

CHRISTLIKE LEADERSHIP IN AN AFRICAN INFLUENCED CATHOLIC CHURCH***Virgilius Kawama**

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Abstract

Christlike leadership is rooted in the life and acts of Jesus Christ as presented in the Bible. This type of leadership centers on others and not the self. Jesus Christ was always busy finding ways to uplift others not only for His own glory but more for the good of humanity. His unique approach to leadership challenges today's leaders perception of the situations, how they think and see others, how they understand the daily experiences of their people, how they handle struggles and goals of their followers. Looking at the way leadership is being exercised in some of our small Christian communities, societies, groups, parishes, and dioceses, can we be courageous enough to say that our today's leaders are Christlike? What has been the influence of our African cultural values and approaches to leadership in the Catholic Church? Has Christlike leadership style influenced our African leaders in the Church? No doubt, there is a growing trend of some bad leadership in the Catholic Church portrayed by Big-Boss Syndrome, authoritarian or autocratic leadership, cliques within a community, and the fights for power or special privileges. This attitude deprives the faithful of Christlike leaders they wish to have. This article, therefore, seek to treat the topic; "*Christlike leadership in an African influenced Catholic Church*". Its objectives are: To ascertain whether the failure of being Christlike in leadership has something to do with being African or not; To state reasons why some African leaders find it difficult to practice Christlike leadership; and To give the way forward for true Catholic Church leadership.

Keywords: Christ, Leadership, Africa, Influence, Catholic, and Church.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of leadership is one of the most vital areas facing the Church of Christ today. Today more than ever, "the Church needs a restored model of leadership that is based on God's Word and that brings Him glory; that exemplify the truest kind of leadership, which according to Christ, demands service, sacrifice, and selfless."¹ Christlike leadership is rooted in the life and acts of Jesus Christ as presented in the Bible. This type of leadership centers on others and not the self. Jesus Christ was always busy finding ways to uplift others not only for His own glory but more for the good of humanity. His unique approach to leadership challenges today's Catholic leaders perception of the situations, how they think and see others, how they understand the daily experiences of their people, and how they handle struggles and goals of their followers. Consequently, "who leads the Church, the type of authority they are given, how they relate to one another, to whom they are accountable, and how they are selected are of utmost importance to the life and health of God's people."² The scriptures provide us with a solid foundation as to who is to lead the Church, how it is to be done, who is the role model in this leadership, and the importance of the attitudes of service, selfless and sacrifice. Looking at the way leadership is being exercised in some of our Small Christian Communities (SCC), societies, groups, parishes, and dioceses, can we be courageous enough to say that our today's leaders are Christlike?

What has been the influence of our African cultural values and approaches to leadership in the Catholic Church? Has Christlike leadership style transformed our African leadership in the Church? Is there a leadership crisis in the Church today? These questions could find appropriate responses in various ways including the observed "poor leadership in families, conflicts in churches, failures and tensions. This result from lack of integrity, poor morals, corruption, impunity, financial misconduct, priests misusing their authority and positions in order to take advantage of those whom they are entrusted to care for."³ No doubt, there is a growing trend of some bad leadership in the Catholic Church portrayed by Big-Boss Syndrome, authoritarian or autocratic leadership, cliques within a community, and the fights for power or undeserved special privileges. This attitude deprives the faithful of Christlike leaders they wish to have. It also affects the effectiveness of the Church in the world because "The success and failure of the realization of the Church's mission on earth has always depended on the attitude of her leaders to such problems and challenges."⁴ This article, therefore, seek to treat the topic; "*Christlike leadership in an African influenced Catholic Church*." Its objectives are: To ascertain whether the failure of being Christlike in leadership has something to do with being African or not; To state reasons why some African leaders find it difficult to practice Christlike leadership; and To give the way forward for true Catholic Church leadership. These objectives are examined based on the perceptions of leadership of some ethnic groups found in Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria. The findings indicate that culture

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¹ John MacArthur ed., *The Shepherd as Leader: Guiding Others with Integrity and Conviction*, (Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2016), 5.² Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner eds., *Shepherding God's Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, (New York: Kregel Publications, 2014), 7.³ Micah Amukobole, *Character-Centred Leadership: Principles and Practice of Effective Leading*, (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 2012), xvi.⁴ Sylvanus Ifeanyi Nnoruka, "Leadership in the Church: Contemporary Challenges within the African Context," in *Church Leadership and the Christian Message*, ed. Francis A. Adedara, (Lagos: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd., 2004), 73.

influences leadership, and it is intrinsically linked to Church leadership performance.

Concept of Leadership

Leadership is one of the most important concepts in the world. It has been conceptualized differently depending on what area of interest one is looking at; take for instance, the Church, political, or cultural perception. Leadership can be defined as “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members.”⁵ It is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal in a family, group, or organization. Leadership is crucial in the creation of enabling environment in any locality. Leadership at all levels of human endeavours is the vital glue that holds people together and propels them to a better or worse tomorrow depending on the leaders at work in the situation. Leadership is a process of influencing the led to willingly and enthusiastically do that which they are supposed to do in line with the groups’ vision.

