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Abstract

The growth, development, progress and success of any organization or nation depends on her leadership. A peaceful society is a reflection of good leadership. On the other hand, a conflicting society portrays the type of leadership governing such a society, whether a good leader or a bad one. This is clearly seen in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, which is confronted with several challenges such as poverty, insecurity, politico-economic instability and conflict, among many others. It is of note that the myriad problems in human society are leadership, many of whom are devoid of the understanding of the principles of good leadership; thus, they become selfish, corrupt, greedy, transparent, cruel, and lack genuine love for the people they are leading or governing. The thrust of this paper is a call for the understanding of the principles of good leadership using Jesus Christ as a model. The paper discovered that a major problem facing human society is the lack of good leadership. The paper recommends that leaders imbibe principles of good leadership used by great religious leaders such as Jesus Christ to have a good and desirable society.

Keywords: Principle, Good, Leadership, Good Leadership, Model, and Jesus.

Introduction

In every successful organisation or enterprise, there is a group of competent people who lead. Such ones are known or seen as leaders. Leadership has become very loud or popular in every arena of human endeavour, especially among professionals and businesses, as well as in the religious arena. The reason for this is not farfetched. This is because they realised that only effective leadership can lead to effective organisation. The yearning or cry of the nation today is for effective leadership. There are crops of leaders in the Bible who could serve as models for today's leaders. As noted by Joyce Wereko-Bobby, "even though the Bible was not written as a management manual, it offers many principles and models to help leaders serve their people more sensitively and effectively."¹ But this can only be so if leaders understand the principle of leadership.

Principle

The question which may rightly come into the inquisitor's mind is: what is principle? The word principle is defined by the *Advance English Dictionary* to mean a basic generalisation that is accepted as true and that can be used as a basis for reasoning or conduct.² It has to do with rules or standards, especially that of good behaviour. It can also connote the rule of personal conduct. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* holds that Principle is: (1) A moral rule or a strong belief that influences your actions; (2) a law, a rule or a theory that something is based on; (3) a belief that is accepted as a reason for acting or thinking in a particular way; (4) a general or scientific law that explains how something happens.³

These definitions are all relevant to our discussion. Principle is a basis for one's actions. It is the guiding force or influence upon which one builds his philosophy and ways of doing things. It is the rudiments or elements of any art, science, or discipline; for example, in Hebrews 6:1 (KJV), the word "Principle", which is from Greek *arche*, refers to the fundamentals of the doctrine of Christ. The NIV refers to it as

“elementary truth” and “elementary teachings”. Principle is the bedrock for action. A “no” principle cannot be a leader or a good leader.

Leader

A leader is a person who leads a group of people, an organisation, a country, etc. However, there are many perspectives on the definition of a leader. According to Oluwasegun, “a leader is not a boss; he or she is not the one with a title. He or she is not the one with the biggest mouth or the strongest opinions”⁴. A leader influences others. The influence could be good or bad, depending on what controls the leader. Oluwasegun notes that:

leaders who are controlled by their egos and ultimately by satanic powers use people to achieve their own goals. When these goals are achieved they lead people astray, sometimes even to death. Example of such leader was Jimmy Jones of the People’s Temple Movement who having exerted influence on many people eventually led them to a camp in Guyana where they all committed suicide⁵.

It is also of note that leaders who are influenced by God serve the people whom they lead, and their greatest desire is what is best for the people, which includes what will build them up and what will make them excel. George sees “leader as one who mobilises, a person whose focus is influencing people; he is goal driven and has orientation in common with those who rely upon him for leadership and he has people willing to follow them.”⁶ Therefore, a leader is someone with functional competencies and elitism that cannot be denied. The elitism is a winning magnetism. The quality of this magnetism Calvin Miller notes “is most attractive in the leader who is not cocky or oversold on his charisma. He is psychologically secure with no need to “toot” his own horn”. Even though he seems not to see it, or at least not to dwell on it, his leadership proclaims itself.”⁷ Kefas Kulani, quoting John R. Mott, posits that “a leader is a man who knows the road, who can keep ahead, and who can pull others after him.”⁸ A leader is seen as a person with the ability to get other do what they don’t want to do but like it. James I. Ukpe and Samuel A. Gbinde note that leaders have the charisma to make others see and act toward the vision.⁹ This means that the leader receives a share of the vision and passes on the vision.

