JESUS' SERVANT-SHEPHERD LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK AS SPRINGBOARD TO THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL PROJECT

Igbakua Iorjaah
Department of Religion and Philosophy,
Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria
iiorjaah@bsum.edu.ng
+2348057857507

Abstract

Jesus Christ developed a leadership model which has proven efficacious for the stable growth of his counterculture, Christianity. He taught it to his followers to pass it on to succeeding generations of the counterculture that is intended to eventually engulf the entire world. Although many Nigerians in leadership positions are members of this counterculture, since her amalgamation in 1914, Nigeria has been having difficulty struggling to build a united nation out of its numerous nationalities, largely due to lack of effective leadership. Leadership in Jesus' teaching is a relational means of ensuring the wellbeing of all called human. But effective leadership is a necessary product of leadership framework. Nigerian leadership is oriented on the framework of kingship with its sovereign disposition which negates the tenets of community ecology due to its exploitative and domination-control tendencies. For Nigeria to attain nationhood, Nigerians must reorient their leadership ideology from royal sovereignty to a follower-focused relational model. This study recommends the 'servant-shepherd leadership model', built from a synergy of pre-colonial traditional Nigerian leadership ideas and Jesus' servant-shepherd leadership lifestyle. Towards this end, the study analyses the leadership conceptions of Nigerian nationalities and Jesus' to derive indicators of effective leadership.

Keywords: Royal ideology, leadership ecology, Nigerian national project, servant-shepherd leadership, and indigenous Nigerian leadership.

Introduction

Royal ideology has always been an important construct for any people because it provides the dynamics of the entire social system for the efficacy of its structures and processes.[1] But, as Jesus said there is a correlation between what one thinks and one's behaviour (Mk 7:20-23). That means a lopsided royal ideology can only put in place lopsided structures and processes and consequently produce dangerously ineffective leadership.

In Nigeria leadership is conceived of chiefly as kingship and the leader (king) as the sovereign benefactor. This is evident in her presidential system where in the presidency the sovereign prerogative (reigning power) of the king

and the political executive prerogative (ruling power) of the prime minister are fused together, giving the presidency enormous powers to dictate to the state.[2] King-centred leadership framework however, consigns leadership under *realpolitik* and creates problems like lopsided relational behaviour in social ecology. A specific consequence of Nigerians' leadership conception is misinterpretation of functions and responsibilities of the leader and a resultant misapplication of the leadership process. It has devalued "the Nigerian values" of leadership, by depicting leadership as the attainment of positions of political and economic power so as to have controlling shares in the allocation of the commonly held resources of the nation-state.[3]

This lopsided conception is also evident in the way Nigerians use delicate metaphors like "team"[4] and "entrepreneur"[5] in referencing leadership. The popular metaphor of "winning team" is taken from the sports arena where success or failure of the team hangs on the aptitude of the coach, making leadership a one-man show. Describing the project of uniting Nigerian nationalities into a nation under one leader (the Nigerian national project) as an "enterprise" implies an identified new market opportunity in leadership; a business owned by the leader**.**

Such conceptions of leadership have continually elicited various forms of resistance from marginalised groups and individuals It informed the coups and counter-coups of the military junta from the 1960s; the restive and militant posture of the Niger Delta youths; the Boko Haram menace in Northern Nigeria; the mounting tensions in debates about Nigeria's fiscal federalism which hinges on resource control; and "the national question" in Nigeria today. These crises imply that the kingship leadership framework is faulty; and it dislocated Nigeria quite early in her move toward integrated national life.

From Jesus' teaching on the kingship of God, leadership is a relational means of ensuring the wellbeing of the given ecosystem called society or community. In this paper therefore, effort is made to examine the basis of Nigerian leadership praxis from the ideological perspective of leadership ecology under the microscope of Jesus' royal theology and its servant-shepherd leadership lifestyle. This is done in synergy with pre-colonial leadership ideas of the nationalities that comprise Nigeria today.

