

AN APPLICATION OF JESUS' LEADERSHIP STYLE IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Abstract

The current state of leadership in many churches of Nigeria calls for scholarly evaluation. The exhibitions of unscriptural and immoral acts in leadership position are not limited to the political terrain of the country, the trace of this unethical display can be found in the church community too. It has been discovered that many church leaders have departed from the style of leadership recommended by Jesus Christ and adopted various inappropriate forms of leadership styles. Thus, this piece set out to reemphasise the application of Jesus' leadership style in the church administration of the contemporary church. While leadership has been studied from political, moral, and social perspectives, little consideration has been given to the application of servant leadership which has resulted to the lack of qualitative leadership both in the church and in the society at large. Using library method as a source of gathering data, the work paid great attention to the concept of leadership from Christian perspective, forms of leadership, and the current situation of leadership in Nigerian churches, Jesus' leadership style and its uniqueness. Effort is made towards applying this style to leadership situation in Nigeria's church today as an ideal style that can enhance the purpose of the establishment of the church before the concluding remarks.

Keywords: Leadership, Style, Church, Jesus, Servant, Christian

Introduction

Leadership has been identified as the key to progress, success, productivity and achievement of any society, while the failure and ineffectiveness will also be linked to those who are saddled with the responsibility of piloting the affair of the society. This has called for its study from different perspectives, which include political, social, moral and religious dimensions. The subject is also very relevant in the church, not only because the Bible treats it as a special topic, but also because Jesus led exemplary life of a good leader whose leadership we should pattern ours irrespective of the position we find ourselves.

The present state of the church shows that we are in need of good leadership that will be patterned toward the style of the Head of the church. This will influence Christians to be able to make meaningful change in the political, financial, economic and social aspects of the society. There are many leadership methods that have been adopted by various church founders, elders and administrators which negate the purpose of the establishment of the church, the results got from these methods are not in line with the aim of the Originator of the church. The atrocities committed by many ministers in the ministry, where jealousy, hatred, wickedness and worldliness are the order of the day testify to the fact that wrong leadership is in operation (James 3:13ff). Therefore, it is high time we went back to the Bible to study Jesus' style of leadership in order to have efficiency in the ministry. This will also empower church leaders to serve as impacting ministers that will be able to turn the world around for the Lord instead of contributing to the existing problems both in the church and in the society at large.

Christians are referred to as the salt of the world in the Bible which suggests that they have the responsibility to preserve this world from decaying due to the sickness being inflicted by immoral bacteria from the kingdom of the darkness and negative world system. It is pathetic to note that many Christians are failing in one leadership capacity or the other, which implies that they fail to showcase the style of leadership exemplified by Jesus Christ. There are two possibilities here that could lead to this, either they are not taught by their leaders in the church, may be through actions or words, or they were taught but failed to appropriate the teachings. The continuous record of immorality, corruption and other unscriptural exhibitions in the official positions, either political or civil, by those who profess Christianity denies them the opportunity to win non-Christians for the Lord.

Therefore, this piece pays attention to the style of Jesus' leadership and recommend it as a prototype of the ideal style of what church leaders should stick to in order to have rewarding ministry and also to affect their society positively. Attention is strongly paid on the meaning of leadership, forms of leadership, various teaching of Jesus Christ in the Bible where He has demonstrated His servant type of leadership, and His demonstration of altruism in the position of authority which is highly lacking in our contemporary time. Recommendations are made towards enhancing godly, impacting and productive leadership before the concluding remarks.

Understanding the Concept of Leadership

Leadership as a concept has been described by many scholars who studied the concept from different perspectives. These perspectives have given dimensional bearing to the studies of leadership. Various scholars have paid attention to political, traditional, sociological, legal, moral and religious dimensions of leadership¹, while some also gave considerations to the qualitative and quantitative discourse of the subject²; other studied the hierarchical arrangement of leadership, which gave birth to terms like local, regional, national and global leaderships. The origin of leadership has been linked to the religion, where God is pictured as the supreme leader who is in the business of directing the affairs of the world and the creatures he created, this is obvious in the Pentateuch, where Yahweh is seen as the leader of his people by exercising his leadership roles through mortals, in the system known as theocracy.³ This suggests that leadership is highly important among social beings that are products of God irrespective of the race, culture and religion.