Leadership

Leadership has become a prevalent issue in government circles and the church. According to Lord Montgomery, as quoted by Kefas, “leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose, and the character which inspires confidence.”¹⁰ Charles Van Engen asserts that “Leadership is a corporate event.”¹¹ Joyce opines that leadership is not position, though it can enhance leadership. Leadership is not personality but the authority invested in a given position. Leadership is not lordship. He notes that “Jesus knew that power can be intoxicating, and so He not only taught His disciples about the need to see leadership as service...”¹² Leadership is not genetic. Leaders are made – not born. In citing E. Schumacher, Joyce maintains that “development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organisation and discipline. Without these three, resources remain latent, untapped potential.”¹³ It is of note that every leadership opportunity has a beginning and an end.

Leadership Styles

Leaders use many leadership styles in their leadership positions as they govern, man, control or rule their domains. Some of the leadership styles include authoritarian, laissez-faire, and democratic.

- (a) Authoritarian: An authoritarian leader frequently appeals to the position of authority when exercising his role. Such a leader “rarely consults with others on the team and on few occasions, just to get a consensus, for any work, but few roles are taken”¹⁴. The authoritarian leader believes that people should obey authority and rules, even when these are unfair, even if it means they lose their freedom.¹⁵ This type of leader makes most decisions and announces

them to his subjects when necessary or appropriate. He is seen as an autocrat, i.e. “a ruler who has complete power, a person who expects to be obeyed by other people and does not care about their opinions or feelings”¹⁶

- (b) Democratic: In this leadership style, the leader believes that the best way to motivate people and make them work well is to involve them in decision-making. This collectivist approach results in a greater sense of group ownership, thus warranting the willingness to support decisions once they are made.
- (c) Laissez-faire (liberal): The term laissez-faire is a French word meaning “the policy of allowing private businesses to develop without government control.”¹⁷ Kefas notes that “this leadership style provides virtually no leadership at all. Such leaders give minimum direction and provide maximum freedom for group decision, taking a non-directive approach to decision making and administration.”¹⁸ Though this style allows everyone’s participation, it does not define the limit of freedom, so it becomes loose administration, and the leader is seen as a weak leader.

However, of all the leadership styles, scholars note that there are many best leadership styles because each has its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, leadership should be seen as a function involving many variables, and a single style is impracticable and ineffective.¹⁹ An effective leader adopts styles that respond to specific situations. Jesus exhibits a qualitative leadership style that should be emulated or imbibed by 21st-century leaders.

Principles of Jesus' Leadership

The life, teaching and service of Jesus Christ are well documented in the New Testament. Jesus Christ began his ministry at the age of thirty. For three and a half years, he built a formidable and outstanding ministry and leaders – disciples and apostles through whom Christianity spread throughout the world. Not only had His teaching on leadership served as guiding principles to His disciples but also to the present-day leaders in the Church and could be adopted or applied to any leadership position in all fields. What are the leadership principles of Jesus Christ?

1. Servant Leadership

Jesus, through His ministerial assignment, demonstrated a servant–leadership style of leading and serving people – humanity. As God incarnate, He had authority yet declared that He came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

Edmonson opines that Jesus practised servant leadership better than anyone.²⁰ As a servant, Jesus served both God and humanity. He obeyed God in everything and thus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, “Yet not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42), which was a humble submission to God and serving God’s purpose even in a time of great danger. Apart from community service, which He rendered through feeding more than four thousand people without counting Women and Children on one occasion (Mark 6:44) and five thousand people without counting women and children on another occasion (Mark 8:9), The healing of the sick, lame, lepers, deaf, blind, providing eye (sight) for the man born without eyeballs which could not be done medically and was beyond scientific explanation, the raising of the dead etc. His service to humanity, in general, cumulated on the cross by carrying the sin of humankind.

Jesus taught the disciples that greatness is embedded in service and, in fact, in servant–leadership. On one occasion, He picked a little child as a teaching aid to teach the disciples. He taught that whoever would be a leader, a great leader, must be like this child; whoever would be popular must be like a child (a lad).

In the African context, a child is everybody's servant in a traditional African setting. He becomes well known because everybody enjoys his service, though an errand boy whose services reach everyone in the village setting but popular.

Jesus, on another occasion, used children to teach on the needful characteristics and qualifications for entering the kingdom of God (Mark 10:14-16). Whoever wants to enter the kingdom of God must be like a child. There are some characteristics and ethical virtues seen in children that leaders are expected to have as they lead if they want to be admitted into God's kingdom as people who have served well in the hereafter. These Jesus emphasised and demonstrated.

In a graphical demonstration, Jesus washed His disciples' feet and told them to do likewise. John says Jesus "tied a towel around himself And began to wash the disciples' feet 'You call me Teacher and Lord and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet'" (John 13:3, 5:13-14).

