

# John Wesley's Christian Leadership Paradigm: A Model for the Ghanaian Clergy

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## Abstract

The thrust of this paper is to explore John Wesley's leadership paradigm as a model for Ghanaian pastors. This was done by reviewing literature on John Wesley and his leadership style. It came out that some Ghanaian clergy lack Christian moral values and leadership qualities. They suspiciously based their values on their circumstances and personal interests such as crave for wealth and fame. The paper concludes that adopting the John Wesley's leadership principles would help redeem the tarnished image of the Ghanaian clergy and would thus enable them live a Christ-like life.

**Keywords:** Leaders, Leadership, Clergy and Ghanaian

## 1. Introduction

Since the planting of Christianity in Ghana, then Gold Coast, by the European missionaries in the nineteenth century (Agbeti, 1986), Christianity has grown to become the dominant religion in the country. According to the 2010 national population census, about 71.2 per cent of Ghana's population professes the Christian faith ([www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010phc/Census2010](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010phc/Census2010)). In spite of this achievement, one of the ills of the Ghanaian Church in this twenty-first century, which is a source of concern for most Ghanaians, is indiscipline among the clergy. For some time now the Ghanaian clergy have come under severe attacks from some of their own colleagues, the laity and the media. Concerns have been raised about the caliber of leadership the Ghanaian Church has produced and continues to produce. Many people are dismay about the negative publicity of some Christian leaders. There have been allegations ranging from financial embezzlement, fraud, rape, and murder among others that have been labeled against some church leaders in Ghana of late. In fact, hardly a day passes without the media reporting of a clergy involving in an indiscipline act. For instance, on Friday, 13 June 2014, the Daily Graphic (Online) carried news of a clergy who was remanded in prison custody by a district magistrate court in Agona Swedru in the Central Region for raping a married woman at knife point. Again the media often carry stories of pilfering of church funds by some clergy and some of these cases have resulted in jail terms for some of the culprits. Such incidents point to the fact that some pastors lack Christian moral values and leadership qualities. They suspiciously based their values on their circumstances and personal interests such as crave for wealth and fame.

Rev. Justifier Nii-Noi Ocquaye of the Ghana Baptist church hit the nail at the right spot when he attributed the current negative attitudes of Ghanaians to the failure in the ability of the clergy to provide clear leadership. He thinks the upsurge in corruption and gross immorality in the Ghanaian society is due to the failure of the clergy to lead the way. He associated the current national crises to the failure of the Ghanaian clergy to instill proper human values into their congregations and their societies in general. This he thinks is giving rise to all forms of social vices (<https://www.ghanaweb.com> accessed 12 July, 2014). One thus agrees with Rev. Ocquaye that the current negative attitude being displayed by both Ghanaians and non Ghanaians is clearly an indictment on the credibility of the clergy.

As established from the foregoing, the attitude of Christian leaders deserves much improvement and this calls for the application of some leadership mechanisms. The paper thus explores John Wesley's leadership paradigm as a model for Ghanaian pastors. Generally, a leader is a person who people look up to for direction with regards to making moral decisions. Leadership therefore is the process of influencing a person's character. It could also be simply rendered as the process of organizing people to achieve a common goal. A good leader develops through a never ending process of self-study, education, training and experience. However, in Ghana this process of continuing self-studying, education, training and experience is generally believed to be lacking among a cross section of pastors.

The concept of leadership has attracted enormous attention, particularly from areas such as business, politics and development. However, to Bekker (2009) the concept of religious leaders is increasingly being ignored. In contrast with Bekker's (2009) view, studies on the concept of religious leaders is now gaining prominence, although from the Biblical perspective and this is as a result of the indiscipline nature of some religious leaders (Edgar, ©1992, Adeyemo, 2006 and Amofo, 2013). From the perspective of this paper, leadership as a skill is needed in all aspects of human life. Every aspect of life to a large extent determines the nature of the leadership skills needed. In this regard, the issue of religious leadership is unique and thus calls for attention, since religion permeates every aspect or sector of society, particularly in Africa. This study thus seeks to explore John Wesley's leadership style as a paradigm for contemporary Christian leadership.

### **1.1 The man John Wesley**

John Wesley's critics often argue that he was not a good example of leadership since his personality often proved to have some disagreeable aspects (Abelove, 1990). However, he was a motivated and determined person who was sometimes perceived to be dictatorial and domineering (Tyson, 2003). This trait of his led some of his followers to nickname him 'Pope John'. Although he was a strong willed person, he showed an approachability to people and was open enough to be called to account for his stewardship at the Methodist Conference of 1766 (Tyson, 2003). He was answerable to his followers. It would be a grave injustice for one to look at his leadership model and influence through the lens of these personality features. Rather emphasis should be placed on factors that were in place that enabled him to be an effective leader.