Speaking from functional perspective, Harris views leadership as that which moves persons and organization towards the fulfilment of their goals.⁴ This implies that leadership is a relevant point when we are discussing how to achieve the aim of any given organization. Adeogun buttresses this view when he submits that leadership is the lubricant of development of a nation or any organization.⁵ Sociologically, Borgadus opines that leadership involves persons who possess certain qualities, initiatives and appropriate ability with which they lead in order to provide solution to the challenges of the group and also direct the activities of the group in group-approved directions.⁶ To lead obviously mean that an individual must be able to give the needed relationship, motivation, direction, control and expression of clear vision to others in order to achieve the set goals of the group.⁷

However, the study of leadership in the Christian point of view has centred on the qualitative strength of the leaders that can champion the affairs of the church

¹ O. O. Adebolu, 2012. "The Roles of the Traditional Leaders in Motivating People towards New Life and National Re-Branding" in D.O. Akintunde (ed.), *Biblical Studies and Rebranding Nigeria Campaign*, Biblical Studies Series, NABIS, 245

² O. F. Nwachukwu, 2012. "Accountable Leadership in National Rebranding" in D.O. Akintunde (ed.), *Biblical Studies and Rebranding Nigeria Campaign*, Biblical Studies Series, NABIS, 89

³ D. D. Danfulani and A. A. Atwoju, 2012. *Youth Restiveness in Nigeria: A Theological Reflection*, Lagos: BPrint Publishing, 114

⁴ W.L. Harris, 1989. *Effective Church Leadership: A Practical Source book*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 27

⁵ J.O. Adeogun, 2009. "The Leadership of Joseph in Managing Excess Food in Egypt and the Management of Excess Oil Revenue in Nigeria", in S.O. Abogunrin, et al. (eds.) *Biblical Studies and Leadership in Africa*, Biblical Studies Series, NABIS, 2

⁶ E.S. Borgadus, 1954. *Sociology*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 498

⁷ A.A. Atwoju, 2012. "Rebranding in Leadership of Nigeria: Jesus' Attitude to the Jewish Leaders as Exemplified in Matthew 23" in D.O. Akintunde (ed.), *Biblical Studies and Rebranding Nigeria Campaign*, Biblical Studies Series, NABIS, 12

with little attention paid on Jesus' leadership style as a prototype for Nigerian church leaders. For instance, Leroy stresses the virtues that Christian leaders must possess before they would be able to motivate and direct other Christians.⁸ This suggests that if a Christian leader lacks the necessary virtues of a good Christian leader, he will not be able to perform up to the biblical standard, which will greatly affect the members of the group spiritually, emotionally, morally and socially. Ayantayo mentions some of these virtues:

Every Christian leader must be responsible, growing, exemplary, inspiring, effectual, caring, communicating, good-oriented, decisive, competent, unifying and hard working.⁹

The major difference between the leadership of the church and that of the secular is that the former is based on the revelation as given in the Scriptures, while the latter is based on the constitution of the group. It must also be stressed that political leaders will be striving to please the electorates as the leader of any social group will also be struggling to satisfy the need of the members, but the church leaders must first of all ensure they lead according to divine instructions even when these are not pleasing to some elements in the church. This singular factor calls for understanding of the mind of God and the divine purpose of establishing the church, which is to serve the will of God on earth.

Forms of Leadership Styles

There are various forms of leadership styles forwarded by scholars based on the nature and goals of the organization in the consideration. The effectiveness and performance of any group or organization have been linked to the style of leadership adopted. Some of these styles have been adopted by many church leaders, which have taken their attentions away from the style practiced, taught and recommended by Jesus Christ. Buttressing this point, Lawrence asserts:

As the church looks for ways both to grow the faith of those already Christian (deepening their 'roots' in Jesus) and to help those outside the faith come to know Jesus (through a variety of 'routes' to him), it is all too easy to abandon what the Christian tradition has to offer on leadership and embrace the latest 'new thing'

⁸ E. Leroy, 2001. *Be a Motivational Leader*, Ibadan: Evangelical Publishers, 1-10

⁹ J.K. Ayantayo, 2005. "Christian Morality and Religious Evaluation of Women's Political Leadership in Nigeria Churches" in *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. Xxxvii, June & Dec., 117

without a critical analysis of what is appropriate and what isn't.¹⁰

Hence, few of these 'new thing' styles will be considered here, this is to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each style in comparison with the Jesus' style of leadership.

