

Christocentric Leadership Framework as Pattern for Democratic Leadership in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is a nation endowed with abundant human and natural resources. Despite this, she has not fared well in political leadership which adversely affects other sectors. Failure of the Nigerian state to advance appropriately is attributed to this negatively skewed leadership pattern with its attendant dysfunctions such as threats of insecurity, abuse of power, squabbles by the ruling class, apathy by the followership, desecration of the rule of law, neglect and utter abuse of the provisions of federal character, among others. There have nonetheless been various suggestions towards correcting this but to no avail. This paper provides the leadership framework of Jesus Christ which he demonstrated in his earthly ministry in theory and practice, as building blocks that would lead to the actualisation of the desire for good governance in Nigeria's democratic journey. It is posited that challenging the faulty status quo, understanding the mission of leadership, inspiring a new vision, enabling others to act, modelling the way, encouraging the heart, communication and consistency, would give leaders the purpose, passion and power to live and lead, combined with the critical elements of values, creativity, inclusiveness, initiative, change and conflict management. It is submitted that if the framework is understood and applied, the struggle for the satisfaction of the mundane would be less attractive and would in the long run, bring to an end the leadership incubus which the nation presently experiences in her democratic journey.

Keywords: Christocentric, Democracy, Leadership.

Introduction

Nigeria is blessed with enormous material and human resources but one area that she is benefit of the advantage of this human resource, is that of leadership. One undeniable fact was the unguarded military intervention in her history. This may have critically accounted for the arithmetic growth of Nigeria. However, since 1999 till date, Nigeria has been experiencing a democratic style of leadership. Put together, at sixty as an independent nation and a hundred and seven years as an amalgamated entity, Nigeria has seen more of opportunistic leaders, whose stock in trade is their personal comfort and

security, accentuated in self-centredness and greed. These exploitative and Rehoboam-like leaders are more on the scene than exemplary leaders. The Bible points out some important qualities of a good leader. These include the leader putting the interest of others ahead of him. This is the fact Jesus stressed in Mk 10:42-44. For the true leader, his primary concern is the welfare of others (followers) rather than his own comfort and prestige. The next point is that a good leader leads by example. Peter emphasized this in 1 Peter 2:21: *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps* (KJV).

The leader summons the necessary energy, galvanizes it, exerts it, takes the necessary risks and becomes vulnerable to others, for the sake of his people. The story is told of two leaders during one of England's many wars. While one of the armies was led by a king who stayed in the rear, directing his soldiers and observing the heat of the war from a hillside which overlooked the battlefield, the other army was led by the king personally. No wonder that this king, who risked his life like that of his soldiers, was the winner. It was the selfless leadership of the latter king that brought about the victory. Another fundamental fact is that a leader views himself as a servant of others. He is not like Rehoboam, who decided that the people would be his servants rather than being their servant. It was not a surprise that his kingdom was divided. Leadership that is based more on privileges than responsibilities is opportunistic and bound to fail. These form the basis for the issues to be discussed, using the leadership framework of Jesus: understanding others, accountability, wise use of time, succession, teamwork, mentoring and humility, as perfect model for all leaders in Nigeria, either as political juggernauts, economic big wigs or religious gurus, etc.

The Person of Jesus Christ

Jesus also called the Christ, was born in Israel over two thousand years ago. The import of His person is attested to by the dividing of the time of the year to mark His birth into BC (before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini-in the year of our Lord). He lived a traditional Jewish life for the first three decades of his life, working as a carpenter. According to an anonymous author,

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. Until He was thirty, He worked in a carpenters' shop... for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He wrote no books. He had no office. He never owned a home. He was never in a big city. He never travelled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness. The authorities condemned His teachings. His friends deserted Him... Nineteen centuries have come and gone, yet today, He is the crowning glory of the human race, the adored leader of hundreds of millions of the earth's inhabitants. All the armies that ever marched ... all the Navies that were ever assembled... all the parliaments that ever sat... all the rulers that ever reigned-combined-have not affected the life of man upon this earth so profoundly as that One Solitary Life.