A Definitional Discourse of Royal Ideology, Leadership Ecology, and the Nigerian National Project

Royal ideology is an ideograph that is better understood from the backdrop of the culture associated with it than by a dictionary definition. Ideology basically denotes a structured ideal or system of ideas of a group;[6] an orientation that characterizes its thinking, created from a specific premise with specific working principles by which to achieve the ideal. From this, royal ideology is the way people think about and depict kingship, using various means to achieve their

ideal of royalty. It contrasts with royal theology, which is a group's understanding of a god's commitment to and with it that governs the relation of the king to the god and the people.

"Leadership ecology" is an ideological construct based on human ecology theory and appropriated in the present author's political theology for understanding "how human interactions and interdependence with their environments affect survival, quality of life, and sustainable use of resources in the environment."[7] Human ecology theory espouses that sustainability of natural resources in the environment depends on the ways and means of human adjustment to their environments. Leadership ecology presumes state leadership as the centre of interactions in "the state" as an ecosystem[8]—a functioning system of interdependent parts[9]— with state leadership as the steward organ of its other appendages.

The "Nigerian national project" is a phrase referencing the task of integrating the British heterogeneous amalgam of nationalities called Nigeria into a nation of every citizen's pride. Since independence, Nigerian governments have been struggling with challenges of increasing complexity to achieve this goal through various state policies: National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, the Unity Schools, the Federal Character Principle, State Creation, etc.[10]

This kind of integration is an assignment in the relational category of community life as an ecosystem. It requires good and effective leadership to accomplish. However, since her amalgamation, Nigeria's biggest problem has been lack of good leadership. Obaro Ikime, traces the prevalence of this bad leadership back to the British colonial officers who gave the three regions of Nigeria unbalanced statuses: "out of the total number of 312 seats in the Federal House of Representatives, the North was given 174, East 73, West 63 and Lagos 3"[11] so that the North could form the federal government even without winning a single seat in the South. Seteolu identifies the crux of this leadership lack as ethnic based politics and a fragile federal structure instituted at independence.[12] J. Isawa Elaigwu corroborates this position: "As the prospects of independence became clearer, Nigerian politicians withdrew into their ethnic cocoons to mobilise for ethnic politics. Mutual suspicion of domination among ethnic and geo-ethnic groups generated intense pressures."[13] Continuing this way, Nigeria lacks internally cohesive political leadership. To this day, the ruling elite is "jaundiced by intense power struggle to access statist structures, private economic accumulation ... preoccupation with political struggle to the neglect of critical development issues."[14] It may also be said that Nigeria has a leadership crisis because of the failure of imported leadership theories oriented on the economic factor of production to provide Nigerians the needed leadership.[15]

In a nation where leadership is perceived in terms of *realpolitik*, the game of politics can only tow ethnic or regional lines; for there is usually, mutual fear

of domination by any region or ethnic group that acquires more political power. Ikime's view is apt: Nigeria cannot function as a united federation without Nigerians – i.e. without patriotic citizens who are confident that their interests are better protected in the larger political unit than in the ethnic nationalities, and so think more of Nigeria than of their Igboness, Yorubaness, or Hausaness.[16] As intimated above, leadership is a relational phenomenon which primarily provides direction and protection to the human community as an ethical organism; one in which the functions expressing its essential idea are executed by members in conscious free-will.[17] Thus, the concepts of "leadership ecology" and "Nigerian national project" form an interrelated series of determinants of relational categories for coherent and effective social system.

Since the 20th century, leadership has been moved from the top-down control, dominating, and manipulative domain of the leader to that of "service to the led." Consequently, leadership studies have become more relational in focus. They explore the relationship between the leader and the led by probing relational dynamics, like attitudes or qualities, such as mutual respect, trust, and obligation, which would produce the best of leadership results. Jesus' servant-shepherd leadership model espoused in this article belongs to this relational-focus ideology. By definition, servant-shepherd leadership is a model that caters for the holistic development of the constituents as persons, by guiding, protecting, and providing the necessary human conditions for them, to help them attain their highest potential. This is the model of leadership that Jesus practised and taught his disciples to pass on to later generations of his counterculture as presented in the following section.