Transformational Leadership Styles

This is a leadership style that concentrates on the development of followers as well as their needs. Transformational leaders seek to bring the best out of their followers by paying attention to their needs, moral development and the advancement of their efficiency for the benefits of the followers and the organization in general. It is obvious that the values that the leaders want to instil into their followers will be sustained, and work towards eliminating the traits that are inimical to the aims of the organization.¹¹ The challenge of this style is that wrong values that are antithetical to the society can be easily transferred to followers by a wicked leader; this is one of the factors that made terrorism and agitation to strive in Nigeria through leaders who transformed followers to their desired elements. This style of leadership was displayed when David became captain of those who were in distress, debt and dismay (1 Samuel 22: 2). He was able to create giants among them by transforming them to what he wanted them to be, analytical and historical study of the Bible shows that David chose captains among them through whom he recorded victory in different war expeditions.

Transactional Leadership Style

This is in form of bargaining system in leadership where the leader is ready to compensate the followers based on their contributions to the development of the organization especially by meeting specific goals or performance criteria.¹² It is obvious that there will be cut throat competition among the followers which may not be healthy for smooth relationship in a group where this style of leadership is in use; it could also lead to misuse of oneself in a bid to meet a specific target of the organization. Many church leaders believe greatly in this style of leadership, and it is always at play when preference is given to a pastor

¹⁰ J. Lawrence, 2004. *Growing Leaders: Reflections on Leadership, Life and Jesus*, Abingdon: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 29

¹¹ B. M. Bass and B. J. Avolio, 1993. "Transformational Leadership and Organization Culture" *Public Administration Quarterly*, 12, 113

¹² T.S. Nanjundeswaraswamy and D.R. Swamy, 2014. "Leadership Styles" *Advances in Management*, Vol. 7(1), 58

over others. If a particular pastor is bringing gifts to the senior pastor or he is able to pay church assessment promptly there is a tendency that he is transferred to a church that could be tagged 'fertile land' financially, in order to be able to bring more money, whereas his counterpart who is doing great work of soul winning may not enjoy such 'advantage' since he is not 'productive' financially.

Autocratic Leadership Style

Autocratic style of leadership is centred on the boss of the organization, where the views of the followers are not always respected nor considered. The followers under the autocratic leaders are always enslaved and denied of their rights. This style is not beneficial to the followers, and this will limit their development in the organization. According to Cherry, the autocratic leader, also known as an authoritarian, makes decisions independently with little or no input from the rest of the group which makes this style of leadership bossy and dictatorial.¹³ Some church founders are sole proprietorships who take decision lonely, they so much believe in their own ways of doing things without giving consideration to other people's views in the church. Due to their frequent reference to 'God says' whenever they want to impose their will on their subjects, many people under autocratic church leaders have concluded that prophets cannot make good administrators in the church. The 'God says' formula is only employed many at times to enhance compliance from the subjects since people will not like to query what God says.

Participative Leadership Style

This is also known as democratic style of leadership where there is a room for the participation of the followers in the decision making of the group. Due to the freedom of decision making and the guidance the leaders provide for the followers, in a bid to develop them, this style has been identified as the most productive, especially when compared with authoritarian style. This is what is known as congregational style of leadership in the church administration, where the members of the church are allowed to participate in the decision making of the church. The great demerit of this style of leadership in the church is the slow in decision making due to the different level of spiritual understanding and growth of the church members. If it is not well managed, this style of leadership will often cause distraction in the affair of the church, because freedom of

¹³ K. Cherry, "Leadership Styles" an online Publication at <http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership> Retrieved on 04/10/2017

participation in the decision making could breed disrespect on the part of the followers to the church leaders.

Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

Another name for this type of leadership is delegative style where followers are designated by the leader of the organization to carry out specific assignments. This style encourages mentorship that can lead to capacity building and production of leaders among the followers. However, many followers have misused the opportunity of representing their superiors in one capacity or the other; many would present themselves as the 'main man'. If a follower is sent to represent his boss, morally he should acknowledge the sender by acting on his behalf and present himself as a vicegerent of the master. Again, it is obvious that when one is given an assignment that is above his spiritual, mental and social ability, there is a tendency to miss-behave or to underperform, nevertheless, laissez-faire allows the growth of the follower as what he learns from the leader can be put to practice during the delegated assignment.