Throughout human history, the question of leaders and the quality of leadership have been matters of critical importance. People have always looked for leaders who are competent; who have the ability to comprehend and respond to any form of threat; who are up to the challenges and opportunities their position can offer; who could offer solutions to community needs and aspirations; who are capable of mitigating conflicts; who can transform conflicts and play decisive roles in establishing peace and harmony; and leaders who are committed to the cause of their office. Robert Keating says:

Leadership is service, in the sense that it seeks to meet the needs of another or of the group by performing needed functions. Sometimes strong directive power is effective leadership, such as when a group has lost its sense of direction or purpose; with another group, or at another time when the group is functioning well in its leaderships and has its directions clear, non-directive styles of leadership are needed. Sometimes the group needs to be encouraged and supported; at other times it may need to be reoriented. Leadership serves the needs of the group.⁶

Everything rises and falls on leadership. This is because leadership is a social influence process through which social order evolves and new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviours, and ideologies are constructed and produced. This is the reason why the society needs a leader who understand the critical importance of good governance, accountability and transparency; who is honesty and conscious of his or her integrity; and a leader who takes a group vision in high regard for a better life of all. The author is well aware that different communities require unique leaders, for example, the pilgrims need guides while institutions require administrators. Nevertheless, in whichever leadership situation one finds himself in:

As a leader, your every word and action is scrutinized by your team and could be given far more significance than you intended. Perceptions of you as a confident leader can be

undermined by conscious or unconscious slips, so try and think in a measured way about the kind of signals you are sending out.⁷ This is due to the fact that leadership is a two-way relationship involving people who are aiming at common goals. Parties to the relationship may be individuals in a group, organization or society. The implication is that followers heed their leaders while leaders remain attentive to followers for goals to be achieved effectively and harmoniously. Many people have had first hand experiences of bad leaders; have lived under leaders that have proved themselves inadequate or even disastrous for their communities. They have had to contend with leaders without good judgement, foresight, conscience or ethics. They have seen leaders without a sense of shame or personal sacrifice, driven by greed and a determination to grab or hold into power at all cost with no regard of how their worst leadership ruins their societies. There are leaders who indulge themselves in reckless game of financial mismanagement, scandals, and violation of human rights. Some bad leaders create conflicts, abuse power, and affect negatively the development of their communities. These kind of leaders lack the most important qualities or characteristics of a leader, the things that a true leader is supposed to have including “vision and purpose; commitment; character and the ability to be a role model; courage and tenacity; and good management skills.”⁸ With this kind of bad leadership, the goals of the group can only be achieved through much grumbling and stress by those who have patience and true love for their group, those who do not give up in life.

Good leadership, on the other hand, is represented in the personal qualities of the leaders, the behaviours they enact, the functions they perform, and their relationship with others. Good leaders adopt relational, critical and constructional approach to various life perspectives. They emphasize the importance of dialogue, sharing experiences and new insights, enhances participants sense of self in a community, generate shared understanding, challenge repressive power relations, and develop culturally appropriate forms of leadership behaviour. One of the key goals of a good leader is:

To recognize leadership qualities in others, and to know how to encourage and assist future leaders so they can realize their full potential. It can be helpful to think of leadership growing in a series of transitions in self-awareness, skill, and responsibility. Recognizing these crucial changes in others, and responding appropriately to them, will help to accelerate the development of new leaders.⁹

The good leaders have a conviction that as human beings we all need to get involved and make the lives of our fellow human beings more tolerable if not better. They understand that leadership is a duty enacted for the benefit of the community. Their leaderships founded on a desire for more inclusive and participative spirit that respect individual differences, authenticity and loving service to the community. Effective leaders:

Ensures that everyone on the team is working towards agreed shared objectives; criticize constructively; praise good work as

⁷ Christina Osborne, *Leadership*, (London: Darling Kindersley limited, 2008), 55.

⁸ Emmanuel Ngara, *Christian Leadership: A Challenge to the African Church*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2014), 29.

⁹ Christina Osborne, *Leadership*, (London: Darling Kindersley limited, 2008), 61.

⁵ House, R.J., et al., eds., *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The Globe Study of 62 Societies*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 15.

⁶ Robert Keating, *The Leadership Book*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 13.

well as find fault; monitor the team members' activities continuously by obtaining effective feedback; constantly encourage and organize the generation of new ideas within the team; always insist on the highest standards of execution from team members; develop the individual and collective skills of the team; and seek to strengthen them by training and recruitment.¹⁰

As a good leader, you need to work hard at earning trust, fostering that trust by showing loyalty, and supporting your team fully. The good leader give a sense of direction, challenge, empower, give encouragement, reward good governance and develop teams. The good leader is conscious of the fact that he exercises authority on behalf of the people; he understands the importance of participatory and collective decision-making.

African leadership and its influence

African is that which pertains to the continent of Africa or that, which is concerned, born, produced and created in Africa. Here we are concerned about African leadership system, the leadership style that is conceived and created by Africans. African leadership systems presuppose African creativity and innovation. The roots of African leadership are long. They are deeply embedded in the experiences accumulated over generations. They explain who we are as individuals and, more importantly, how we work together. Some African leaders truly and sincerely believe that the destiny of Africa and its people lie in the ability of the Africans to find solutions to Africa's problems. As a result, an African leader provides answers to the questions facing his or her community. The African leader succeed when his skills, lessons and experiences addresses ethnic and traditional challenges. Some of the solutions to local problems align with Christ's solutions to his time challenges, while others are not very much impressive for a Christian. The main concern of the author is on the elements of leadership that are not in line with Christ's leadership, how they could be polished, while preserving the good African leadership approaches.