Jesus' Servant-Shepherd Leadership Model

Jesus prescribed a two-component framework for analysis and understanding of leadership lifestyle to his disciples: service and shepherding. He conveyed this framework in the mould of his teaching on the kingship of God in Roman Palestine. To understand this leadership well requires careful analysis of both the mould and the context of Jesus' royal theology as well as his terminology as the content of his theology.

Context and mould-wise, there are two perspectives in Jesus' leadership teaching: the one builds on Roman royal ideology; the other espouses Jesus' royal theology. In Roman royal ideology, leadership constitutes in the prestigious position held by some members of the elite class of the society, owing to the authority and power of domineering and control the occupant of the given office relishes by virtue of his position of honour (cf. Mt 8:8-9).[18] Such leadership works through a caste and denotes a top-down controlling process. In this practice the servants of the vision are seen as commodities; an ethic where ends justify means; etc. It is based on the concept of sovereignty wherein the leader is the "number one citizen" of the group. The idea probably developed into a

concept of "the great man" and then of a sovereign, denoting lordship with servants attending.

Jesus had an alternative ideology, which starkly contrasts with the Romans'. Meant as a corrective on the interface between kingship and leadership, it is couched in imageries of service or stewardship (Mat 20:20-28; Lk 22:7-9. The leader, the number one person and therefore, great man of the group, is the servant of the other members looking up to him for their direction (not directives) and wellbeing. In Jesus' royal theology, unlike in Roman royal ideology, the entire universe of existence is God's kingdom both in concrete terms (territorially considered) and abstractly, denoting "the power exercised by a king";[19] for the entire universe is his sphere of influence (Mat 5:33-35). Sovereignty therefore, belongs to God, the one and only king, and any human being however exalted they may be is only his steward; his head-household-servant or "manager" (*oikonomos* Gal 4:2). Hence Jesus taught: "let your kingdom come" meaning "let your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven" (Mat 6:9-10).

Content-wise, in the Old Testament, God's vice-gerents who led his people are called servants of God, as is Moses (Deut 34:5; Jos 1:1) and David (Psa 18:1; 36:1). In the New Testament, Jesus integrated and prescribed *diakonia* (voluntary) and *douleia* (forced) service as the prime characteristic of leadership (Mat 20:20-28), in contrast to the dominating and manipulative control system of the Greco-Roman patronage culture. "Servant leader" in human language is an oxymoron.[20] But, in Jesus' thought-world, service was the fundamental and foundational relational component of leadership (Mat 20: 25-28; Mk 10:42-44). Leadership was about helping others to develop into their best in their circumstances. Servants usually bore the burdens of their masters thereby enabling those masters to live better lives. The role of the leader was conceived of on the same categories as that of a servant. Therefore, service became the fundamental function of the leader.

In that world of Jesus, the shepherd metaphor was the predominant imagery of leadership. In the Old Testament, Jacob spoke of God as his shepherd in the sense of his source of providence, care, and protection (Gen 48:15; 49:24). Israelite elders used "shepherd" to characterise David as their "real leader"—"the one who led out and brought in Israel" (1 Chr 11:2 NAU)—even when Saul was "king" of that nation. David portrays God as his shepherd in Psalm 23 with six functional characteristics of the shepherd. He provides a place of rest for the sheep (v 2); He waters the sheep (v 2); He heals the sheep—body and soul (v 3); He guides the sheep in the right paths (v 3); He protects the sheep (v 4); and finally, he feeds the sheep (v 5). In the New Testament, Jesus appropriates this portrait to himself in John 10. The shepherd in that text is so intimately related to his sheep that they know his voice (Jn 10:3-5); he leads them (v 4); and protects

them from predation by himself constituting the door of the fold (vv 7-10); finally, he cares for the sheep to the extent that he gives his own life for their good (v 13).