Charismatic Leadership Style

In this style of leadership, attention is on an individual that possesses exceptional gifts which is specially given through supernatural powers. The leader rises to the problematic situation of his people and gets it solved through his divine gift. The star of leaders with special and divine ability shines as a result of their enablement to find solution either to the spiritual or socio-economic problems of the people. In Adetunji's view, the types of leaders in the Book of Judges could be classified as charismatic leaders.¹⁴ There are many leaders in contemporary churches that are very gifted in one area or the other of the ministry. This has contributed to the formation of church doctrines and teachings reflecting the belief and charismatic displays of the denominational founders. We must agree with Adeleke that none of these styles can bring the best if we do not allow the Spirit of God whole establish the church to take control.¹⁵

The Current State of Church Leadership in Nigeria

Nigeria is presumed to be a secular state of people who are very religious in everything they do. The embracement of religion in the country has opened

¹⁴ O. G. Adetunji, 2010. *Leadership in Action: A Sourcebook in Church Administration for Students and Ministers*, Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nigeria) Limited, 23

¹⁵ J. A. Adeleke, 2014. *Essentials of Church Administration*, Ibadan: Gideon Global Press, 79

door for the advancement of the three major religions in the country, which are African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity, where each of the religions boasts of many devotees. This has given religious leaders in the country the opportunity to take religion beyond its scope of divine assignment to the level of commercialization through which many are enriching their pockets. It is believed among its adherents that Christianity is not a religion but a way of life through which sinners are brought to the saving knowledge of God, but the activities of many church leaders do not reflect the claim of the way of life, instead, selfish interests, personal ego, pursuit of positions and self adulations are their targets. This obviously contradicts Jesus' style of leadership.

The commercialization of Christianity and anointing in the country has pushed many people into ministry, thereby claiming to be church leaders. The most painful thing about such church leadership in Nigeria today, apart from the fact that wolves are parade themselves as shepherds, is the immoral display and unscriptural exhibition of ill-gotten wealth. This is against biblical principles of leadership; commenting on this, Janvier and Thaba argued thus:

The character of the biblical leaders is critical for ministry success. The Bible is more concerned about the character of a leader than about abilities. God will not use a man or woman of faulty character.¹⁶

The demonstration of immoral acts has been identified as one of the factors responsible for ineffectiveness of the messages of church leaders.¹⁷ Meanwhile, some of these unethical displays of church leaders will be considered in order to juxtapose them with Jesus' style of leadership.

It has been discovered that one of the reasons behind the proliferation of churches in Nigeria, apart from the financial gain, is the urge to be a leader by all means. Many young pastors are no longer ready to serve under senior pastors, a system which would have given them the grace of tutelage. Young pastors want to assume the position of church leaders overnight by manning self-established churches. Little wonder that Nigeria is one the countries with highest number of church denominations running like sole proprietorship business along the streets. According to Ajayi:

¹⁶ G. E. Janvier and B. U. Thaba, 2012. *Understanding Leadership: An African Christian Model*, Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks, 140

¹⁷ D. S. Ajayi, 2016. "Factoring Morality into Church Evangelism for Effective Witnessing" in *Christ Apostolic Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies*, Vol.1 No 1, 74

Everybody wants to be addressed as General Overseer (G.O). Therefore, one can see different nomenclatures given to churches in Nigerian streets. Even a church that is not well known in the street can be referred to as 'International,' while many churches named "evangelistic missions" are without involvement in mission work at all.¹⁸

It is an aberration that allegations of corruption, ritual killing, robbery and kidnapping are levelled against some church leaders in Nigeria. A case where a pastor is defrauding church members millions of naira is pointing to the collapse of leadership in Christendom. Social Media are filled with news of pastors involved in ritual killings in order to induce population upsurge because of financial benefits. This negates the leadership that Jesus passed to his disciples which made them to provide solutions to the problems of the masses that came under their ministrations, not compiling the problems as some the contemporary ministers are doing today. The involvement in the political corruption has made many of Nigerian church leaders to lose their positions of confidence, influence, authority and government in the society.¹⁹

There are many lawsuits in the court today following controversies that surround the leadership of many church denominations, apart from those who could still manage their crises internally. The appointment of one position or the other has polarized many churches which resulted in the creation of different factions within the denomination where the leaders of each faction claim to be the authentic. Leadership cases in the church have made Nigerian Christians become regular customers of the legal practitioners in their bids to redress, challenge or sustain their appointments through litigations. If we claim to be working for Christ, and the record of the Christ's ministry shows humility, simplicity and servanthood in his leadership, it is baseless to sue one another over church leadership, when Jesus was seen serving his disciples. It is a shameful thing that those who are supposed to advise people to step down for one another in the political positions are the one turning church leadership to do-or-die affair²⁰.

