

The Servant-Leadership Concept of Jesus (Matthew 20:20-28, Luke 22:24-27) as Precursor to a Transformed Leadership in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper presents a servant-leadership style as a better model for the transformation in any leadership particularly in Nigerian society. This servant-leadership style is examined from a theological perspective as several works on leadership are yet to carry this out. This is needful because religion plays prominent role in the attitude and decisions of Nigerians and Africans in general. The servant-leadership style in this paper is obtainable in the service oriented leadership style lived and prescribed by Jesus. The findings made in examining the leadership styles in the social, religious and political milieu of Nigeria shows styles characterized by corruption, self-centeredness, misappropriation of the nation's wealth, oppression of the poor, domineering traits, lack of goal and poor leadership skills. The results found include under-development, poverty, strikes, kidnaps and sometimes death. By using a critical analysis approach, the servant-leadership of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew and Luke is carried out. This work is qualitative in nature and the methods for data collection are: observation, focus groups discussion and critical historical materials. All these are discussed in line with how they can be applied to Nigerian leadership situation.

Key Words: Servant, Power, Leadership, Transformation, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria, after about fifty years of independence as a nation has suffered immensely in the hands of its various leaders. Though it is blessed with natural resources, researches show there is barely anything to show for it. It is a wealthy nation however its people live below poverty line with no basic infrastructures, no regular power supply and no free and fair elections. These have resulted from the self-centeredness, misappropriation of the nation's wealth and oppression of the poor by the leaders in the helms of affairs. The leaders from long period of study have been found to exhibit domineering traits at every given opportunity. More pathetic is the helplessness of its people despite the democratic regime. Having presented the fact that Nigeria has leadership problem even at fifty years of independence, there is a need for transformation. This paper posits the concept of servant-leadership style of Jesus as a good model for Nigeria leadership state. What then is the concept of servant-leadership style?

Clarification of Concept

The concept of the servant-leadership is the combination of two words. Each word needs to be defined and how they relate to this paper. Leadership has been defined by several authors. Stephen (2007) defines it as the position of being in charge of a group, organization or a country. Haggai definition as quoted in Oderinde (2004) says leadership is "the discipline of deliberate exerting special influence within a group to move it towards goals of beneficial performance that fulfill the group's real need." From these definitions, an important quality of good leadership is the exertion of special influence on the people being lead for a common goal which is to the people's hope, aspiration and benefits. According to the WordWEB (2012) servant is a person working in the service of another. In this paper, servant is referred to as someone who gives himself up wholly to the service of the benefit of others putting his or her own interests last.

The concept of the servant-leadership implies that leaders devote themselves to service and meet the needs of the people that they govern putting away all forms of personal interest. This kind of leadership is far from self-serving, domineering leadership and makes those in charge think harder about how to respect and motivate people (Direct Leadership, 2010). Leadership is synonymous to power but Bush (2010) says, power is meant to be used to help people. Contrary to the notion of power being a tool for advancing personal purposes, name or fame, it is destined to serve people. Since leadership involves service, Maxwell (2005) words put it right that "true leadership must be for the benefit of the followers not to enrich the leader." By implication, servant-leadership is people oriented.

Literature review

Some of the works by scholars have same opinion on the cause of the leadership problems in Nigerian. One of these is Abogunrin (2003) who puts the present state of poverty in Nigeria as "the greed, avarice, selfishness, lack of vision and lacking of plans by the leaders." Nigerian's leaders, as common to other African countries from observation, sole aim of becoming leaders is to have access to the nation's treasury and loot it. Asaju (1999) examined the effects of causes on leadership. He quoting J. C. Ryles unequivocally condemns greed and covetousness as evil and unethical human behavior. Asaju (1999) condemns the drive for money by leaders as one of the most unsatisfying of possessions. It takes away cares, no doubts, but it brings with it quite as many cares as it takes away.

Relating it with leaders, the anxiety to keep it, the guilt in the abuse of it and perplexity in disposing of it outweighs the desire to acquire it. It is a fact that one bane on leadership in Nigeria is greed and attention to money; however, the effects and solution are not adequately dealt with.

Nigeria leadership problems and effects on people

The condition of the Nigerian society is characterized by insecurity of life and properties. The mass media have daily reports on people dying of hunger due to proper agricultural plans despite the expanse of land available in the country. It is disheartening that Nigerians are not up to 160 million in population but majority cannot afford their daily meals while few “so called leaders” squander the nation’s resources. To attest to this squandering is the current accusation of the House of Representatives on the misappropriation of #9billion. This allegation led to an open exchange of blows at the floor of the House. The speaker was also accused of purchasing cars worth #2.3 billion in 2008 as well as buying special vehicles worth #335million for the leadership of the lower chamber of the National Assembly. Other items such as television sets, photocopiers and so on were said to have been purchased at inflated costs. (See Abimboye and Agbaegbu 2010)