As it stands, Jesus at once characterised the leader as servant and shepherd. From his perspective, the shepherd relates to the sheep as one who serves them by giving them provident care, guidance, and protection (Ps 23; Jn 10). The biblical data thus, prescribe a framework for the leadership concept wherein the leader is a shepherd with the servant role as a constituent of his function. By servant-shepherd leadership therefore, "servant" only predicates the quality of service to the leadership of the shepherd by identifying it with service as of a servant. Thus, Jesus extends the servant metaphor of leadership by the shepherd metaphor and gives a more complete picture of the leader's life and function than merely seeing him as a servant and leadership as service. We find similar features in indigenous Nigerian leadership conceptions as the next section shows.

Traditional Nigerian Leadership Models

For want of space, we here analytically present only the salient though less than adequate indicators of "*the* Nigerian leadership conception" which are findings from the survey we have conducted on the subject. First, the leader or headman of the segments in the various nationalities that are Nigeria today was commonly designated the "chief elder", with the connotation of "king".[21] Hence, the idea of kingship later fully developed in almost all pre-colonial Nigerian ethnic groups. There are indications that the emergence of the state and king in Nigerian nationalities was a response to the need of security.[22] The frequent attacks on villages by savage peoples caused families, usually of the same lineage, to settle together in villages.[23] Similarly, villages and towns would group together in what may be called a state.

Second, the leaders of the state were usually identified by age; the time or period one had been in a particular area; personal qualities, e.g., achievements; and popularity—owing to some influence exerted or achievements made in community skills, as of a warrior. The indigenous peoples of Nigeria considered those who could protect them physically and oftentimes spiritually, such as warriors, old men etc, as qualified to lead.[24] The elderly were respected and seen as qualified for leadership because that they had escaped death for so long implied acquired rare knowledge of life forces and so both physical and mystical power and thus, ability to face any form of malice brought against them while in leadership positions.[25]

Traditional Nigerian leadership conception was two-pronged: the Hausa and Yoruba monarchy. Traditional Hausa authority system was feudal, hegemonic, highly stratified, bureaucratic and hierarchical with the *sarki* (emir/king) at the top—as in all patronage-prestige systems. Only members of the ruling class—the royal family and other officials co-opted on merit

determined by loyalty, ruled.[26] Thus, the Hausa conceived of leadership as collective endeavour of the elite hegemony with the *sarki* (king) at the summit of power, manipulating political and economic dynamics to promote the personality of the benefactor by protecting his subjects. Simply put, leadership was the sovereign's art of manipulating certain controls to maintain hold on his subjects and achieve his set goals.

The other prong presents leadership among the more fragmentary societies where leadership denoted the act of a group of persons, under a headman or chief leader. The Tiv, as an egalitarian and religious society, for instance, lived communal life, informed by their deep sense of corporate responsibility and continuity. Leadership in this set up was thus, synonymous with guidance and protection; the idea of one for instance, the *Tor Agbande* (Drum Chief), with delegated authority in custody,[27] directing life's course, using certain controls, like kinship; social continuity; and ultimately, the personality of the leader.[28] Similarly, among the six Niger Delta peoples: the Aboh, Itsekiri, Ukuwani, Urhobo, Isoko, and Ijo (Ijaw), the elders' council was not one of rulers; it gave direction to the affairs of the nation state such that internal harmony was maintained. "Consequently, power was matched with a regulated sense of responsibility".[29]

The Igbo people, as fragmentary societies, were each governed by a village council head, designated as king (the chief leader) only in council.[30] Hence, the colonial authorities on arrival designated them "chiefs."[31] The king was to protect his subjects from foreign invasion[32] as in any ecological unit. Thus, in Igbo culture, leaders were not imposed on the people, but were accountable to them since they derived their authority from the people. Leadership here is that of delegated authority to serve people with their support for their wellbeing.