¹⁸ D. S. Ajayi, 2016. "Factoring Morality into Church Evangelism for Effective Witnessing" 76

¹⁹ A. O. Malomo, 1986. "Religious Establishment and Ethical Revolution in Nigeria" in S. O. Abogunrin (Ed) *Religion and Ethics in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Daystar Press, 25

²⁰ A. Alawode, 2015. *The Lifestyle of a Performer and Reformer: Pastor Abraham Olukunle Akinosun*, Ibadan: CAC Publicity Department, 154

One of the features of Machiavellian politics is to seek political positions through immoral ways, including killing of the opponents by employing any means.²¹ This idea has been borrowed into the church leadership; it is not funny to note that some people could employ the service of assassins to eliminate whosoever they think is blocking their ways to a particular position. Many could also go diabolical to attack their marked opponents spiritually in order to have a clear way to the aimed positions. The question is: is the purpose of attaining position in the church today still the same with that of the biblical records where people of good reputations and names were chosen to lead the people of God (Acts 6:1-5)? The criteria for becoming leader are no longer spiritual, but are based on financial strength, godfatherism and political connections.

Misuse of power in leadership position is becoming a normal trend in churches today. It is common to some denominational leaders to use their position to exploit followers. Jesus catered for the needs of his followers by providing foods for the poor, healing for the sick and deliverance for the demon-possessed, but church leaders today are using their positions to exploit people. Senior pastors expecting 'brand envelopes' from a struggling junior pastor who hardly eat three square meals, this is uncalled for in church leadership, while collection of money from the poor before praying for blessing by any minister is a negation of Jesus' principle of leadership.

The wrong orientation of church leadership has also been demonstrated in form of misuse of 'anointing.' This is very common in the churches established by an individual, where power has been solely centralized to the extent of enslaving other pastors in the ministry. Some of such leaders used to even demand worship from church members by commanding them to be on knees if they have anything to discuss with their leaders. Some members even pray in the names of their church founders, while images of some of such church leaders are encouraged to be displayed in the rooms, sitting rooms and offices to serve as protection for their followers. All these can only be explained as a display of self-adulation and claiming of glory that supposed to be directed to the Redeemer of the church. It is high time we questioned the integrity of leaders who have seen church position as an immunity and ticket to display unethical behaviour like sexual immorality, pronouncement of curses and enslavement of fellow Christians. A leaf from the style of Jesus' leadership will go a long way to correct all these anomalies in the church leadership.

Jesus' Style of Leadership

²¹ A. O. Oyekunle, 2015. "Political Corruption and the Future of Nigerian Politics", *International Law Research*, Vol. 4, No, 1, 178

The style of leadership exhibited by Jesus Christ in his earthly teaching and ministry is conceptually known as servant leadership, which is the system whereby a leader assumes the position of leadership with a mindset to serve his subjects and not to be served. The recognition of his personal deity, glorious and powerful ministry, and the superiority of his personality notwithstanding, Jesus condescended to demonstrate how a leader should lead by serving his subjects. This was demonstrated in many occasions in his earthly ministry either through action or in an illustrative teaching. Servant leadership is not popular among the political officeholders, especially where hierarchical arrangement of cadre is stressed, and this was the order of the day during Jesus' ministry, but he wanted to change the orientation of his followers from the cultural and bossy way of leading people which encouraged leaders to lord it over their subjects. He introduced another style that showcased divine and spiritual consciousness in the display of leadership role. Wilkes buttresses this point:

Leadership in the kingdom of God is different from leadership in the world. It's still leadership, an individual who influences others toward a shared goal, but those who lead in the kingdom of God look very different from those who lead by the world's standards. Life under the lordship of Christ has different values from life under the lordship of self. Therefore, kingdom leaders are people who lead like Jesus. They act differently from leaders trained by the world. Kingdom leaders are servant leaders because they follow Jesus, who "did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).²²

Considering the importance of leadership to the continuation of Jesus' vision and the ecclesiastical relevance of the subject to the establishment of church especially after his ascension, Jesus paid great attention to the teaching of servant leadership when he was with his disciples, this was done purposefully to forestall the misuse of power that could jeopardize the work of salvation given to the church. Therefore, he strategically gave the teaching in a time and a way it would remain in the memory of the disciples. This implies that naturally, man has the tendency of lording it over his fellow man if he is not checked and this could be worse when one has either spiritual or legal power at his disposal to deal with another person mercilessly. This natural tendency was what Jesus dealt with in his disciples by demonstrating the possibility of serving in the leadership posts.