One can glean his understanding of leadership from his writings. In one of his works, he asserts that the reason the Christian community worldwide had done so little was that they were producing so few real Christians' (Maddox, 2003). He attributed three reasons for his statement. One is that few churches offered their members an adequate understanding of Christian doctrine. Also, where churches provided adequate doctrinal formation, they lacked provision for spiritual discipline. And lastly, where churches offered doctrinal formation and spiritual discipline, there still seemed to be an absence of the Christian practice of self-denial (Maddox, 2003). This situation has led the clergy to 'miss' its rightful place in the church. According to Maddox the clergy can take its rightful place when the Christian community understands the scope of its beliefs, particularly as it pertains to the doctrine of salvation. If the community limits its understanding of salvation to merely the forgiveness of sins, then it may very well be assumed that the formation of moral character is an instant that needs no process.

The point worth stressing is that Wesley sees leadership to begin with people. True leadership, in his view is not fixated on a particular ideology or the vision of an individual (Weems, 1999). A model of leadership that succumbs to the temptation of ideologies or personal agenda may be effective for a certain period of times, but will not make a significant impact where it is most needed. He saw the needs in his community and it is clear from his sermon on 'causes of inefficacy of Christianity' that he was tremendously frustrated by the lack of solutions offered by the so-called Christian leaders of his day ([www.Wesley Center Online](http://www.WesleyCenterOnline.com)). In the same way some of us are frustrated, worried and dismay with the current upsurge of social vices and the apparent lack of solutions offered by our leadership, both political and religious leaders.

Arguably, in the case of Wesley, England's political leaders at that time would have considered themselves to be not only social leaders but also Christian leaders. In the same vein, every clergy should see himself as a social leader and this could be seen in the life of the Israelites under the reign of the Judges. The Judges did not only see themselves as religious leaders but as social leaders as well. Through their social interaction with their people the Judges were able to use God's message to understand not only the religious needs of their people but the social needs as well. With this understanding they were able to find antidote to most, if not all, the challenges confronting their communities. However, in the time of Wesley and in this current dispensation there seem to be a discrepancy between the gospel the clergy believed in and their social interaction regarding finding remedies to the ills of their congregations and the society in general. In other words, the (some) clergy seems to have failed to use the gospel to finding remedies to the teaming challenges facing the Church and the society in general. The point is that the attitudes as well as activities of some of the clergy are themselves 'headache' to the Ghanaian Church. These clergy have failed to use the Bible to finding remedies to their indiscipline nature. The query worth asking at this juncture is who is a true Christian leader (ie. One called or commissioned by God)?

True leaders are those who understand their faith to be more than lip-service in the Church. True leadership demands an awareness of people and their needs and this could be achieved by inspiring change in the life of the congregation. Just like in Wesley's era, in our current dispensation some so-called men of God do not inspire change. So, a query worth asking is where do leaders who inspire change come from?

In Wesley's view true Christian leaders who could make a difference did not necessarily come from those with obvious ability, but simply from the people whom God provided (Weems, 1999). Wesley looked for leaders from among the people, not above the people (Weems, 1999), for he thinks that such leaders have a genuine love and awareness of the realities of the daily lives of their followers. A true Christian leader in this regard follows his congregation and would not promote an ideology that sought to convince the masses to follow him. Again, a true Christian leader is the one who will recognize as well as pick and work with the lay people in the Church as joint labourers in God's vineyard. Wesley demonstrated this stewardship when he instituted the Order of Local Preachers. These were people among the general populace who expressed their belief that God had called them to proclaim the word and to serve the Christian community at large. These were ordinary lay people with very little training, but Wesley recognized and used their passion for the people and God by allowing them to serve as leaders within their local worshipping communities. This often entailed more than just fulfilling preaching appointments. Furthermore, the preaching places or societies were not managed under the dictatorial finger of a minister or Wesley himself, but were managed by the lay people who formed part of these congregations. Later, these same lay people were those who took charge of greater Methodist structures and circuit stewards. The people were given the opportunity of playing roles in the structure, function and mission of established local congregations, so much so that these communities survive and thrive without the luxury of having a resident minister (Weems, 1999).

Again, as a Christian, Wesley knew that the foundation of Christian character is the believer's union with Jesus Christ. The union with Jesus Christ produces certain moral results like honesty, integrity, fairness, service to humanity, total dependence upon God for strength and guidance among others which are crucial to a leader's effectiveness. Before his encounter with Jesus at Alders Gate in 1738, Wesley thought he knew Jesus Christ. He had in fact embarked on several journeys to preach about Jesus Christ. However, his actions, as he later realised were in vain simply because he had no personal relationship with the personality he was marketing (Baker, 1982). Similarly, there are some Ghanaian clergy, who have been preaching about Jesus Christ for some time now, yet their actions depict that they do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ whom they have been marketing. A leader who has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will definitely live a Christ-like life. But this union with Jesus Christ is lacking among some clergy in some of our Ghanaian churches.