Despite his attempts to keep a low profile, his fame continued to spread beyond His immediate vicinity. Described as the amazing man, James (1976) remarked that:

Patients stricken with the most baffling and incurable diseases were instantly healed by this mighty man. The lame leapt for joy, the dumb sang His praises, the blind saw with brilliant clarity. Those who writhed in pain one moment danced in jubilation the next. They came from everywhere—towns, villages, leper colonies; from mansions and hovels, from morning till night. Some came to be healed, some to listen, and others just to catch a glimpse of this amazing Person who had captivated the hearts of the people. His fame spread far and wide (11).

Different denominations however differ in their interpretation of the founder of their faith. Jesus to most Christians is more than a great prophet and teacher but the Son of God and Messiah, as the revelation in the flesh of the perfection of God as indicated in the fourth Gospel—he who has seen me has seen the Father (John 14:9). Christianity is predicated on the incarnation, the belief that God was in Christ, not in writing, doctrines, miracles, subjective experiences or sacramental forms but in his historic person, in Christ's spirit, word, life and death. Beyond being a model of religious experience, he is ever the leader, whose authority radiates in his teachings and lifestyle. In other words, considering his birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension to heaven, it is clear that he is an incomparable personality in all of human history and a unique leader among all leaders that have come and gone. As the greatest leader of all time, he epitomises the essence and embodiment of leadership. His life was an inspiration to scholars much more than did Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (taught by Plato). Artists like Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni known simply as Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci; poets such as Dante Alighieri, John Milton; and composers Franz Joseph Hayden, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, George Frideric Handel, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johann Sebastian Bach, Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, all did beautiful and inspiring pictures, poems and melody compositions about him.

It is an open secret that Jesus did not officially write any book, yet millions of books have been written about his life and teachings. As the Apostle John writes, “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (John 21:25). Jesus affected human society like no other and left an unmatched legacy today. During His earthly ministry, He preached, gathered, trained and taught twelve common men, with a mandate to go and do likewise. Emboldened to do this after receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), their footprints changed the course of history. As may be observed in the above position, he performed many miracles when he began His public ministry in his thirties but far above these, were His teachings and leadership style in theory and practice.

Concept of Leadership

The definitions of leadership are as numerous and varied as there are definers. Compared to love, it is what many people recognise but is not adequately defined, that is, it has no generally accepted definition. Meaning many things to different people, part of the problem arises from the orientation of the definers either as resources managers or theologians, etc. generally, leadership implies that there is a point person, one who emerges either by election, ascription or heredity, to oversee the affairs of a particular setting by way of persuasion, influence or inspiration. Secondly, that the group possesses some attitudes, behaviours, actions or activities that needed to be harnessed or galvanised towards a certain direction. Thirdly, there is need for the group members to work cooperatively and enthusiastically in achieving the set goals or meeting the desired target. As a human factor which binds people together, it motivates people towards goal attainment; it is not an end in itself but a means to an end.

According to the Nigerian Covenant study guide (1999), leadership possesses the attributes of blessing and curse bringing with it also admiration and respect. Leaders are thus under pressure and are tempted to what is wrong which explains why some are successful and others are not. These temptations include using their positions to build up their images, possessions and power. Orji (2014) offers explanations to this failure. He traced it to the process leading to the emergence of such leaders which he identified as unconventional means such as political talk shops and endless rhetoric. It is this that invariably affects their sense and passion for good governance, leading to irresponsible, irresponsive and ineffective leadership being experienced today.