Jesus as a Servant Leader

²² C. G. Wilkes, 1996. *Jesus on Leadership: Becoming a Servant Leader*, Nashville: Life Way Press, 13

Jesus was a servant leader. He was a servant to the Father's mission, and he was a servant to those on mission with him. The whole life he led and his ministry showcased the type of leadership he wanted his followers to adopt as they would be continuing the work of the gospel after his ascension. The record of Jesus' ministry in the Bible is nothing but a complete demonstration of how a leader can be leading through service which provides the basis for our working definition of *servant leader*: A servant leader serves the mission and leads by serving those on mission with Him.²³ We will concisely present how Jesus demonstrated this form of leadership as we have the record in the Bible.

His condescension to become man

The process through which the Son of God became man is theologically known as incarnation which is the embodiment of the Word in human flesh. It took great humility for God to become man in order to save lost man in his eternal doom (John 1:14). The presentation of Pauline theology about the relationship among the three personalities of the Trinity shows that Jesus Christ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God but condescended to take form of a bondservant and came in the likeness of man because of the salvation of mankind (Phil. 2:5-7). Incarnation explains servant leadership, because it was possible for Jesus to send angel from heaven to save man, but the creator came to serve the creatures, what an example of servant leader He is!

Jesus' humility to dwell among men

The work of salvation took Jesus over 33years to be accomplished; we may not appreciate this literally, until we consider the divine status of the person involved. Leaving his glorious throne in heaven to be dwelling among sinful men for so long period is the greatest sacrifice that we can think of. We cannot compare sinful exhibitions of feeble men with the divine nature of Christ, but he humbly endured this for many years.

Obedience to human constitution

Jesus, the greatest authority personified that the world has ever recorded obeyed man's laws and also follow human protocols of doing things. He obeyed both the religious and the civil laws; he humbly queued for baptism, when he could have invited John the Baptist to conduct his own specially. This is a lesson

²³ C. G Wilkes, 1998 *Jesus on Leadership: Discovering the Secrets of Servant Leadership from the Life of Christ*, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 18.

for both the religious and political leaders in Nigeria that are fond of breaking rules because of positions they occupy.

Submission to punishment and death

Surrendering to the trial, punishment and death masterminded by those who were seeking for their selfish interests was hard to swallow for whosoever possesses power to deal with his 'enemies,' but Jesus submitted himself without misusing his divine power (Phil. 2:8). All this is done to pass a lesson to his follower to be altruistic and sacrificial in their dealings.

Jesus' Teaching on Servant Leadership

Apart from the lessons of servanthood in leadership that one can learn from Jesus' personal life, his teachings practically lunched his disciples to the pool of wisdom on how a leader can serve while leading others. Some of these teachings will be considered here in order to draw out the lessons Jesus was passing to his disciples and how that can help us to shape our orientation about leadership in the church and the society at large.

Teaching on Who is the Greatest (Luke 24: 30)

There was an argument among the disciples of Jesus Christ on who is going to be the leader maybe after he might have left them. The dispute coincidentally came after Jesus has held last supper with them which signified his imminent departure. Jesus used this avenue to teach them this important subject of servant leadership. He changed their perceptions from the style of leadership that was generally known to them which allowed leaders to lord it over their subjects, to a new style of leadership where the greatest is the younger. Jesus says: "But not so among you, on the contrary, he who is greatest among you let him be as the younger and he who governs as he who serves" (verse 26). The message here is that your leadership will be effective and your greatness will be relevant only when you are ready to serve your followers. Jesus gave example of serving and sitting at the table, since the greatest supposed to be served, but Jesus as the greatest was the one that served the disciples at the last supper.

The Request of the Sons of Zebedee (Matthew 20:20-28)

Another teaching of servant leadership came during a strange request made by the mother of sons of Zebedee from Jesus to allow one of her sons to sit on the right hand and the other on the left hand of Jesus in his kingdom. Without necessarily going to the theological arguments on the cause of this kind of request from the Zebedees and that of the eschatological and symbolic

response given by Jesus, it was obvious to the other ten disciples that the two brothers wanted to be their leaders, which displeased them greatly. They were displeased because everybody wanted to be leader and lord it over others, or because they were twelve and literally put, Jesus had only two hands (right and left), which the two brothers wanted to occupy, by implication and psychologically, the rest of them would be serving only one family.

