



EXPLORING THE POTENCY OF RELIGION FOR LEADERSHIP CHANGE IN NIGERIA: CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Leadership as a concept is very significant and fundamental in human relationships and it is central to the ordering in the society. The success and achievements of an organization, group or society to a great extent is proportional to the prevailing leadership abilities. When leaders do their work effectively, people in the society are challenged, inspired, enabled, molded and encouraged, bringing about positive change in the society. This work thus examines the society through analytical approach coupled with consultations from other relevant literatures and exploration of examples of leaders in the Bible. It was observed that leaders need to be role models in all ramifications, stakeholders in the academic and spiritual realms need to inculcate building of effective leadership in their tenets and institutions as core lessons for the next generations; there exist sharp contrasts between biblical leaders and secular ones.

Hence, it is imperative that religious leaders and adherents (Christians inclusive) should be extraordinarily different

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in their leadership roles, should not allow their religious beliefs to jeopardize their actions in the society. Again, role model leaders and their tenets exemplified in Bible days should be incorporated in the nation's curriculum as core topics and subject.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is fundamental to human relations and central to the ordering of the society, hence it is a significant concept in human endeavours. The success and achievements of an organization, group or society to a great extent, is proportion to the prevailing leadership. Behind every successful enterprise or a society is a group of competent leaders. When leaders do their leadership work effectively, people in the society are challenged, inspired, enabled, modelled and encouraged. Leadership is both a technical science and a sensitive art. It is concerned with group goals and needs as well as the people of a particular society or organization. Cohen (1990:10) says. "Leadership has an extraordinary power. It can make the difference between success and failure in anything ycfu do for yourself or any group you belong to."

It is instructive to itate that the potency of religion as an instrument of good governance/leadership as exemplified in the tenets of most religions is yet to be explored in Nigeria. It has therefore become imperative to attempt a reorientation of peoples' perspective of leadership from the religious point of view. This paper therefore, is set to explore the possibilities of religion in the reorientation of the Nigerian citizens and leaders towards leadership change. This is done with a view to engender good leadership which is the change agenda of the present government in Nigeria. Thus, effort is put in place in the present study to explore religion and its potency for leadership change in Nigeria. Leadership prowl and expectations from a successful leader and its implications for leadership change in Nigeria; leadership styles; biblical allusion of model leaders and leadership change interplay.,

It is therefore instructive to note Maxwell (1995) saying that "everything rises and falls on leadership." Reasons for this cannot be far-fetched, truly many people have ideas of what a good leadership is and should be, but finding such acceptable examples is now a rear thing. Some people became leaders in spite of their weaknesses and others became leaders because of their weaknesses. Today, there are many babies in the corridors of power who lead only for their own selfishness and personal glorification. Many people now have bad and corrupt version or orientation of leadership which has given birth to a bad and corrupt

society. It is obvious, for example, in the case of Nigeria that the present state of the society is a reflection of the nation's leadership.

Religion and Its Potency for Leadership Change in Nigeria

Religion is an important feature of human existence that cannot ordinarily be underplayed. The history of humanity is replete with man's adherence to various supernatural injunctions. Such injunctions have aided socio-educational development, interpersonal and international cooperation. Religion can be seen as a double edged sword. Religion can either make or mar, depending on how it is used nevertheless, if well harnessed, the religiosity of Nigerians as an example, can be used to foster a transformational leadership that can bring about a peaceful and good changes in the society. To this, Okereke (1983) also submits that religion is a link between man and God and it is the sum total of man's relation with God and the transcendent. Religion is human interaction with the supernatural in order to cope with life's crises; it is really a social Phenomenon which has both philosophical and social dimensions. The advantage of religious involvement in leadership is to ensure peace and blessings of God in the society since no society could survive without God and His laws. The more reason why Onwuka (2004) submits that every religion has inherent changes in it, all that makes for peace and progress. Ekong (1988) views religion as fulfilling certain universal functions such as the promotion of group solidarity or religion is a cultural possession strengthening moral order and promotion of social control and support for other social organizations like schools, hospitals and other welfare agencies. Religion, no doubt is a force to be reckoned with in the life of the individuals and the nation at large. This is because it is a tool that can provide inspiration and change to the people in the society to unite and fight social upheavals, moral decadence, leadership and promote economic development through hard work. Also, religion prepares both the individual and the society for a good leadership, thereby brings positive changes to the society.