Leadership cannot be understood independent of its context. This article deals with leadership perspective from an African eye. However, the author recognizes the fact that Africa is too big and complex. Given the vastness of the continent and the immense national, tribal, ethnic and religious diversity, it could be argued that the term African leadership may be too broad to say anything about. It is too ambitious to attempt to explore leadership across the whole of African continent. This is because African continent is just too huge for any researcher to manage. Consequently, the author has narrowed down his research to five countries he has had privileges to live and work in. They are Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria. This article's main purpose is to provide research on leadership based on those five countries. Though based on five countries, the research provides practical insights into the way most African leaders practice their leadership roles in many African countries. These selected African countries have diverse rich tribal traditions. What is common in all these environments is that their cultures often display hierarchical tendencies; faithfulness to past linkages, traditions, and indigenous habits. For them the concept of leadership is partly a function of the traditions and cultural values of the people.

The individual perception and understanding of leadership is influenced by the cultural setting in which he or she is brought up. The process of socialization plays a significant role in this regard as when people live together they influence one another on the understanding of what surrounds them. For instance, while growing up in these typically traditional environments, one is socialized to respect elderly people and community leaders. In addition, a child is not supposed to correct an elderly person even when he or she is wrong because the elders by virtue of their age are taken to be leaders or people who knows things better than the younger ones. This is consistent with the traditional chieftaincy system. The chiefs are regarded as infallible fathers and custodians of the communities they rule.

Most of the traditional societies experienced in Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria, are characterized by the following: male control and dominance in all spheres of life; marriage philosophy that the man is the head of the family; access of women to leadership positions is constrained by gender roles (women are known to be housekeepers or people of the kitchen); a perception of the masculine characteristics associated with the concept of leadership; people experience high power distance between the leader and the led; the followers expects and accepts the unequal distribution of hierarchical order of power; an ideal leader is someone who instructs them; a leader who seek the opinion of his followers is weak and incapable; a great leader is someone who acts as a superior father figure and makes all the important decisions.

These African countries people adhere to various traditional leadership styles. The traditions and cultural legacy of the people are so deeply felt that they permeate all activities. Culture and leadership are recognized as an indispensable part of their lives. Culture is socially transmitted and forms the totality of the people's patterns of behaviour, customs and traditions, and it is the essential root of components of social organizations where authority is derived from the chief, genealogical lineage, or traditional religion leaders. The leaders, regardless of how they found themselves in leadership positions, whether by appointment or election, they are automatically deemed to be imbued with wisdom, authority and strength.

Some tribes of Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, and Kenya put much emphasize on the leadership competencies, responsibility and accountability, on the spirit of connectiveness, collectiveness, humanness and social cohesion. They believe that for them to survive and prosper, they need wise, able, visionary, ethical and compassionate leaders. They believe so much in the richness of their tribes, countries, and Africa as a whole as observed and affirmed in their histories, cultures, beliefs, diversities and developmental initiatives. Their emphasis on community and collectivism in an African leadership creates a strong team spirit and sense of unity among the people. The leaders holistic view of problem solving takes into account all stakeholders, considering both the short term and long-term effects of their decisions.

In some African tribes, leaders are known for their gifts of uniting people; their understanding of the needs of the community; their effectiveness at solving problems within the communities; their listening abilities to the advice of others; their humility to consult the others before making decisions; their holistic approach to problem solving; their strong connection with the people; their respect for the dignity of

¹⁰ Robert Heller, *Effective Leadership*, (London: Darling Kindersley, 1999), 42.

others; their love for group solidarity; their emphasis on interdependence; their concern for harmony in the group; their transparency and accountability; and their compassionate and caring spirit towards the people.

From African leadership to Christlike leadership

A great concern is how to move from African leadership to Christian leadership in an African influenced Catholic Church. Andrew M. Davis defines Christian leadership as “The God-given ability through the Holy Spirit to influence people by word and example to achieve God’s purposes as revealed in the Scriptures.”¹¹ People are to realize that once they are chosen as leaders in the Church they are no longer African leaders but Church leaders who should reflect the leadership qualities of Jesus Christ by their new way of looking at whatever pertains to leadership. This is due to the fact that: -

Entering into a leadership role as a Christian is entering into partnership with God. We become God’s agents in the world, guiding and directing the people of God as we work together to complete the mission Christ gave the Church when ascended into heaven.¹²

No doubt there are good elements of African leadership that should be allowed in the Catholic Church, but those traditional African leadership approaches that contradict Christ’s approach to life should not be entertained. Here we consider both the leadership approaches found in an African context and could be allowed in the Church and those elements that need to be avoided. This is as a result of the fact that not everything about African leadership is bad. There are some traces of Christ’s leadership style in some African cultures. Those African leadership traits that reflect the leadership style of our Lord Jesus Christ should be treasured and used in the Church. Some African cultures, as experienced in the environments the author has socialized with, are very hierarchical. There are cultures where each and everyone is required to know his or her level in the society. Failure to do so one finds himself or herself in unnecessary problems. These cultures categorize people, some are in a higher level of the ladder than the others, and the hierarchy continues descending till the least personality in the community. The difference between those in leadership and those who are not in leadership are clear. This kind of leadership approach should not be entertained in the Catholic Church, once the person is appointed a leader in the Church is automatically required to make an effort to adjust and emulate Christlike leadership that breaks the barriers and allows everyone to be free to mingle with others regardless of the different obvious human classes that might be in existence. The situation changes when:

The Lord blasts out the ethnic boundaries around his people and Jesus sends his followers out to make disciples of all nations. No longer are the people of God gathered in one land. No longer are they a political entity of clans and tribes forming a patriarchal nation. No longer are the people of God defined by a line of descent. When Jesus sends his followers to make disciples of all nations, the people of God cease to be defined

by the fact that they descend from Abraham. Where one was born, whom one was to, these issues no longer determine whether one belongs to God’s people.¹³

When all are allowed to be true disciples of Jesus Christ, when they understand that they are all equal and the same before God, when they believe that many minds are more powerful than one, then they are able to create a pool of shared gifts that makes Christ’s leadership and Christian spirit a reality.