Jesus intervened without necessarily blaming the Zebedees, He orientated the disciples that “whosoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave” (verses 26-27). He also concluded the teaching by using himself as a perfect example, Who did not come to be served but to serve others. Many Christians want to be in front as the mother of sons Zebedee desired for her sons, but they are not ready to serve, they only want to occupy leadership positions either religiously or politically for their personal selfish interest.

The Washing of the Disciples’ Feet (John 13:1-17)

Though some church denominations has doctrinally interpreted Jesus’ feet washing to mean several things and some have made it an ordinance in their churches, the exegetical exposition of the pericope show the intention of the message the Master wanted to pass to His disciples on leadership. The event of disciples’ feet washing was the beginning of the inner discourse of Jesus with his disciples during his last few days with them as recorded in book of John. This period was used to lay emphasis on the previous teaching and also to give last words as He was planning to depart.

Jesus adopted demonstrative method to teach the disciples how to be a serving and humble leader. This is done in order to retain the teaching and also to show the importance of the subject matter. During the last supper Jesus removed his garments, took a towel, poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet. Culturally, this kind of work could only be done by the slave of the house for the master. The special dressing and action of Jesus typically represented a slave; this is because feet would have gathered dirt which could only be cleaned by a slave. This made Peter to refuse him claiming that the action should be vice versa, but Jesus brought out the lesson of the action to them that “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (verse 14), which taught them great lesson of humility.²⁴

²⁴ N. Shields, 2009. *Life and Teachings of Christ*, Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS), 274

The three teachings expatiated above revealed how Jesus used available events to implant into the hearts of his disciples how he wanted them to lead the church of God. This is the type of leadership that is appropriate with his mission for the church, which distinguished her from the rest of the world. It is sad to note that the contemporary church leaders are abandoning Jesus' style of leadership and going back to the old styles that He took away from his disciples.

The Uniqueness of Jesus' Style of Leadership

The life and teaching of Jesus have revealed to us his style of leadership, it is imperative to pinpoint some of the qualities that make this type of leadership a unique one, this will help us to understand the difference between it and other forms of leadership.

i. Sacrificial in Nature

It is a demonstration of sacrificial living in the position of leadership in order to make life better for the followers. Jesus did this and want his disciple do, the highest sacrifice was paid on the cross, he is not expecting less from his followers (John 13:15). The demonstration of altruism in leadership is shown by Jesus to his disciples, through this, He changed their egoistic mindset in leadership.

ii. Humility

Humility can only be demonstrated when a leader, who by human consideration, supposed to be served now take it upon himself to serve his followers. If we see leadership as a call to service and avenue to impact lives positively, there will not be any reason for exhibition of pride. Leaders demonstrate arrogance in positions because they have not seen leadership as a call to serve other; instead they view as a opportunity to accrue financial benefits and affluence to themselves.

iii. Mentorship

This type of leadership helps in the production of several servant leaders through the exemplary life of the one leading the group of people. Sadly, many of church leaders of our time who are ignoring mentoring of their followers actually enjoyed the service from their predecessors which contribute immensely to their spiritual fervency and administrative acquirement.²⁵ For the continuity of Jesus' redemptive work, He mentored the disciples who would

²⁵ J. Lawrence, 2004. *Growing Leaders: Reflections on Leadership, Life and Jesus*, 229

carry on the work after his ascension. Recognising the importance of the mentorship to the success of any given leaders, Oyedepo opines that:

Show me a man without a mentor, and I will show you a man that may never bear any trace of leadership. This is because every great leader is an offspring of another. If you don't have any man that you are following, there may never be any man following you.²⁶

Therefore, if the trend of good leadership will endure in Christendom, godly leaders must take mentorship with the seriousness it deserves, this will not only ensure the continuity of Jesus' style of leadership but also sanitize and cleanse the church from the immoral activities of bad leadership.²⁷

iv. Visional

Jesus was not considering the implication of his teaching on the immediate situation, but ultimate effect it would have on the church. This called for the repetition of the clause 'but not so among you' to represent the church that will be built where the servant leadership will be most relevant. Thus, a servant leader lead with the initiative to create a lasting legacy that will be a solid foundation upon which the coming generation will build their pattern of leadership²⁸.

v. Service Oriented

This is opposite of the type of leadership that was common among the gentile, Jesus emphatically told his disciples that the leader among them will be serving others and not vice versa.