Religion teaches happiness, love and respect for its followers while on earth and ensures that man attain his ultimate wall or help in building good citizens who can later emerge as good leaders and contribute meaningfully to the development and positive changes of the society.

Reiterating this, Okebukola (2012) submits that religion maintains that all human beings are equal in the sight of God and considers every human person as a special creation of God. It also condemns corruption, dishonesty, injustice, nepotism, kidnapping and disrespect to constituted authority.

Religion has played great roles in the transformation of the society and still has a great role to play in different ways. Religion has a powerful influence on the activities of members of the society whether they are Christians, Muslims or African traditional worshippers. Also, religion regulates the conduct and behaviour of people in the community and preaches vital virtues needed in the society in order to ensure a transformational leadership. This simply means that if and when the adherents of • these religions live strictly by the tenets of their religions, there shall be a reorientation of people's perspective on leadership which in turn will lead to a peaceful and progressive society.

Buttressing the foregoing, Okereke (1983) submits that the religious involvement in leadership activities will ensure the building of God's Kingdom on earth and His involvement in the affairs of men. In other words, if there are good and godly leaders and if governance is to be what God wants it to be, God fearing leaders who could work for the general welfare of the people of a given society, religions must be inculcated in the process of choosing such leaders because religion is the anchor of any society and the custodian of the ethics of such people.

Prowels and Expectations from a Successful Leader: Implications For Leadership Change in Nigeria

Behind every successful enterprise is a group of competent leaders. When leaders do their best, they challenge, inspire, enable, model and encourage citizens. God's people merit good leadership and the society deserves the best leaders. Leaders set the example in their homes, their personal lives and in their spiritual lives. The saying "like priests, like people" underscores how people became like those above them. Leaders have power and influence beyond what is written in their job descriptions.

Leadership is both people and programmes. A leader works with people, is responsible for them and is accountable to them. But a leader is also

responsible for the programmes of the institution or organization. Goals and standards must be maintained. Institutional goals, aims and objectives are to be a concern of the leader. Also, leadership is both an art and a science. As a science it is goals, structures, policies, times, boards and committees. Leaders as an art refers to personality, beliefs, convictions and people skills. Any organization without proper leadership is doomed for failure. Leaders gives vision and organisation to a group of people; they help maintains order and stability they uphold standards and organizational goals and they are God's way of shepherding His people.

Foundational Christian leadership has two directions. The first is towards God and the second is towards people. Leaders are supposed to glorify God and the second is towards people. Leaders are supposed to glorify God in the foundational leadership that is directed towards God. They set their minds on things above, seek first the kingdom of God and be pleasing to God. Towards the people a leader is to be loving and nurturing. The danger is not holding these two directions in proper harmony. Leaders get out of balance by an over focus on one thus becoming deficient in the other. Being over fearful of people and not fearing God is more common than the other way around. Rarely is someone over focused on God. Albeit, the aforementioned leadership provels from both secular and religious points of view are ingredients of leadership change.

There are many formulas for defining success in leadership. It may be better education, better skills training or better inner life. The leader must balance many personality, cultural, educational, and situational factors to be successful. Warren Bennis (1989:189) believes there are five qualities which need to be found in a leader. These qualities include: Technical Competence: This is an ability to manage things and tasks in a skilled manner. Goals, schedules, and meetings are all part of the technical skills of leadership, otherwise the organisation will not run smoothly; People Skills which is an ability to communicate and work with a variety of different people. People are the heart of any society and will cause the success or failure of the work. Leaders get things done through people and need to help them feel a part of the organization. Cohen (1990) s.tates that: "Leadership has to do with getting things

accomplished by acting through others. Regardless of your own abilities, there are many important goals that you cannot attain without the help of others."

Other qualities are skills which are the to see the big picture. A leader must remind himself or herself of the overall goals of the organization. He must be able to see where all the small pieces fit into the bigger picture. This also relates to problems and an ability to visualize a way out of a problem; judgment which denotes a learned ability to quickly assess the opinions of others, assess the situation and then make clear judgement. A leader does not always have to be right, but should be willing to make decisions even if they lead to a wrong result on occasions and character which relates to the success of any leader. Character is the moral foundation of a person. It is what guides him in making decisions (Bennis, 1989:189). All these attributes are essential for leaders in the present dispensation.