In synthesis, apart from the sovereign's manipulative conception of leadership by the Hausa group, most Nigerian peoples conceived of leadership as the act of a group of persons, under a headman or chief leader, who had acquired good experience of the problems and demands of life, and was knowledgeable in the operations of life forces within the *pleroma* of existence and so could direct the way and guide the rest along the right pathways, towards the good of all. This headman had only delegated authority to serve his support group (supported by that group) by giving them direction and protection. That means leadership was conceived of as serving and shepherding. The title, king, was borrowed, only to identify the headperson as the chief leader in all the segments sampled but absolved of its sovereign denotation, save among the Hausa and to some extent, the Yoruba. They differed chiefly in that the council of chiefs in the emirate was only an advisory body whereas the Yoruba council of chiefs had constitutional powers to remove the *oba* if and when he grossly

misruled. This perspective of leadership understands the phenomenon as a relational category that determines the quality of life of the given community as an ecosystem. Hence, we speak of leadership ecology.

Nigerian peoples' conception of leadership drastically changed by the colonial period. Then, the British colonialists arbitrarily imposed on Nigerian peoples the patronage-prestige authority systems or leadership forms, a replica of which they found among the Hausa group with its Oriental background. And this was irrespective of the peoples' consent or conformity of such authority systems to the peoples' culture or values system.[33] In so doing, the British created in Nigerians, not only a new perception of leadership, namely dictatorship without checks and balances, but also the notion of resistance to dictatorial rule. The British used the Divide and Rule policy to achieve their goal of changing the Nigerian leadership perception and praxis and made Nigerians to believe this is the way leadership is done.

Servant-Shepherd Leadership Model in Real-Life Nigerian Ecosystem

We have found in the foregoing analysis that servant-shepherd leadership has among other features, service oriented outlook; a moral-based leadership that emphasises stewardship, individual focus, role modelling, altruism, and gradual transformation of the followership's mental and behavioural categories to accord with God's countercultural relational prescriptions. The servant-shepherd leader has a two-dimensional conception of himself and his function as servant and shepherd.[34] The model is all about the leader serving his group's mission by attending to its needs, like giving it direction (service) and serving the constituents by equipping them to fully develop themselves (shepherding).[35] Consequently, in this study, attempt is made to describe how the most salient features of the servant-shepherd leadership model can be applied in everyday Nigerian life to sustain this human ecosystem.

The leader's conception of leadership and the model of leadership he elects to use determine his leadership praxis. The leader who sees himself as the great man or patron usually lives a client relationship with followers; the one who sees himself as a servant or shepherd avails himself to constituents as their instrument for self-development and to God, his master for use for the wellbeing of his people. In a word, servant-shepherd leadership is "availability."

Second, good leader-follower interpersonal relationship is largely dictated by certain relational factors which either aid or mar leader-follower relationship. Leadership theorists have various lists of them. This study identifies the following from our survey as more applicable to the needed leader-follower relationships in the Nigerian context:

1. **Respect** – This refers to the recognition of one's worth by another. It is intrinsically associated with honour, a worth which is socially acknowledged. Culturally, Nigerians respect authority and hardly ever

challenge or criticise it. But, in recent times, frequently, striking unions slap Governments in the face because *they failed to respect their agreements in the past*.

2. **Trust, Honesty, And Integrity** – Trust, the belief that someone is honest and sincere and so will live up to his reputation and responsibility is intrinsically related to credibility. "To be persuasive we must be believable: to be believable we must be credible; to be credible, we must be truthful".[36] Lack of trust drove the G18 which transformed into G34 to initiate moves that forced the self-styled "Evil Genius" and "Maradona of Nigeria," Ibrahim Babangida, to "step aside" from governance and leadership of the country. The same absence of trust set the Vice President, Atiku Abubakar against his boss, President Olusegun Obasanjo, to the extent that these Nigerian leaders spent most of their second tenure fighting each other. Ojakaminor captures it well: by their second tenure, "It was intrigues all the way".[37]

3. **Empathy and Altruism –** Altruism and empathy pertain to the leader's selfless identification with his constituents in their situation and his consequent self-giving to serve them in that situation. "When people believe that their leaders understand their concerns, they do their best to execute decisions, even those they disagree with, as grumbling and resistance tend to fade away".[38] The amnesty offer by President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to the various militant groups of the Niger Delta region rather than military affront is good illustration of this. The militia groups believed that he understood their concerns and willingly submitted themselves and their weapons to pave way for peace, which coercive approaches could not achieve.