The oppressions of the masses have resulted to many of the Nigerian youths resorting to crimes. For instance, the wave of kidnap and robbery in the Southern-Eastern part of Nigeria is carried out by the youths there. Nigerian newspaper, (Newswatch, 2010) gives an account by the assistant commissioner of police and police public relations, “the crave for money is the root of crime in the South-East”. And also, the Edo state Police Commissioner says, Edo state recorded an average of five to six cases of kidnapping daily. In Abia state, kidnapping and other crime are on the increase. Umen Kalu who is the state Attorney-General and Commissioner of Justice claim there is a political linkage to the crime rate in the state. He blames some politicians for grooming and giving arms to young boys towards elections particular in 2011.

Since the leaders are involved in these crimes, there is the need to be re-oriented on what true leadership is and how can it be adopted as leadership style by leaders?

The Servant-Leadership Concept (Matthew 20:20-28, Luke 22:24-27)

Matthew 20:20-28:

20: Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. 21. And he said to her, “what do you want?” she said to him, “declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right and one at your left, in your kingdom. 22. But, Jesus answered, “you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup I am about to drink. They said to him, “we are able” 23. He said to them, “you will indeed drink my cup but to sit at my right hand at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my father. 24. When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. 25. But Jesus called them to him and said, “you know that the rulers of the Gentiles Lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them” 26. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, 27. And whoever wishes to be the first among you must be your slave. 28. Just as the son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Revised Standard version)

Luke 22:24-27:

24. A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. 25. But, he said to them, the King of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves. 27. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serve? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Revised Standard version)

An Exegesis of the Passages

Matthew's gospel gives in detail the reason for the strife that is being referred to in Luke's gospel. Nwaomah (2003) says the details in Matthew 20:20-30 revolves around two significant Christology themes. First is "the recognition that Jesus as the teacher holds answers to the way of salvation and eternal life." Second is his public declaration of his mission to substitute for death on man's behalf and followed by the challenge to emulate him in humble and selfless services." Matthew states that the request was made by the mother of Zebedee's children which probably is Salome (Barnes, 2004) Some scholars posit that she was an ambitious woman who was desirous to see her sons honored; she thought she could manipulate the Jesus to appoint her sons as leaders. Others say the inclusion of the mother was as a latter addition (Black and Rowley, 2010). A further exegesis shows the disciples only thought Jesus leadership was limited to a temporal kingdom on earth but Jesus told them it was connected with his later glory. Jesus made reference to a cup to be taking in order to occupy leadership position. This cup according to him signifies suffering.

The sons of Zebedee said they were willing to partake of the suffering and this was fulfilled at the various stages of their lives. James was slain with the sword of Herod in Acts 12:2 while John was banished to the Island of Patmos, a solitary island for the testimony of Jesus Christ which he bore in Revelation 1:9. Jesus did not promised them seats in his kingdom as they requested for the reason that only "Jesus' Father" alone could do that according to his purpose for each disciple.

When the other disciples heard about the request of the sons of Zebedee, they were offended at their ambitious attitude to be exalted above the other disciples. Jesus responded with a call to all of them, and he taught them intrinsic principles for leadership. He first explained how the human government runs. The kings of the earth put their favorites in positions of power and give authority to some over others but in the kingdom of Christ, everyone is equal. He added that the most distinguished person must show humility through serving others.

A careful study of the statement of Jesus shows the use of the following Greek verbs *katakurieuousin* and *katexousiazousin*. *Kata* which is the prefix was added to the words *kurieuousin* and *exousiazousin* for emphasis on the domineering tendencies of a leader. Such leader operates as a highly powerful authority above those governed. It is like a master-servant relationship. Jesus prohibits this kind of relationship among his followers rather; the person who wants to be a leader must be the servant in his leadership position. This was demonstrated when the church was instituted after the demise of Christ by his disciples in Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The disciples created the office of the minister or deacon known in Greek as *diakonos*. The deacon in the primitive church was to serve in the love feast and to take care of the poor widows, orphans, prisoners and the sick; to also provide for them out of the revenues of the church. It was the lowest but important ecclesiastical office. The office of the deacon was a replica of the office of the Doulos at the time of the disciples and it was the lowest secular office as the deacon is the lowest ecclesiastical office.