Furthermore, one other needful quality for successful leadership is that of leadership and time. Leaders are expected to have a broad view of time. This includes the past, present and future. Workers are often more interested in 'today' and neglect the historic purposes of the organisation as well as the future direction of the organization or society. The past is important in Africa especially Nigeria. People know their history and their ancestors much better than Westerners. They also have a sense of the society's history concerning its origin and purposes. The past is well remembered and respected in Africa and this natural interest in the past influences churches, schools and denominations. Leaders must refresh themselves occasionally with meditation on the historic purposes of their society, thus a focus on the past. People who look back know their organizational roots.

The present seems to consume most of a leader's time. Pressures of salaries, health, benefits, crises, accidents, emergencies all have the potential of giving a leader too much stress and a present focus. Additional meetings, counseling, travel all take more and more time. These items must be attended to because a leader lives in the present not the past or than future. But leaders must learn to control the present by setting priorities based on the historic purposes of the organization and future directions.

The future is the direction a leader must walk in the leader is the best person to look ahead for organizational direction. The leader is the only one with the power to shape direction and set a course to meet organizational goals. The most significant contributions leaders make is not to today's bottom-line, but to long-term development of people and society who prosper and grow. A knowledge of the past, a plan for the present, and vision for the future will take a leader a long way in any society (Janvier and Thaba, 2014:26). This is germane to effective leadership and leadership change perspective in Nigeria.

Leadership Styles

Leaders do not possess the same attitude or perspective. Leaders do not get things done in the same manner and their styles vary. Leadership styles vary with the kind of people the leader interacts and deals within the society. Various scholars categorize leadership styles in different ways. For instance, Bingham and Loessner (1972) classify leadership styles as the autocratic, laissez fair and the democratic. Blanchard (1985) suggest four styles: directing, coaching, supporting and delegating. Lee (1989) lists them as: authoritarian, laissez-faire and participative. Adetunji (2010) classify them as authoritarian, laissez-faire, bureaucratic, charismatic and democratic.

To Bingham and Loessner (1972) the autocratic leader believes in centralizing everything within himself, making all the major decisions and taking very few people into his confidence. He gives orders and expects them to be obeyed. He believes that authority and responsibility are his alone. He usually becomes insecure in his office and does not trust others. He may be willing to delegate responsibility but refuses to share the authority. They contend that the democratic leader is one who sees himself as a guide and counselor. He does not plan programmes or set objectives for a group by himself. Rather, he helps the group define and achieve its objectives. He seeks to get his followers to work with him not for him. His characteristics include: (i) helps involve people and leads to the growth of the members of the group; (ii) brings about a permissive climate which allows persons to be themselves and to express their true feelings, (iii) gets results along with building happy working conditions; (iv) has • respect for human personalty, (vi) believes that minorities have

rights as well as majority and (vii) is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of the group.

The laissez faire leader, according to Bingham and Loessner (1972) is happy to accept the status conferred upon him as a leader, but unwilling to perform the tasks of his office. The leader very poor at planning or offering guidance to others. Whatever comes naturally is all right with him. Policy is 'hands off.' He believes that eventually someone will come around and do what needs to be done. He might be termed a democratic leader in neutral sense.

Blanchard (1985) suggests four leadership styles: directing, coaching, supporting and delegating. In directing, the leader provides specific instructions and closely supervises task accomplishment. In coaching, the leader continues to direct and closely supervises task accomplishment, but also explains decisions, solicits suggestions and supports progress. In supporting he facilitates and supports subordinates' efforts towards task accomplishment and shares responsibility for decision-making with them. In delegating the leader turns over responsibility for decision-making and problem-solving to subordinates. Blanchard suggests how a leader decides which style of leadership to use as this is determined by the development level of the followers, the follower's competence and commitment, ranging in each case from low to high to viable.

Dale (1986) identifies four leadership styles: the catalyst, commander, hermit and encourager. The commander style of leadership tends to be too autocratic. The hermit leader tends to be too withdrawn, and the encourager leader is a counselor and a friend but often not strong in management skills. The catalyst is the most effective in building a team-driven church. Great leaders never forget the people who make their leadership possible. Thus the catalyst leader creates from these friends a strong command and a team agenda.