In a typical African environment, where one comes from determines to some extent the position of the person in the society. As a result, you hear so much the language like, ‘we are from the ethnic majority or minority, or we are from the ruling clan’. Many people are being brought up with this kind of conviction and would like to maintain the privileges that come with their roots. And they expect those with fewer privileges to remain where they are eternally. The potentials of those people from the minority group or the ruled category are not promoted since they cannot be used anywhere. People from ethnic minority find it difficult to become leaders in the mixed communities. The potential leaders are those who come from the majority group or the most influential ethnic group in the community. Unfortunate enough, this approach to leadership has also negatively affected the choice of Church leaders. It is no longer about God fearing leaders but those who come from the majority or ruling group. And for sure very often wrong choices of leaders are made, there are leaders who end up leading the Church as if they are traditional leaders. Leadership in the Church is:

A participation in the ruling quality of Christ’s ministry. It is sharing in his passion; it is sacrificing the self for the sake of the flock. The flock are the children of God, the leader their servants. A served and worshipped leader has no place in the Church. A leader in the Church is a slave-king; he has the dignity of a king but must serve as a slave. It is the service that enhances his dignity, when he is served he loses his dignity and becomes a pagan king.¹⁴

However, some leaders find it difficult to adjust or understand that they are no longer pagan or traditional leaders but Church leaders to be influenced by Jesus Christ in all they do. They would like to continue commanding boldly their followers and expect them to respond blindly. African leadership is a term used to describe the process by which leaders in Africa lead their people. It encompasses the way leaders make decisions, how they interact with others and how they manage resources. African leadership emphasizes cooperation and community. However, there is a change of terms here, instead of African leadership, we rather have Christlike leaders in the Church. The difference here is that, rather than being influenced only by what is African, people should be affected by what is Christlike or what is found in the New Testament concerning leadership as practiced by Jesus Christ. Christian leadership seeks to be of service, rather than dominating; encourages and inspires others; respects rather than exploits others; reflects,

¹¹ Andrew M. Davis, “Leading the Church in Today’s World: What it means practically to Shepherd God’s Flock” in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, eds. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner, (New York: Kregel Publications, 2014), 312.

¹² Carol Cartmill and Yvonne Gentile, *Leadership Essentials: Practical Tools for leading the Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 7.

¹³ James M. Hamilton, “Did the Church Borrow Leadership Structures from the Old Testament or Synagogue?” in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, eds. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner, (New York: Kregel Publications, 2014), 23.

¹⁴ Anthony Ojo, “It will not be so among you (Mt. 20:25): Revisiting the New Testament Model of Leadership,” in *Church Leadership and the Christian Message*, ed. Francis A. Adedara, (Lagos: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd., 2004), 40.

prays and acts on Jesus Christ's words, Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant, whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mt. 20:27-28).

Nevertheless, the African good elements in leadership style like good relationships, cooperation, community and consensus orientated, sensitive to individual or group needs, service to humanity, good listening to the advice of others, consultation with others before making any major decision, stronger connection with the people, and holistic approach to solving community problems should be welcomed and maintained in the Church. It is also healthy for the people to see that their good approaches to leadership are accepted and being used in the Church. To make it easy, we must encourage the emergency of Christlike leadership, not only in a Catholic Church but also at every level of human society. For when there is gradual understanding of Christlike leadership, people will not be caught unaware once they are appointed Church leaders. They will understand that "The Church is all one body of people who are equally unworthy, equally graced with eternal life. We are all equally redeemed by Christ, and we are equally bearing eternal life from Him and sustained in Him."¹⁵ Once people understand that we are all equal before our common Father, God the Almighty, they will be able to celebrate their union with each other, humble themselves, take seriously their personal self-examination, and eager to promote a leadership that is ethical and imbued with a sense of efficacy, integrity and accountability.

The Church needs leaders who will be known less for what they proclaim and more for what they deliver; less for their clamoring for titles and more for their expertise; less for their positions and more for their competence; less for what they control and more by what they shape. The Church wishes to witness compassionate and visionary leaders who care about their followers and who are dedicated to the noble cause. The new wind of leadership that is Christlike encourages servant hood, participation and guarantees the rights and freedoms of every person. It is the leadership style that looks more on the soul of an individual than the issues of age, positions, or background. The souls' value is the same regardless of any accidental factors like race and size. So Christlike leadership facilitates an environment where every person has a stake in how the Church is governed.

Christlike leadership is a type of leadership that is rooted in the Bible and the acts of Jesus Christ himself, while African leadership has its foundation in the African values and customs. While Christlike leadership is after the emulation of the only great leader Jesus, the African leadership has various models of leadership like the ancestors, elders of the specific community and those who hold positions of leaderships in African setting. Nevertheless, one has to know also the fact that though there could be many different leadership models in an African environment, there are always common elements or values that defines one as a true African leader. These African values that defines an African leader can be found in every leader regardless of where he finds himself, north or south, east or west of Africa or country. Notwithstanding, the multiplication of role models in an African leadership style can

be very confusing sometimes, the leaders are not sure of whose guidance is to follow in specific life issues. While for Christlike leadership, it is simply a matter of asking oneself, if Christ was in this situation I have found myself in, what could he has done. This is because, as Christian leaders:

We have to keep the Church's or the organization's purpose in the forefront of all activities through functions such as goal setting, planning, organizing, programming, motivating, coordinating, and evaluating. We also seek to establish a climate conducive to the full development of human resources. That places the burden upon Christian leaders at the top of an institution or business to assume managerial responsibility for developing people.¹⁶ Many of our churches' leaders nowadays are fond of taking shortcuts in resolving issues; they shift failures and blames to their followers while successes are theirs; they avoid standing for the truth when things are not going well. But Christlike leaders always act with honest and integrity; avoid shortcuts but always go about everything the right way; he or she is ready to accept any mistake that might have been made in the process of duty. Joseph Mattam emphasizes:

When our leaders accept that we all make mistakes and are ready to own them up, abandoning all false claims and legitimization process that goes on in every society, the Church will become more humane, more approachable, less threatening and more like the servant master, and we have a chance to become the kind of leaders Jesus envisaged.¹⁷

Like Jesus Christ, Christlike leaders should always speak the truth without fear of any repercussion. They should be concerned with sharing Christ's message in all they do and not wasting their precious time looking for ways to gain political and fake support. Our African leaders should have the strength to speak the truth with love, even in the situations where the truth seem to be costly knowing that whether you stand for truth or not, people will always find reasons to challenge you. The reality of our earthly life is that, whether you say the truth or hide the truth, you will still die or be hated by some people and loved by some people.

Jesus' leadership approach has strong value for all of us. Jesus Christ accepts us as we are, with our strengths and weaknesses, our poverty and riches, and he does not mind our backgrounds but respects our common brotherhood in him that makes us true children of the same Father, God, the Almighty. But most African leaders seek to be surrounded with influential people; hanging out with the smart, the beautiful or handsome and the rich people of the parish or community in which they perform their duties. This is not how Jesus operates. Jesus Christ not only spends time with people the world rejects but also goes on looking for them. He seeks out the ostracized, poor, sick, weak, and people deemed worthless. The story of Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke:

He came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree

¹⁶ Anthony D'Souza, *Leadership: Trilogy on Leadership and Effective Management*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994), 15.

¹⁷ Joseph Mattam, "Priest or Servant Leaders?", in *East Asian Pastoral Review*, Volume 46 (2009), Number 3, 214.

¹⁵ John MacArthur ed., *The Shepherd as Leader: Guiding Others with Integrity and Conviction*, 211.

in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the son of man has come to seek and to save what was lost" (Lk. 19:1-10).

Jesus Christ approach to Zacchaeus situation is a good example for every good intentioned leader. Zacchaeus is a despised tax collector, a cheater and sinner. Zacchaeus life changed with the company of Jesus. Christian leaders should remember the most vulnerable people of the society, people living in poverty, displaced, rejected or sick and look for ways to empower them. Instead of the self-created leadership style that centers the self above all else, Christlike leadership is empathetic, humble, centred on others, motivated by lifting others up or making them better than he or she found them, and try to see things from other peoples' perspectives. To be a Christlike leader means to be Christlike in character. Christlike leadership should be able to develop and enjoy the fruits of the spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). These are leaders who integrate faith in all programs, who are grounded in Biblical principles, who enjoy intimacy with God, and live Christlike leadership style in their everyday responsibilities. Christlike leaders genuinely submit to Jesus Christ and his word, just as Jesus the Son of God submitted to the Father. To be a Christlike leader you need to follow Christ, listen to God through meditation on the Word of God and learn to recognize the promptings of the Spirit of God.

Jesus shows us wise and loving leadership, which is so different from many African leaders. African leaders running different organizations of the Church should compare their own thoughts, actions and character traits with those of Jesus. In every situation, the "faithful shepherd looks to God his Shepherd and shepherds like God does. God is the ultimate shepherd of His people, but He has graciously called us to help with this work."¹⁸ This God's calling to participate in His leadership should not be taken for granted. The leaders that Jesus was developing became people with a passion to reach spiritually lost people in their environments. They became leaders with Christ's vision, people with hearts for evangelism and compassionate concern for the whole person. They began to follow their master not only in His proclamation of the Kingdom of God, but also in His concern for the poor, His tenderness toward the sick and the disabled, His compassion for the hungry, His loving spirit towards the children and women, and His determination to release those in spiritual bondage. Jesus commissioned His followers to make disciples in all nations, that is in each and every ethnic group. We are part and parcel of the Disciples of Christ; we are to be courageous enough to follow in the footsteps of the first disciples.

Obstacles to Christ-like Leadership

The obstacles to Christlike leadership are numerous. They include the following attitudes of some African leaders: unnecessary disturbance of their followers; not paying attention in meeting to what others say because they come with already baked solutions; taking discussions towards decision-making as simply for formality's sake; raising their voices at others regardless of their standard; and saying insulting things to those they encounter. Some leaders forget the fact that they can cause other believers to stumble by "flaunting a liberty, despising them, belittling them, withholding what they need from them, ridiculing them, treating them with indifference, defrauding them, taking advantage of them, or even by failing to confront their sinfulness."¹⁹ Notwithstanding, Joseph Mattam is convinced that "once the concept and practice of the present understanding of leadership based on power, honor and prestige are given up, there is a chance for the Church to become a brotherhood or sisterhood."²⁰ People will start valuing each other regardless of their positions in the house of God. They will realize that leadership in the Church is for service as friends and equals. This we read in the Gospel of John:

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world, and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper, and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "what I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all." For he knew who would betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." So when he had washed their feet, and put his garments back on, and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Master, and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the Master and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater his master, nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it (Jn. 13:1-17).

Jesus' life was one of service and whoever wishes to follow him will have to be a servant of all. This service depends on being a disciple of Jesus and willing to serve the community. The focus is on building up the community and not for personal glory.

