Jesus knew leaders could misuse the authority to make innocent people do what they wanted them to do.

Jesus told the people not to do what their leaders did, because "they do not practice what they preach". Jesus told them that "whoever would be the great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; just as the son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many".¹⁵ Jesus called them unto him and started the principles on which they to act. He reminded them of the type of leadership that was prevalent in their society, ye know that the princes of the gentiles exercise authority over them, and they that are great exercise dominion over them, appealing to them in a case that was well known by them, what the princes of the Gentiles did. Jesus' reference to the leadership of the Gentiles points to the negative tendencies in the humanistic variants of both Jewish and Greek thoughts about Leadership that we all must guard ourselves against, since it is unsullied biblical culture and not the corrupted traditions of either Jews or Greeks, that we wish to adopt.

Taylor Jay also postulated that Jesus uses the Gentile leaders as a negative example because the Jews knew well about neighboring pagan rulers who often exhibited an abuse of power.¹⁶ The Gentile model authority was based on arrogance and overbearing dominance. Jesus was telling his disciples that searching power for wrong reasons was a gentile (i.e. pagan) practice and they should avoid it. Jesus prohibits this kind of relationship among his followers, instead the person who wants to be a leader must be the servant in the leadership position. Jesus has identified the nature of worldly leadership from the behavior of his disciples and had to call them to order to learn and accept the new leadership paradigm he came to establish that he was counter culture to the leadership of the ancient near east and the Greco-Roman world known to them.

To demonstrate the new leadership paradigm that Jesus came to establish, he told his disciples that "the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). From Jesus' perspective, the phrase "son of man" replaced the designation, messiah; it is a comprehensive term which embraces the total work of Christ. Jesus actually announced here that he is the messiah, who did not come as king to be served by others but as a servant to serve humanity. Jesus also intended that, those who are servants to him should also be same to their fellow brothers and sisters without discrimination.

The leadership qualities of Jesus for Nigeria church leaders

In Jesus' response to power tussle among his disciples, he stated that leadership is a divine affair and it is God that appoint people to positions of leadership for service and leaders must sacrifice to meet the needs of their

subjects or followers. Indeed, leadership in the light of the bible is synonymous with service to God and one's fellow men. So, in Jesus' perspective, leadership is only an instrument for service to God and the organization and development of the society.

Leadership is a Divine Affair

Leadership is a divine affair and an instrument of service, but not a secular affair as misconceived. Indeed leadership is an attribute of God that has been delegated to man as a result of his image in him and must be exercised based on God's principle. Moreover servant leadership is the original leadership style initiated and instituted by God based on biblical account which was distorted during the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, but was also redeemed and restored along with humanity by Jesus Christ. Therefore, the contemporary society should embrace this leadership style based on the principles of Jesus Christ to surmount her challenge. Furthermore, those who aspire to be political leaders must have it the back of their mind that leadership belongs to God and has only been delegated to man for proper organization, development and well being of the society and leaders must account for their stewardship to their electorate and God.

Leaders are Appointed by God through Human Instruments like Election

In his response to the crisis among the twelve, Jesus was frank that appointment to positions of leadership belongs to God and He gives to whoever he wills at the appropriate time. So, it is important for those seeking leadership positions and their supporters or the masses to have this at the back of their mind that aspiration about leadership can only be realized if it is in line with the will of God.

Leadership is for Service to God and his Creature

Leadership is an instrument for service to God and his creation. Man in the image of God and his likeness, "imago Dei" was created with the primary aim of serving his creator, God and his creations (fellow human beings and the environment). Ojakaminor also opined that leadership must not be seen as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement, but an opportunity to serve.¹⁷ This is the gospel ideal to which the politician must feel called. The spirit of service together with necessary competence and efficiency can make virtuous or above criticism the activity of persons in public life which is justly demanded by the rest of the people¹⁸. Therefore, it is imperative for all human beings to become aware of this fact and do their best to fulfill this obligation by faithfully serving their creator and his creation. It is important to always remember that we are created to serve, but not to be served.

Service is a Moral Duty for all Human Beings

Service is a moral duty and leadership is a fundamentally moral relationship dependent activity.¹⁹ Dzurgba also agreed that service is a moral duty which compel those in leadership to fulfill their obligation to the masses.²⁰ Therefore, it is imperative for leaders to ethically sound and morally upright to succeed in their services delivery. Ciulla posited that the moral triumphs and failures of leaders carry a greater weight and volume than the non-leaders. In leadership we see morality magnified, and that is why the study of ethics is fundamental to the understanding and practice of leadership.²¹ The impact of leaders' moral lapses causes great harm to their church and moral challenges of power explain why it is mandatory for leaders to be ethically robust and morally upright to be successful in service. A richer understanding of moral challenges that are distinctive to leaders and leadership is crucial to leaders in the discharge of their duty. In fact, if any leader must have integrity, he or she must have a moral code for them to operate.

Conclusion

The heart of a Christian leadership is service. Jesus Christ teaches that service constitute greatness and leadership. Authority and greatness comes from the desire to serve. James and John, the sons of Zebedee wanted to be great, they wanted the best positions, wanted to be first and be recognized but their concept of greatness was worldly. This work opines that if church leaders should imbibe the qualities of shepherds to the church, the church would fulfill her mandate. Some church leaders are found displaying oppressive traits at every given opportunity. These have resulted from self-centeredness, greed, avarice and oppression. They are compared to those Jesus considered as the rulers over the gentiles who lord over them. Thus paper postulates that church leaders must pattern their leadership style after that of Jesus Christ as a good shepherd and also exhibiting humility in their service.

Endnotes

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