Lee (1989) groups his leadership styles as: authoritarian, laissez-faire and participative. He says the authoritarian style makes the decisions and directs the implementation of the plan without the participation of others. Thus he consults with others and even works for a consensus, but few votes are taken. He makes most of the decisions and announces them as he sees fit. This leader is usually seen as strong and decisive. The

laissez-faire leader is no leadership style at all. Leaders of this style wait for the group to initiate and decide, offering little if any perspective or information, seldom of ever making suggestions or recommendations. They would typically be seen as 'weak' or 'poor' leaders. The participative style invites and welcomes the participation of others in the decision-making process. A shortcoming of this style is in inefficiency, since time consumed often far exceeds the importance of the matter at hand.

Adetunji's (2010) classification of leadership styles entails: authoritarian, laissez-faire, bureaucratic, charismatic and democratic. He submitted that the authoritarian derives vested authority through his office more than from personal attributes. He seeks very little participation from the group in terms of participation in decision making. Adetunji portrayed the laissez-faire as lacking direction because the leader does not help in making decisions. Bureaucratic leadership style is based on a system of rules, policies and procedures to solve all problems. This system is well organized.

The charismatic style focuses attention on the leader. The leader seems to possess a certain charisma (divine gift) to be inspired by supernatural powers. Democratic leadership style is generally described as the government of the people by the people and for the people. In this style, all policies derive from group decisions where the leader does not dominate group actions. The choice of any or combination of some of the aforementioned styles is imperative for leadership change in the present time.

Biblical Allusion of Model Leaders and Leadership Change Interplay

The knowledge of the Bible story itself was the first essential background in Christian leadership (Preston, 1934). The best source for this is the Bible. For instance it was the contention of Dimkmeyer (1996) that the Old Testament highlights examples of leadership of those with seemingly no power under the authority of repressive regimes, yet who influenced those in the authority to change the world. Maxwell (1995) in *The 21st Most Powerful Minutes in a Leader's Day* argued that the Bible is the greatest leadership book ever written. It is proven to be very useful to use the Bible for leadership lessons and it will continue to be so. What makes the Bible even more useful for learning leadership lessons is that

it conveys those principles largely through the real life stories of real people. People usually learn more easily from specific examples than from abstract propositions.

Similarly, Adetunji (2010) affirms that Jethro-Moses judicial leadership model is one of the early biblical models of leadership problem-solving approach. Moses learned to share leadership with others under the tutelage of his father-in-law, Jethro. Jethro's advice was instrumental in helping Moses to move from being a 'workaholic leader to an effective administrator' in his time. Moses managed by exception. The fact that this model originated with Jethro presupposes that the Medianites, one of the Kenitribe, already had a very good administrative system. Adeogun (2009) earlier on submits that "Yahweh seems to endorse transformational leadership in the way He 'chose leaders for the people of Israel because He dethrones a leader and appoints new ones." Thus, the Old Testament demonstrates that leadership begins with divine appointment and not by voting.

Moses in the Old Testament was a popular leader. It is said that because Moses was brought up as an Egyptian prince, he received the best education in many spheres of life and was said to be one of the three mostly highly educated characters in the Bible apart from« Isaiah and Paul. Most Bible scholars agree that Moses exhibited attribute of servant leadership. He was measured as a standard for living (John 6:30). Stephen commented on him thus: "and Moses was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). Some excellent qualities inherent in Moses are expected of the leaders today hi both the church and the nation at large as antidote for good governance that is of repute is Joshua.

Another servant-leader in the Old Testament was Joshua. Much was discovered about his early life, but he was identified as Moses' minister (Jos. 1:1). In his leadership qualities, he did more than fighting the battle of Jericho. Mosley (1997) considers {he exploit of Moses in leadership and imagines how one can replace a better leader with those credentials today. Joshua's name was mentioned first in Exodus 17:8-16 hi the battle as the Israelite general, as long as Moses' hands were held up by Aaron and Hur, Joshua continued to win over Amalek. He was also a representative of the tribe of Ephraim in spying out of Canaan (Num. 13:8, 16). He was commissioned before Moşes' death as his successor

(Num. 27:18-23; Deut. 31:7- 29). "He was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him and the children of Israel listened to him, and did what the Lord had commanded Moses" (Deut 34:9, NIV). Some of the leadership qualities in Joshua include: endowment of 'the Spirit, spirit of firmness - Joshua and Caleb stood firm on the side of. possibility while others were in the opposite (Num. 14:6-9; 13:32).