¹⁸ John MacArthur ed., *The Shepherd as Leader: Guiding Others with Integrity and Conviction*, 115.

¹⁹ John MacArthur ed., *The Shepherd as Leader: Guiding Others with Integrity and Conviction*, 213.

²⁰ Joseph Mattam, "Priest or Servant Leaders?" 214.

One of the most challenging aspects of Christlike leadership for unredeemed African leader in the Catholic Church is Jesus' teaching on servanthood. While the disciples competed with one another for primacy, Jesus reminded them, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you" (Mt. 20:25-26). The servant attitude of the leader is essential in inspiring the followers and in giving them a sense of belonging. The leader is not to be elevated above the people being served, neither should leadership be based on a desire to lead, to be saved, or to be looked after. There is a lot of competition for a post of a Pope, Cardinal, Bishop, Dean, or Parish Priest. The struggle for powers that offer to some extent selfish privileges is becoming common. We have heard of the Bishops being denied to enter the diocese to which they are appointed to by the Holy Father, Bishops who have survived gun shots or poisons, just because they are not from that diocese, they are not from the ethnic group with majority Catholics or of much influence in the Church. One wonders what kind of catechesis some people went through, what kind of seminary and religious formation the clergy and the religious received. Truly, with this approach to leadership in the Church we cannot claim to be Christians.

Big boss syndrome or authoritarian leadership is what is motivating most African leaders in the Church. They are looking for positions of command over others, fighting for power of special privileges, use their influence to downgrade others and weaken those they lead or see as future potential leaders. Their attitudes are not very different from that of King Herod who trembled upon hearing the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ even without knowing what kind of a King Christ was to be. A competitive stance towards others, a self-serving attitude toward power, and a pride in domination, are temptations of power that affect our struggle to shared leadership in the Church. Jesus was: -

A man rooted in God, who was totally free of the outlook of the world: free from greed, lust, hatred, fear, attachment, and he loved all and opted for the poor. He saw his mission as one of service: service of the Father in the service of his fellow humans.²¹

Jesus promoted and lived the spirit of service as friends, as equals, regardless of the distinct and different functions that exist in the Church. Jesus' thought about his followers is precisely this, "as for you, do not be called rabbi. You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers" (Mt. 23:8). Obviously there are distinct functions in the Church which Jesus himself claimed when he washed the feet of his disciples. Hence as leaders of the community we will have to be representatives, the living presence of this master who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave and washed the feet of his disciples and left us a pattern to follow. If we want to be like Christ:

We have to pattern our life on Jesus, and in every way be like him. We are to be lives offered in love and service; ready to lay down our life for God's people; answerable to God and the people. The only power we have is the power to love endlessly, love all and be for all, manifesting the possibility of true love in the world.²²

Traditional values of age and gender, informed by cultural and traditional religious norms, are barriers to Christlike leadership. Mostly Africans are brought up in the environment where husbands makes decisions for their wives, fathers dictates what the children are to follow, wives are regarded as second in command to their husbands. They believe that a man has to be weak to allow his wife or children make decisions. The man of the house is everything; it does not matter whether the head of the house has little or no knowledge of the situation. Such an inferiority complex among wives and children make it difficult for them to make meaningful contributions even in vital community activities. Unfortunate enough, this traditional approach to leadership sometimes plunges itself in the Church leadership depriving people of their Christlike leadership. The Church needs effective leaders who are "continually growing in their personal faith relationship through cultivating spiritual disciplines in their lives such as prayer, bible study, worship, and service."²³ Here a leader seeks for a spiritual foundation of leadership with a mission and vision for ministry that is in alignment with the mission and vision of the Church.

African leadership involves the recognition of the importance of generational linkages, and commitment to development and sustenance of the synergy between the generations. Some people take it for granted that because my uncle is the Bishop, then, I should be favoured or put in the place of honor like Cathedral Administrator, Diocesan Pastoral Coordinator, and so forth. These people find: -

Their dignity and worth as persons in the function or position they have in society, the respect people give them because of their position; this has not helped the servant leaders to become true to their vocation, the living presence of Jesus.²⁴ The Church does not function like that, it is not a one blood clan property but for all Christians. The Church needs leaders who respect and are respected, who trust and are trusted, who loves and are loved, who are secured and confident in his or her leadership and does the same to others. Some African leaders tend to be more autocratic, they want to control all the decisions or make choices based on their own beliefs, and they have no time to involve others for their suggestions or advices. They make decisions without consulting their team or constituents. According to Walter Kasper, "Community leadership cannot be exercised in an autocratic manner; it must collaborate with the other ministries and with the entire community."²⁵ For Simon Western:

A fundamental principle that applies to leaders is that too much followership dependency undermines critical and innovative thinking, and creates a climate that eradicates dissent, or even the exploration of difference. It may feel good to a leader to have a dependent followership, but it is not a healthy or sustainable dynamic. Without critical thinking, awareness of role, social location, the issues of power, patriarchy and diversity will never be addressed.²⁶ This is a challenge for those who are called to move from this kind of leadership to Christlike leadership where power seem to be shared and decision-making is a community activity. Those who accept

²³ Carol Cartmill and Yvonne Gentile, *Leadership Essentials*, 19.

²⁴ Joseph Mattam, "Priest or Servant Leaders?" 214.

²⁵ Walter Kasper, *Leadership in the Church*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 66.

²⁶ Simon Western, *Leadership: A Critical Text*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2013), 95.

²¹ Joseph Mattam, "Priest or Servant Leaders?" 213.