It is acknowledged that there are styles of leadership covering all human endeavours. These include autocratic, bureaucratic, charismatic, democratic/participative, laissez faire, people/relations-oriented, servant, task-oriented, transactional and transformational (Robert-Okah, 2005; Adeogun, 2009; Okonkwo, 2020). Of interest here is the fact that one person can be a leader and a follower, depending on the situation. It is pertinent to point out here that leadership is not one size fits all. Often, the leader adopts or adjusts his style to fit a particular situation or a specific group. Thus, there is no water-tight relationship in the styles of leadership, as a leader could apply more than one style, depending on the situation and followership, in bringing about the dividends of good governance. The difference however lies in the leader's ability to know when and how to apply which. Going by this, it is clear that leadership involves command and control. The danger of this scenario arises if the leadership becomes uncoordinated and not subject to any check by any other body or organ. In such a situation, there could be anarchy or apathy on the side of the followership, as their might arise confusion in discerning whose interest is being pursued.

However, according to Alamu (2004), the concept of leadership is complex and dynamic; hence, it connotes assignment, effectiveness, responsibility, accountability, vision, character, productivity, persuasion and realization of targeted goals. For Peretomode and Peretomode (2001), basic qualities of leadership are a vision and set goals, taking reasonable risks, hiring of leaders, delegating authority and responsibilities,

sharing the glory of the organisation, taking responsibility, consistency, drive, decisiveness and judgement, emotional maturity, accessibility and approachability, initiative, integrity, adaptability, stamina, tolerance and human understanding, support to subordinates and effective communication.

Leadership is the quality to lead, guide, and conduct or direct a course of action, something or people. This means that leadership is core in every human endeavour. Every leader has a jurisdiction. While for the clergy, it is his parishioners, who look up to him for moral and spiritual guidance, for the politician, it is the voters to whom he would fulfil the manifesto he presented during his electioneering campaign.

As a process of influencing, it involves getting the people willingly do what must be done and do well what ought to be done. This process is however not unilateral as the people can equally influence the leader. This is where the managerial acumen of the leader comes in to play to ensure that the Biblical incidence of Saul and Samuel does not occur. In 1 Samuel 15: 15 Saul rather than take responsibility, pointed to the people as those who spared the best of the sheep and oxen for sacrifice to God against the instruction to totally destroy the Amalekites and their property.

Leadership in Nigeria

While acknowledging that the trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership, Achebe (1985) stated that Nigerian leaders are unwilling or unable to rise to the responsibility and challenge of personal example, which according to him, are the hallmarks of leadership. Leadership is basically achieved by means of election, appointment and inheritance. By whatever means one becomes a leader, by ascription or achievement, leadership and responsibility are God-designed twin gifts for service, as He is capable of raising and putting down leaders at will (Dan. 2:21; John 19:11, Rom 13:1).

Be that as it is, contemporary political leadership is inundated with exploitation, personal enrichment, pursuit of parochial interest and selfish ambition. Because of this, the followership seems to have resigned its destiny to fate and has adopted the acronym AGIP (any government in power) as a means of earning and sustaining livelihood. This is a pointer that Nigeria is in desperate need of good and efficient leadership capable of provoking the patriotic spirit in the citizenry.

Though the foregoing does not imply a total failure of leadership in Nigeria, it nonetheless points to the fact that there is a chasm between the leaders' actions and the people's expectations. Having lost a firm grasp of basic leadership principles, they have not been able to largely earn the people's confidence.

Leadership Framework of Jesus

Jesus was not only a great teacher but the ultimate leader. He is in a nutshell the epitome of what a leader ought to be. His leadership and legacy continue to grow with the passing of each century. In the face of murderous opposition, he inspired such loyalty which his followers were willing to die for. Pertinent issues arising therefrom include how he did it; principles he taught and practiced; and do those same principles still work today?. There is no doubt that His life principles have helped millions of people find

purpose, passion and power for living. These leadership principles are taught and applied today in business schools and corporations worldwide. His leadership principles of understanding others, succession, teamwork, mentoring, accountability, humility, wise use of time and prayer are examined as basis for democratic leadership in Nigeria.