4. **Humility** – The idea of humble service seems to contradict that of leadership in most of its conceptions. In everyday life, many think of leaders as people who are assertive or self-confident, intelligent, and determined,[39] qualities that depict the leader as the Great Man, the sovereign, and leadership as domination and control. In contrast, the humility of servant-shepherd leaders "is manifested in their willingness to work quietly behind the scenes, spend time on small things, and make seemingly inconsequential decisions unrewarded and unnoticed".[40] Most Nigerian leaders see themselves, not as servants or as shepherds, but as sovereigns, indeed, as lords and demigods who deserve worship and adoration in the spirit of Machiavellianism, a doctrine that politics and morality do not go together.

5. **Openness and accountability** – These relate to stewardship as a relational value in the leader's community. Servant-shepherd leaders have no skeletons in their cupboards and so, exhibit accountability and

openness to criticism.

Recommendations

On the basis of the foregoing research results, it is hereby recommended that, for leadership to be effective in today's Nigeria so as to actualise our dream of a united nation:

1. A leadership revolution or reorientation should be kick-started and supported by genuine commitment to its realisation and maintenance by all Nigerians. We must exit the Western great-man patronage system for our forefathers' servant-shepherd leadership model, which Jesus shared and it has proven efficacious for his counterculture.
2. The Western values characterised by selfish individualism, which are dictating leadership praxis in the guise of secularity that is rather secularism, should be replaced by traditional Nigerian values system, characterised by community interest, and governed by genuine religion.
3. Nigerian leaders and those aspiring to leadership positions should be exposed to teaching sessions, to understand the servant-shepherd position of the leader and so accept and apply it in their leadership assignments for the wellbeing of their followers. The leader as a servant-shepherd becomes great only when the people see him as the pillar of their wellbeing and look up to him.

Conclusion

The thesis of this paper is that Nigeria cannot achieve true nationhood unless she replaces her sovereign-prescribed leadership framework with a relational-based one that will provide direction and protection to the ecosystem for coherent and effective social system. It argues that Nigeria's sovereign royal ideology underlying its leadership praxis is lopsided and accounts for the socioeconomic and political crises hindering genuine concern for development of a "Nigerian nation." This results from misinterpretation of functions and responsibilities of the leader, and consequent misapplication of the leadership process. From a leadership ecology stance, state leadership, as the steward organ of "the state" is the centre of interactions in that ecosystem. Human interactions in Nigeria without astute umpire have given birth to ethnic based politics and a delicate federal structure, though. To date, Nigeria has no internally cohesive political leadership, but only a ruling elite preoccupied with power politics, dictated by mutual fear of domination by any region or ethnic group that acquires more political power.

Jesus' servant-shepherd leadership framework with its service orientation, moral-base, stewardship emphasis, etc. and most importantly, gradual transformation of constituents' mental and behavioural categories to accord with God's countercultural relational prescriptions is most relevant to the

contemporary Nigerian situation. With its emphasis on the leader as the head-servant responsible for the wellbeing of his master's household (Lk 12:42; 16.2), it well accords with the traditional leadership conceptions of most nationalities that are in Nigeria today. Moreover, servant-shepherd leadership has also proven effective in broader contexts because of its concern with creating a high level interpersonal relationship between leader and followers. The Church, the first expression of Jesus' counterculture, guided by the Holy Spirit which is an "expert in humanity" is the rightful person to, and should, inculcate this ideology in Nigerians and guide its praxis for stability of the polity and genuine national development.

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