Isaac succinctly notes that "Jesus taught that proper use of authority is for the service of other people. The leader has to demonstrate authority through servanthood. In this way, the leader would be a model and can influence those he or she is leading greatly".²¹ Citing Donald E. Messer's book, titled *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry*, concords that "The Servant Church is not deemed as an end in itself, but as a means to God's kingdom."²² This example Jesus has set for all.

2. Willingness to Invest in People

The selection of Jesus' disciples by Jesus Christ was for a purpose – a modelling purpose. When one considers the disciples, their background, status, etc., it becomes undeniable that they were not "religious" elite. Yet, Jesus used them to build His Church, which would become universal. For example, Kenneth notes, "Peter and John had not been trained in the rabbinic school, nor did they hold official positions in recognised religious circles."²³ What Jesus invested in them did not go unnoticed by the Sanhedrin, comprising the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes and high Priest. Luke, the author of Acts of the Apostles, records, "When they saw the courage of Peter and John, and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Jesus transformed the disciples from ordinary men to extraordinarily noble men. Jesus had the will to translate and transform the ignored ones, rejected and even outcasts, to become important and useful in society.

Jesus had, on many occasions, demonstrated His will to transform lives. Matthew reports, "When Jesus entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him" (Matthew 8:5-7). The centurion's servant was healed and freed from the grievous torment.

A leper once approached Jesus and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean' Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man, 'I am willing; He said. Be clean', immediately he was cured of his leprosy" (Matthew 8:2-3).

3. Delegation of Power

Jesus mobilised and equipped people for the work of the mission. He did not only call and select a group of people; He gave them a vision. He took responsibility for understanding, knowing fully that effective communication is essential; he taught them about the kingdom. He also shared his vision with them as they went from place to place, preaching the gospel and ministering to peoples' needs. Dare notes that "a shared vision of purpose and outcome, which is owned by all, is the key to achieving the

goal”²⁴ According to Dale Roach, the entire ministry of Jesus focused on the empowerment of others.²⁵ As noted by Lee Colan, it was the leadership style of Jesus to have others learn from Him by engaging, watching, and repeating His behaviour.²⁶ He first selected the twelve (Matthew 10:5ff) and later the seventy (Luke 10:1ff) and sent them to the field.

Robert Coleman says of Jesus that “everything he did and said was part of the pattern” (p.5).²⁷ Hull has classified this leadership style of Jesus or phase of ministry as the “be with me phase”.²⁸ Jesus empowered the disciples and sent them out on their own. Considering this pattern, no micro-management it appears.

4. Leadership Succession Plan

One of the outstanding leadership principles of Jesus was His succession plan. He purposefully prepared the disciples to take over the ministry. As He was training and developing them, He pushed them beyond what they were capable of doing, and He held them to high expectations. He was not timid to make high or huge demands of people. This was reflected in His statement “Follow Me”, which implies that the would-be successors (disciples) had to drop their agenda for that of Christ and be wholly willing to lose everything to follow Him.

Jesus consistently reminded His disciples of one unchanging fact: He would not always be with them, but still reassured them of His presence with them and the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14). Jesus was still the “leader”, no dispute on this, but He left others to take the ministry forward. Only a good leader who wants continuity in his work prepares a successor to take over. Wallace states that events of history reveal that transition in leadership can easily be the most traumatic event in any organisation’s history. He notes that “in every succession, the organisation’s credibility, momentum, vision and values are at risk. A poor transition can drain corporate energy and resources for years to come...Without a smooth succession, lasting success cannot be achieved. Some of the world’s leaders experienced great success, but their life accomplishments collapsed because they failed miserably at succession.”²⁹ Jesus successfully produced successors before His departure. He empowered and commissioned them (Mark 16:16-18).

Conclusion

Leadership is very germane to the success of the organisation. A leader is one that leads other. He is expected to be functional. Leadership is a ministry which must be rendered to humanity, but it can only be meaningful when the leader leads well and successfully produces successors to take over. This could only be when the leader applies meaningful principles of leadership. The world today clamours for leaders who can meet people’s physical, spiritual, economic and political needs. This kind of leadership style of Jesus surpasses that of any known world leader. This paper has examined four Leadership Principles of Jesus. There are numerous other principles of leadership used by Jesus, such as celebration of success in ministry, self – development and spending time with God in praying, etc., but due to the number of pages required all may not be exhausted. It is, therefore, of note that if today’s leaders could model after Jesus’ leadership styles, their services to humanity would be more meaningful to lives even after they might have departed.

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