In like manner, Nehemiah, undoubtedly, is a prominent leader in the Old Testament. He was the rebuilder of the Jerusalem walls after the efforts of Zerubabel and Ezra who ruled before him. Nehemiah, according to Mosley (1979) was "a man was willing to become a leader willing to be weak or strong, as submissive or as controlling, as fearful or as brave as an effective leadership required, situation moved him to the heart to, become a leader of people into restoration." Mosley used the acronym, FAST to describe Nehemiah. This acronym represents Faith, Action, Skill and Tenacity. Such qualities are expected of national leaders today.

Moreso, mention can be made of Paul the Apostle as another leader from the New Testament dispensation. He served in the New Testament era. He served as a leader in the whole Christendom at large and will continue to make meaning in Christianity. Being highly educated, he could be regarded as a professor of law, theology and philosophy and among the three best highly learned Bible characters: Moses, Isaiah and Paul (Acts 9:8; Adetunji, 2010). Paul met with Christ on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-5) and being born in Tarsus gave some advantages to him by his family as citizen as speculation has it. Paul was an unusual leader with unusual gifts especially with consideration to his last speech to his son in the Lord (II Tim. 4:6-8). Throughout the New Testament, the epistles stand as the basis of Paul's leadership qualities. Prominent in such .qualities are: commitment to specific mission, concern .for others more than self, capacity for meaningful relationship, superior perception, confidence in himself and in Christ, a leader with positive attitude, a sense of limitless horizons, and a man of high spiritual awareness by his experience and devotional life.

Leadership style that could be of help to leadership perspective and change in Nigeria today is found in Jesus Christ. The more reason why Bennis (1989) avers that the world's way of leadership is not the same as God's way. The world's incorrect concept of leadership is that of 'one

person' exerting control, exercises authority and power. Thus, the leader is .seen as either a person of superior intelligence and creativity or person who possesses unusual skills or traits of personality that draw attention to himself. The fact is that there is a fundamental difference between leadership as practiced by the world and that practiced by God's people.

Reiterating this fact, Matthew 20:25-26 draws attention to Christian leadership as follows: "Jesus called his disciples together and said, you know the rulers of the heathen have power over them, and their leaders have complete authority. This however, is not the way it shall be among you." Jesus laid emphasis on the servanthood as key to leadership. Little wonder, Bennis continued emphasis of Jesus .as the perfect leader. His life and teachings from the viewpoint of leadership form a solid foundation for biblical leadership. Jesus himself summarizes His concept very forcefully: "If one of you will want to be great, he must be the servant of the rest, and if one of you want to be first, he must be the slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44). The big question is, who among our leaders are ready for such selfless service? This is the bane of good leadership in the present dispensation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The work has examined the concept of leadership, Christian religious leadership, biblical examples of leaders, e.g. Jethro, problem-solving leader; Joshua, servant leader; Nehemiah, rebuilders of Jerusalem and Jesus Christ the teacher per excellence; leadership prowess and qualities as well as leadership styles; all these with their implications for the current society. It is now imperative to give some recommendations.

In order to ensure effective leadership in Nigeria, the religious groups must play prominent roles which involve the teaching of religious virtues especially of biblical leaders of repute in places of worship. There is therefore, the need for religious leaders to teach their adherents what their religions demand and insist that the right thing be done by their followers. The teachings should not end at theoretical 'phase, but be translated into proper actions by both the religious leaders and their adherents. Through this, a better society will be ensured with positive changes.

Stakeholders in the academic and spiritual realms should inculcate how to build an effective leadership in their tenets and institutions as core lessons for the younger generations. Christian leaders, especially, should realize strongly that there is a very sharp contrast between them and secular leadership (Matt. 5:13, 16). It becomes mandatory that religious leaders and adherents of Christianity should be extraordinarily different in their leadership roles in that their belief must pass through them. Today's leaders should follow good examples of our past leaders who were not selfish and had created legacy. Quality character and moral uprightness are essential in the lives of our leaders. Similarly, role model leaders as exemplified by Bible days should be incorporated into the nation's curriculum as core subject.

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