Given the erratic nature of leadership styles, it is expedient that they should be based on certain principles, to the extent that even when a democratically leader has to apply the authoritarian leadership style, he does so with a human face. The declaration of state of emergency years ago in some states in the North East geopolitical zone of the country by President Goodluck Jonathan due to the activities of some dissidents is a case in point. Guided by the Nigerian constitution, he allowed democratic structures in the affected states to continue functioning. This is in sharp contrast where leaders apply their style in similar circumstances without recourse to discretionary powers and democratic principles. Thus, those who are in power at the expense of principle often end up being totalitarian even though civilian in background and tend to perpetuate themselves and their cronies in power.

The leadership framework of Jesus may be surmised as challenging the process (transformation), understanding the mission (taking the right steps), inspiring a new vision (preparing for the future), enabling others to act (creating opportunities), modelling the way (personal example), encouraging the heart (courage and welfare), communication and consistency. These give leaders the purpose, passion and power to live and lead as they combine the critical elements of values, creativity, inclusiveness, initiative, change and conflict management. To be discussed following are the underlying principles of this framework.

Understanding others: Jesus loved and was kind-hearted and so listened to and understood the emotions and actions of his followers. When Peter drew his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest, Jesus reproved him firmly but kindly (John 8:11) and quietly healed the servant's ear (Luke 22:51). He gently cautioned Peter so many times because he understood his humanity. Peter was able to learn and grow from these reproofs into the leader he became after the departure of Jesus. Equally, when his disciples expressed fear in the face of tempestuous wind, he understood their emotions and simply chided them on their lack of faith (Matt.8:26; Luke 8:26). Elsewhere, when the disciples perceived that they had seen a ghost at sea, he gave them cheering words (Matt.14:27; Mark 6:50).

Succession (Leadership transfer and transition): The moment Jesus announced His vision (Luke 4:16-19), He began to recruit men who would succeed Him (Matthew 10: 1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16). He started the process of succession when He divinely saw the potential of Peter, James and John (Luke 5:1-11; 9:28), who later came to be known as disciples of the inner circle. Jesus began from the onset to inform His disciples that he was not going to be their leader for a long time. By his acts, we see that Jesus demonstrated that this principle of succession and transfer of position of power works even to the leader's advantage.

Teamwork expressed in leadership teams and groups: Another principle that Jesus exemplified was working with teams. Jesus had leadership teams: there were groups of three, twelve, seventy, five hundred and special group made up of the women. For each team he appointed, he trained and gave clear and definite assignment; he motivated and inspired them to work with him to accomplish the vision. The group of three was his inner circle. These were Peter, James and John. Jesus constantly took them to remote areas or mountains where he taught and mentored them especially about the discipleship. The second inner circle of Jesus was the twelve made up of people with strong character as well as various behaviour problems. Jesus shared a lot of fellowship and worked with them. Within the twelve, Jesus clearly chose the Apostle Peter to be the chief spokesperson and his successor. He also knew that there was a traitor among them, Judas Iscariot. Nevertheless, Jesus empowered them and gave them authority (Matthew 10:1) to carry on the vision of the group. Next was the group of seventy, which was his evangelistic arm. This group was given the authority to care for people in the villages. They went in pairs into the towns and villages to spread the good news, healing the sick and casting out all kinds of diseases. The group of five hundred basically followed Jesus' itinerary closely. They listened to his teaching, preaching and witnessed the miraculous signs that he performed. Biblically, this group is known as Jesus' congregation. This group is also popularly called the disciples. They took the good news of the Kingdom to their villages and towns. Finally, and not the least, was the special group of women who nourished and refreshed Jesus Christ. Such women included Mary Magdalene, Martha his sister, Mary of Bethany and Mary his mother even though these women did not receive official leadership status like the men because of how the Jewish society treated women as second-class citizens. However, Jesus during his time empowered them and many ministered alongside the Twelve Apostles. They constantly took care of Jesus and his ministry needs. All these teams and groups talked about the kingdom vision and how to accomplish it.