²² Joseph Mattam, "Priest or Servant Leaders?" 214.

leadership in the Church and are not ready to adjust end up leading the followers autocratically, they have no regard for the followers. They forget the fact that “without followership leadership does not exist. Followership is symbiotic with leadership, and to understand leadership is to recognize how leaders and followers co-produce and sustain each other.”²⁷ The power of leaders is a consequence of the actions of the followers rather than the cause of it. You cannot be a leader without the followers. Any wise leader ought to respect the followers for they define his leadership position. Some African leaders often have a more relaxed attitude towards corruption and nepotism. Justice is not meant for a corrupt relative but for those of the other clan. Themselves as leaders are not even accountable to anybody because they feel they are above the law or they have become a law themselves. Transparency is not for them but for the followers. Positions of leadership at every stage of the society belong to brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces. Any other person regardless of their gifts is not considered worthy to places of leadership. Their leadership styles are often characterized by the need to achieve and hold power, they perceive their own generation as superior to others, and they have no trust for people of other lineage. This attitude cannot be accepted in the Church, it goes against Christ’s teaching on leadership. Christ wishes those who adopt his leadership style to have genuine compassion for those they minister to, to care deeply for their needs, concerns, and problems.

The way forward for true Catholic Church leadership

The way forward for true Catholic Church leadership should be by addressing the obstacles that affects negatively an African person in his path to higher values of Christlike leadership. The truth of Church leadership is this:

All such leadership, regardless of titles, or training, or longevity, or position, or reputation, or prestige, is under the one and absolute authority of Christ. Leaders, then, lead as they are led by Christ; they teach as they are taught of Christ; they build in the manner by which they have been instructed by Christ; and they labor for the glory, not of themselves, but for the glory of the one to whom belongs all glory and honor and praise, the Lord Jesus Christ. As supreme leader, teacher, and builder, Christ alone has unchallenged authority over every leader and every Church. Jesus’ words, ‘I will build my Church,’ must remain on the minds and in the hearts of every Church leader who truly seeks to lead within the Church of Jesus Christ.²⁸ It is not the designated leader of the Church who has highest authority but Jesus Christ himself. The Lord Jesus Christ has the only “truly and finally ultimate authority over all, and he has been given authority over all creation in order to execute his plans and purposes for building his Church. Any local Church that truly is a Church is under his highest authority for all that it is and should do.”²⁹ The Church leadership involves various levels of authority and responsibility. Christ has designed that there be trained leaders who bear the responsibility for the spiritual growth and development of the Church, guarding the Church from error,

and graciously leading the Church along paths of truth, hope, and joy. There is a need of Christlike leaders in the Catholic Church, leaders who think of their followers; who understand the experience of the people, their struggles and achievements; a leader who is willing to listen to people from different walks of life; a leader who value other peoples’ perspectives in all sincerity; a leader who is honest and of integrity; a leader who accepts his own shortcomings and ready to work on them positively for him to build trust with his people.

There is a need for an effective, ethical, principled and compassionate leader in the Church. A leader who recognizes the fact that:

The ability to both give and receive feedback is an essential leadership skill. Giving feedback encourages development and innovative thinking in your team, while knowing how to receive feedback provides an opportunity to learn more about yourself as a leader and the effect your behaviour has on others.³⁰ The leaders who help build better relationships with family members, Church faithful, and community people are urgently needed. The leader who is trust worthy and worthy of being taken as a role model according to how he or she exhibit the selfless and integrity of a Christlike leader.

The dysfunctional and corrupt leaders clearly influences the way people think about leadership and their desire to be seen as a leader. They tend to lead people in the Church as they are influenced by their different traditional religious beliefs and associated practices, their ethnics’ perception of gender and age, as well as their families and communities relationships. According to Joseph Mattam:

Jesus had emptied himself, became a slave and never had any authority that came from society; so the Pharisees and other authorities often questioned him about his authority in doing what he did or said. Jesus’ authority was not from the institution but from his being rooted in the Abba. As long as we claim special powers which make us be above the community, we are not likely to be interested in becoming what we are to be as servant leaders.³¹ The servant leaders will have to discover their true identity as servants of the community, not masters and lords of their followers. They will have to move away from a culture of command and control, of threatening and punishing others, to a culture of service and friendship as equals, of being answerable to the community.

Those who seek to lead others unto Christ should strive to emulate the Savior’s example of perfect leadership who is a servant, shepherd and steward. A Christian leader “must see his or her work truly as a ministry. What you do must be based on who you are; a servant, shepherd and steward of the Lord. Through your life and leadership service, you must treat others with respect, justice, fairness and love.”³² To become Christlike leader is to accept Christ as the ideal, have a desire to become like Christ, and finally emulate his character. Leaders should have a strong, good and positive influence on those they lead; should have specific opinions and ideologies to significantly shape peoples’ lives for the better future; in all their choices and thoughts they should have an opportunity to

²⁷ Simon Western, *Leadership: A Critical Text*, 44.

²⁸ Bruce A. Ware, “Putting It All Together: A Theology of Church Leadership” in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond*, eds. Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner, (New York: Kregel Publications, 2014), 288.

²⁹ Bruce A. Ware, “Putting It All Together: A Theology of Church Leadership,” 306.

³⁰ Christina Osborne, *Leadership*, (London: Darling Kindersley limited, 2008), 30.

³¹ Joseph Mattam, “Priest or Servant Leaders?” 214.