Applying Servant Leadership to Contemporary Church

The fact is that various leadership styles have their purpose and target of achievement. The aim behind their formulation determines their application. This implies that there could be wrong adoption and application of leadership style into an organization where such will never be appropriate for the actualization of the purpose of the establishment of that organization. One could logically submit that failure in church leadership could be linked to wrong

²⁶ D. O. Oyedepo, 2007. *Exploits in Ministry*, Ota: Dominion Publishing House, 268

²⁷ G. Oluwasegun, 2004. *Church Leaders' Teaching and Training Manual: A Ministerial Aid for Training Church Workers*, Ibadan: International Publishers Limited, 26

²⁸ L. J. Michael, 2003. *Spurgeon on Leadership*, Kaduna: Evangel Publishers Ltd, 43

adoption and application of leadership styles on parts of church leaders in the contemporary time. Thus, for the church to find her feet on the ground in term of leadership, the style laid down by the Head of the church must adopted and applied appropriately.

Church leaders must be able to distinguish between the secular leadership and church leadership as it has to do with purpose, objectives, style and benefits. A bid to pursue, practise and exercise church leadership like that of the secular, will result to loss of focus for the church. It is high time leaders in the church placed eternal value over material rewards of leadership, in order to be able to serve with the mind of Christ in position. It should be stressed here that church leaders' power for leadership is in their connection to Jesus' Christ, which is maintained by surrendering one's ambitions to Him and gaining His vision and strength²⁹. Since there is a laid down style that will help the church to fulfil her mission, the leaders who are fond of using other styles should change to the appropriate one or change leave church administration for another business where such styles will be acceptable, appropriate and productive³⁰. Therefore, it is imperative to lead with the submission to the Spirit of God, if not; one would resort to secular philosophy in the course of discharging divine duties. Toler rightly submits that:

A Christian leader will never lead people forward for Christ without first taking his or her own trip to the cross. Without the electricity of cavalry's flow, human leaders are powerless. There is no bypass. Personal faith in Jesus Christ and the empowerment of His Spirit is the great prerequisite for Christian leadership.³¹

Church founders should cease from viewing church planting as a sole proprietorship business where an individual take the whole decision without allowing team work or the contribution of others in the process of decision making. The words of Jones are relevant here when she asserts that "If you as a leader or manager intend to accomplish anything significant, the first step towards attaining your goal is to create a team."³² If team work was not important Jesus would not have called the disciples, he would have faced the work solely. It is an aberration to adopt autocratic style of leadership in the church setting where God could choose to use even a little child to have His purposed

²⁹ H. Myra & M. Shelley, 2005. *The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham*, Michigan: Zondervan, 19

³⁰ J. C. Maxwell, 2005. *The 360 Leader: Developing Your Influence from anywhere in the Organization*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 69

³¹ S. Toler, 2007. *Practical Guide for Pastoral Ministry*, Benin City: Wesleyan Publishing House, 170

³² L. B. Jones, 1995. *Jesus CEO : Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership*, New York: Hyperion, 91

accomplished. Therefore, an atmosphere of moral, spiritual and leadership development must be created by the church leaders in order to ensure the continuity of the mission and vision of the church either with or without their presences³³.

The humility that significantly serves as the hallmark of servant leadership must be visible in the display of duties of church leaders. What Jesus corrected in the lives of the disciples was the tendency to lord it over their fellow brothers, the contemporary church leaders must not fall into the same error of authoritarian leadership. Hence, submissiveness, humility and sacrifice that will help to implant Christ's Spirit into the minds of their followers should be demonstrated by church leaders, this will put an end to the reoccurrence of immoral acts bred by over ambitions of church leaders today. Ultimately, the application of this leadership style will encourage people to serve fellow brothers wholeheartedly through which the spread of Jesus' mission will be achieved.

Concluding Remarks

The deficiency in the leadership of the church today is a clear indication of the departure from Jesus' style of leadership, which is altruistic and service-oriented in nature. Many people are striving to attain position in the church in order to satisfy their selfish interests. The implication of this is that the church that supposed to correct wrong leadership in the political terrain of the country is also falling victim of the infection of the bacteria of bad leadership. If the church will be able to carry out her spiritual and social responsibilities effectively, there is a need to go back to the style of leadership established by Jesus for the smooth running of the church which is the uniqueness of Christ's follower. The young ministers should endeavour to get it right in the area of discipleship, while the senior pastor should strive to lead an exemplary life which is capable of implanting servant leadership into the hearts of their followers.

³³ W. G. Caldwell, 1997. "Administering Personnel" in B. P. Powers (Ed.), *Church Administration Handbook*, Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 72

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