Mentorship (through teaching, training and delegating future leaders): Even though Jesus is Infinite yet he did not lead his ministry on his abilities alone. He selected men and women in whom he deposited wisdom. The twelve were not selected randomly or carelessly from the generality of multitude. They were men who had been intimately associated with him and who had responded to his teaching, followed his leadership and had been trained by him. The disciples were men who through long association understood Christ intimately. They were to continue the ministry that Jesus had begun. Christ said to them, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Jesus delegated giving them the opportunity to become leaders.

Accountability: Accountability is a significant demonstration of love of the leader toward his people. A leader must first be accountable to God, which involves personal cost, self-denial, hard-work and personal sacrifice. Sometimes, it involves paying the ultimate price-death. Jesus taught that we are accountable not only for our actions but also for our thoughts (Matthew 5:27-36, 43-48). A leader who is accountable does not compromise or sacrifice truth because of personal interest; every action or responsibility involves accountability.

Humility: One of the leadership failures in our society today is the lack of humility in those who serve. Today's leaders abuse power and authority that were given to them. Some of them think they are in control without realizing that power is given and can be taken away at any time by the giver. Leaders must realize that absolute power, dominion and authority belong to God. He is the one who is absolutely in control not men. He is the one who gives and takes away positions of power and authority. Manipulating and manoeuvring for positions of leadership are hallmarks of people who are not qualified or prepared for leadership positions. In civilized and democratic societies, people have the privilege to elect leaders of their choice or remove them from office when arrogance, pride, distrust manifest. Jesus was a humble leader. Humility is the first secret to a great life and leadership success. Jesus taught his disciples that humility is not only the way to God's heart but also the way up (Mark 9:45; 10:35-40; Luke 18:8-14). God sees our genuine humility and He exalts those who humble themselves. Humility is the first duty and the highest virtue of any leader. The opposite of humility is pride. Jesus constantly taught his disciples to be humble so they can serve one another. He used the example of his own willingness to humble himself and become a servant in order to redeem man, to encourage his disciples to be humble (Mark 10:45; Phil 2:3-11). A leader who consistently exhibits humility will not only achieve great success but will become a great leader.

Wise use of time: He also taught us to use our time wisely (John 4:34; 9:4). This does not mean there can never be leisure. In as much as there is time for contemplation and for renewal, but time must not be wasted. He discouraged procrastination; time lost cannot be recycled or gained; when a moment has gone, it is gone indeed.

Prayer: Finally, one essential but often neglected leadership principle of Jesus is prayer. He never embarked on any important assignment without prayer. Prayer or meditation or reflection, therefore is the very first act and genuine mark of a great leader. In as much as the followership is enjoined to pray for the leadership, the latter should equally do same, perhaps, even more. Divine wisdom and supernatural leadership abilities may not be elusive when leaders pray. Because of its prime function, one may describe it as one of the fundamental rights in leadership. This is so in view of the Nigerian evolving democratic experience.

Application of The Leadership Framework of Jesus

Given that leaders in Nigeria would not be perfect in their various positions, the fact remains that concerted effort should be made towards appropriating this framework. Leaders whom we have admired or respected overtime, had in one way or the other exhibited some of the qualities which Jesus had in his life and in his leadership. Those who have been tragic in history in their impact on mankind were those who either ignored or lacked these principles. Where Jesus was selfless, they were selfish; where Jesus was concerned with care and freedom for his followers, they were concerned with oppression and control; where Jesus exhibited service, theirs was the exhibition of ego

and emphasis on being served; where Jesus met the needs of others, they were looking after their own, their immediate family and cronies or very close or subservient associates who are loyal; where Jesus was concerned with the development of his disciples, they sought to stunt such and rather manipulate them; where Jesus was filled with compassion and a sense of justice, they were filled with unforgiveness, harshness and injustice. In dealing with sinners, Jesus saw sin as a product of deep and unsatisfied needs on the part of the sinner. With this understanding, he condemned sin without condemning the individual (John 8:11). Genuine leadership demands that we show love to offenders even when they are to be corrected and venture to address the basic cause(s) for such action without exploiting them.