³² Anthony D’Souza, *Leaders For Today Hope For Tomorrow: Empowering and Empowered Leadership*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), 17.

look to Jesus for guidance; they should be ethical, honest, humble, and empathetic. Leaders will become authentically transformational when:

They increase awareness of what is right, good, important and beautiful, when they help to elevate followers' needs for achievement and self-actualization, when they foster in followers higher moral maturity and when they move followers to go beyond their self-interests for the good of their group, organization or society.³³ To achieve a true Catholic Church leadership, those involved needs to be flexible enough as there will be moments when they will be challenged to act both as 'followers' and as 'leaders'. This fact describe the reality that people "participate in the leadership process, sometimes by following, other times by taking a leadership role, at other times producing leadership, and at other times neither following nor leading but partaking."³⁴ This approach to life will help us develop self-esteem to an extent that whether we become leaders or followers in the house of God we will have no reason for worries or being ambitious for any position because our duty is simply to participate. We will understand that when we accept to be participants in the Church, we shall be protagonists of both leadership and followership.

The solution to leadership crisis in the Church caused by their African ethnic understanding of leadership is to see the community of faith in a new way different, from the way they perceive leadership traditionally. Leaders need to understand and accept the fact that:

A Christian community is pictured as a centre of faith. It is a place where best hopes shine out, or at least, flicker attractively now and again. It comprises a group of people who are not only needy but also gifted. These gifts appear in all parts of the group; abilities to care for the young and for those who are suffering; talents to manage finances and develop creative liturgies; skills to deal with the complex questions of poverty and social justice. These gifts spring from the deeper source that we name the spirit. These diverse and very practical resources give shape to a group's identity and purpose; clarifying our gifts, we better learn what we are for. And we become more responsible for the group's future.³⁵ Catholics today are more challenged to see more clearly the nature of the crisis before us so that, together as the whole Church, we might envision a response that is adequate to Church's future. Our hope here is to serve this new vision of Christlike leadership, by encouraging more people among us to contribute to the task.

God calls people to leadership in the Church. He gives them a unique task as well as a specific opportunity to implement it. He expects his leaders to turn inwards, to look into themselves, to search their souls, and to listen to Him alone in the exercise of their leadership office. They need to listen until they understand that thing which God is delivering through them. Church leadership, therefore, is after:

Building up a community in the commission received from Jesus Christ and in his power, with Jesus himself as the criterion of our work. The community is built up when it is

nourished from the table of the word and the table of the Eucharist, when it is purified and sanctified, when it is empowered and motivated to perform its own service in the world, and when the charisms that are at work in the community are integrated with one another and kept united to the Church as a whole.³⁶

In this case, the Church leaders are expected to have preferences for value based, team oriented, and participative leadership. They are to serve the community and work for the common good; to be selfless, honest and humble; and to be able to build and unite people towards a common goal. The unique task given to a leader to implement Christ's values calls for an inner urge, a will, a determination, a renewed energy, sacrifice, teamwork and team spirit. The point must be made that there are different categories of leaders in the Church including pope, cardinal, bishop, parish priest, deacon, rector of seminary, sister-in-charge, council chairperson, head of Catholic School, leader of Christian organization, chaplain, women leader, men leader, youth leader and many others. What is said about bishop's leadership duties will apply to a greater or lesser extent to some of the categories of leaders mentioned above, even those not mentioned here as long as they are practiced within the Church spirituality. As an obvious result, every leader must learn to model himself or herself on:

Jesus Christ, the High Priest, the Supreme Pastor, the one who called the apostles to follow him, the one who today calls those upon whom the privilege of serving as priests and ministers has been bestowed. Jesus was the great teacher. He knew the scriptures well; he taught with authority; but he was humble; he associated with the lowly and the downtrodden; he had compassion for suffering humanity. Jesus had a great sense of mission. He knew the Father had sent him to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to show humanity the way back to the Father. Jesus was a deeply spiritual leader; he did not only talk, he walked his talk; there was no contradiction between what he taught and how he conducted himself; he spoke about the things of God and behaved like a man who came from God.³⁷

Conclusion

This paper provides information on Christlike leadership in an African influenced Catholic Church. The research demonstrated how leadership has been applied across cultures in the five countries the author has lived and worked. Through examination of this initiative, the author revealed how African leadership influences Church leadership, not only in the way of transferring existing traditional knowledge of leadership in the Church arena, but also how it affects the followers' participation, exploration, and evaluation of their experiences. The leadership and management of the Church should be influenced by the desire to please God and Christ, the spirit of compassion and tenderness, and lead the Church on the basis of the word of the Gospel. The author advocates for Christlike leadership in the Church that is free from traditional negative influences and centers itself on Jesus Christ as a role model in whatever is to be done, leadership that contribute towards the development of a more culturally sensitive and relevant perspectives in the Church for the good of all the community members. Christlike leadership should have the ability to

³³ Bass B, *Handbook of Leadership*, (New York: Free Press, 1990), 171.

³⁴ Simon Western, *Leadership: A Critical Text*, 44.

³⁵ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *The Emerging Laity: Returning Leadership to the Community of Faith*, (New York: Doubleday, 1986), xvii.

³⁶ Walter Kasper, *Leadership in the Church*, 64.

³⁷ Emmanuel Ngara, *Christian Leadership: A Challenge to the African Church*, 15.

influence, inspire and motivate others; should be prudent, sensible, honorable, hospitable, sober-minded, self-controlled, and respectable. A Christian leader is to represent the character of God and Christ well in the Church. Having leadership gifts is not enough to be a leader in the house of God, one ought to align those gifts of leadership in line with Jesus Christ, he has to be tested and examined before being granted any Church responsibility, he should be able to work in such a way that his approach aligns with the Church principles.

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