The account in Luke 22:25 centers on leaders as benefactor. The word benefactor in the Greek word is *euergetai* the plural of *euergetes* which means a well doer or benefactor. (Adams 2004). According to Hendricksen (1979) a benefactor in the ancient world had clients who were to appreciate their lower positions while glory and honor went to the leaders. Bock (1994) also explains the Greek word *euergetai* as the surname of some Egyptian Ptolemies such as the Ptolemy Euergetes. In the Roman world, benefactors are soldiers who were given lands after any conquest. It was a custom among the ancient Romans to distributed part of the lands which they had conquered to the frontiers of the empire to their soldiers; those who enjoyed such lands were called, benefited persons and the lands themselves were termed *beneficia*, benefices as being held on the beneficence of the sovereign (Adams, 2004)

Jesus and his style of leadership

Jesus gives a different meaning to the secular attribution of materialism to the benefactor. He makes it clear that being great is not defined by position, resume, and material but by attitude and service. He further points them to his exemplary life. He was in the form of God as stated in Philippians 2:6 but he appeared in the form of a servant. Jesus lived a humble life among his people and labored for them by doing good, providing them food, healing the sick and raising the dead. See Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 9:13-17; 8:38-42 and 49-56; John 11 respectively.

Though Jesus was a leader, he fared poorly as his people did, he suffered with them and practices self-denial on their account and finally he laid down his death for the ransom of the sinners when he was crucified unjustly. The ransom of sinners gives a different interpretation to the physical works of Christ. His work was not merely physical which consist of healing the sick, meeting needs or suffering injustice but the following sheds light to the other significance of his works.

The word “ransom” literally means a price paid for the redemption of captives. In war, when prisoners are taken by an enemy, the money demanded for their release is called a ransom; that is, it is the means by which they are set at liberty. So, anything that releases anyone from a state of punishment or suffering or sin is called ransom. (Bock, 1994)

In essence, the work of Jesus Christ extends to the salvation of humanity and the world at large. He gave his life to rescue his people from destruction and the world of sin and death. The Disciples of Christ in the same manner are to live for others and if need be die for them. (Barnes 2004)

Jesus’ Leadership Model and the Desired Leadership Transformation in Nigeria

As described above, the model of Jesus of leadership is the servant-leadership model and transformational. It is in the opinion of this paper since it is transformational in nature, it could be adopted by the leaders of Nigerian nation in the making and execution of policies at all levels. As Utomi (2010) says, leadership in transformation needs knowledge and sense of service. As exhibited by Jesus, leadership should be others’ centered and not “me, myself and I” (Alexander and Pat 2000) like it is in leadership in Nigerian society today.

The leadership model of Jesus requires commitment to the greater good for the benefit of all citizens. Leaders in this model have good listening skills, they seek to understand others and they can hear the unspoken. They are courageous, compassionate with integrity and they have groomed themselves in readiness for the leadership position. Like Jesus, they have positive goal in connection to the people. Itiola (2010) gives further details of what the leadership model of Jesus consist of; freedom of association, freedom of expression and discipline. Jesus was humble, compassionate, accessible, confident, people oriented, disciplined, provider of solutions to people’s problems. Personally, a good leader in this model is a good manager of his emotions, time, priorities, energy, words and personal life. He is a good thinker who attends to events with focus and excellence. A minute of thinking is often valuable than an hour of talk or unplanned work (Maxwell 2005). Nigerians cannot wish for more than all these qualities in their leaders and their leadership style.

With all these, the outcome will be the rise to new breed of leaders and the growth and development of the people and society

Recommendations from the study

In view of the findings juxtaposed, the following are suggestions that will enable a servant-leadership attitude in the Nigeria society and global world at large.

- Servant –leadership trainings should start from the home.

- To achieve Jesus leadership style, each leader should read, study and live by the examples Jesus.
- Both existing and intending leaders should be compelled to attend leadership trainings before being sworn into governance
- Nigerian leadership should give more attention to meeting the people's basic needs which include food, shelter, housing and clothing
- The masses should be given avenues to oblige leaders to provide for their basic amenities.
- People should be allow not cajoled to vote for the person they desire as leaders
- Favoritism and god-fatherism that portrays Nigeria model of leadership should be eradicated. Jesus did not permit favoritism in his leadership.

Conclusion

The leadership model in Nigeria as observed in this study is one of corruption, inhumane activities, lack of integrity, tyrannical with elections not free and fair and citizens suffering in the midst of plenty. The servant-leadership style as lived and taught by Jesus has been adequately explained to solve the poor leadership state. Nigerian leaders should adopt the attitude of service for the masses like Jesus lived. His leadership style as an effective leader which is worthy of emulation consist of godliness, love, integrity, stability, diplomacy, decisiveness, vision, sociability, perceptiveness and wisdom. These are universal human values that cut across all nations. There is the need for a new Nigeria and the birth of new nation that requires charismatic leaders who are willing to serve in love.

We conclude this piece with a summary of the kind of leader (s) desired for Nigeria:

Regardless of culture and time, a great leader is remembered for his or her charisma, which means "divinely inspired gift" in Greek. Charismatic leaders have profound effects on followers. Through their exception inspirational and verbal ability; they articulate ideological goals and missions. They communicate to followers with passion and inspiration, set an example in their own behaviors and demand hardwork and commitment from followers. They are above and beyond normal expectations.

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