Leaders today must learn not to preserve their position of power at the expense of future leaders. Leaders must challenge followers to become leaders themselves. They must search out for those who have character, courage, competence, confidence, faith and humility and yield power and authority to them. A leader must lead to advance the leaders of tomorrow and by so doing create leadership reservoir for future generation. People in position of power and authority must realize that they cannot live, lead or last forever therefore they must begin early to search for replacement. The overriding need of leaders, if it is to discharge its obligation to the rising generation, is to recruit, teach, train, mentor and prepare young people who are strong, courageous and wise for leadership positions. Many nations have always prospered from successful leadership succession.

Conclusion

Central to this paper is that of teamwork in view of the godfather-like leadership ravaging the nation. Perhaps, the slow pace of national development could be traced squarely to absence of teamwork which has led to marginalisation and expressed through intra party squabbles and unending litigations. Leaders can learn from this principle of leadership which is very effective. However, they must also realize that in every leadership team or group, there are going to be people of different personalities and behaviour traits. The key is the courage and wisdom to appeal to their respective affinities and sensibilities. Secondly, a process of successful leadership transition or succession is misplaced and cannot happen without leadership training, teaching and delegating responsibility to key people or the team, in order to accomplish set goals and objectives. Jesus could have done it alone but he demonstrated that it is impossible to attain great leadership without training and mentoring potential future leaders. Thirdly, Jesus severally initiated the philosophy of “do what I do” rather than “do what I say”. He worked and walked with those whom he came to serve. His was not a long-distance leadership; he was not afraid of close friendships; he was not afraid that proximity to him would cause harm to him but as we saw in Mark 5:24-34, it brought about the healing of a woman with haemorrhage. The aphorism that “the leaven of true leadership cannot lift others unless we are with and serve those to be led” became fully manifest in the life of Jesus. A visit to any community or institution by a government official today appears

dramatic. The pathways are sometimes cordoned off and overzealous security personnel rough handle individuals who wish to catch a glimpse of such public officer. Curiously, during electioneering campaigns such office seeking individuals begin to shake hands with the unsuspecting electorate as a sign of identification with them.

The success or failure of Nigeria as a nation largely depends on the quality of its leadership. Arising from the leadership framework of Jesus, people occupying leadership positions are encouraged to follow his example by giving their talent, time, possessions, influence and lives to their followers. It is instructive that they imbibe virtues such as strong moral character, human-heartedness, self-discipline, leadership by example, compassion, confidence and competence, which form the essence of leadership. Persons who aspire to leadership positions should be trained on these fundamental principles because Nigeria is failing because leadership has become an all comers affair where the acquisition of political power is the motivating factor rather than the interest of the state and its citizens. If these principles are understood and applied, the struggle for the satisfaction of the mundane would be less attractive and would in the long run, bring to an end the leadership incubus which the nation presently experiences in her democratic journey. It is the adoption of this framework that could give birth to transformational leadership in which the people are able to trust their leaders and in which the provision of social amenities, employment, appointment, admission and other national entitlements and honour, are not based on location or one's religious conviction, gender, tribal loyalty or political affiliation but on the fact that one is a Nigerian and is eminently qualified and deserving of such privilege based on the law of the land. In many cases, relinquishing positions of authority makes the leader to enjoy admiration, respect and honour than when that leader remains in power perpetually. To move to the next level, we advocate the emergence of transformational rather than transactional leadership. Jesus' leadership framework is enormously transformational which recognises the potentials of individuals to contribute to national growth.

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