A leader with a Christ-like character is able to command trust among his people. This is exemplified in the life of Wesley. In his ministry, he was able to attract a lot of the 'working' poor in England due to the trust the latter had in him. Outler (1977) for instance, describes him as a 'folk theologian' and this is because he 'spoke plain words to plain folks'. In other words, he preached to the understanding of common people. The irony is that he was a superbly educated Christian minister who used his considerable gifts to translate complicated theological discourses for the common people; it was in this sense that Outler (1977) referred to him as a 'popularizer' who intentionally concealed his learning. His down to earth relationship with the working class earned him a lot of admiration. Hundreds and thousands trooped to hear his sermons. His ability to communicate with the masses was an achievement that went unparallel during his days. But what type of leadership do we see in Ghana today? Most of our clergy are never down to earth. Worse of all most of these leaders rather tend to 'milk' their poor congregations.

Beside, a sense of commitment to one's dreams, goals and target regarding the Great Commission is crucial for successful leadership. Wesley's commitment to the cause of God was evident for all. His fervor to see people saved saw him travel extensively to preach the gospel. On records, he is believed to have travelled more than 250,000 miles on horseback and preached more than 40,000 sermons (Lee, 1954). He and his preachers encountered persecution and physical violence of the bitterest kind. They never allowed strange storms derail their mission train. They rode the storm triumphantly because they showed no fear. In the face of persecution they did not give up or waver in their aim of reaching as many people as they could. They thus, remained resolute to the cause of their mission work. Similarly, a true leader should be able to ride any storm triumphantly and this should be without any fear. Unfortunately, some Ghanaian clergy easily allow strange storms derail their mission train.

Regarding financial issues, Wesley was also immersed in the lifestyle and theology of the church fathers and this could be seen in his writings. He asserts that any Christian who takes for himself or herself anything more than the plain necessities of life lives in an open habitual denial of Jesus Christ. He was one person who practices what he preached. To demonstrate this, he gave most of his money to the poor and needy. This made him to always wear inexpensive clothes and ate only simple food. He contended that should he die and leave a bequest of ten pounds then humanity should bear witness against him that he lived and died a thief. This is an absolute echo of patristic theological discourse and ethics (Mayhew, n. d.).

Wesley's example depicts his emulation of the Matthean legacy of economic sharing. Economic sharing among the Apostles was both exhilarating and dramatic and this every good Christian steward must emulate. A good steward is that one who always remembers the poor and needy and always has in his mind the core teachings of Jesus Christ on the support of the poor as found in Matthew 25 (Mayhew, n. d.).

One is not advocating that the current Ghanaian Christian leadership emulate this patristic theology and ethics. After all, one is at liberty to live an affluent lifestyle in a country that is characterized by abject poverty. Beside, this patristic theology and ethic did not mean that the labourer was not worthy of his hire or some clergy deserve double honour than others. The point is that emphasis was placed on the welfare of the clergy as well as the ministering of the poor and needy. In Ghana, some clergy especially from the Charismatic strand are living affluent lifestyle. The flamboyant lifestyles of some of these leaders have received much criticism in recent times and indeed it is a source of concern for some Ghanaian Christians (Shaibu, 2010:147-150). Condemning the ostentatious lifestyles of some of his colleagues, Eastwood Anaba thinks some Pastors pressurize their congregations (through offering) for their own personal gains. In the end Anaba thinks some of his colleagues commit many unpardonable mistakes (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2004). It is not being suggested that church leaders living ostentatious lifestyles are signs of wrong doing on their part, but the unorthodox methods that some of them used to amass wealth from their congregations is partially the source of concern. In addition, the use of the generated funds (offertories) from their congregations to enrich themselves and their families to the neglect of the poor and needy in their churches is another source of worry. This is absolutely in contrast to the patristic theology and ethic and in sharp contrast to the lifestyle John Wesley led. In fact, in contemporary times, the theology of economic sharing that once existed in the church is hardly seen or experienced. What is gradually gaining prominence in Ghana today is what could be described as the theology of individualism. Individualism has eaten into the Ghanaian fabric to the extent that the Ghanaian church sees nothing wrong with it. Some church leaders are so individualistic that even their flamboyant lifestyles depict such system; they live an affluent lifestyle whilst some of their church members find it difficult to subsist. Their lifestyle depicts a leadership style devoid of commitment and care of the destitute; a clear picture of ineffectiveness.

Effective leadership is largely dependent on the commitment and conviction to selflessly realise certain goals. This is known as a vision or a 'preferred future'. For Christian leaders, the conviction must be shaped by the biblical vision of God's kingdom. It must be combined with an ability to communicate these contours in meaningful and relevant ways through sound preaching and teaching and imaginative pastoral leadership. Wesley embodies these attributes in his ministry. The overriding vision of Wesley was not to preach the gospel to as many people as he could so that they could be saved but to always remember the poor and needy. On the issue of preaching the gospel, he charged his newly commissioned circuit riders to save souls as well as care for them. He tasked his riders to spend and be spent in the ministry work. They were not to visit only those who needed them but to those they ought to visit.

Indeed Wesley clearly understood the true principle of Christian stewardship and this was depicted by his leadership style. In his style he made a fine distinction between vision, mission and strategy. He demonstrated true leadership by giving priority to his leadership vision and mission which he did not only theorized but put into practice.

### **1.1.1 Implications for the Ghanaian Clergy**

The revival Wesley initiated in the eighteenth century is one of the classic examples of the difference that Christian leadership can make in society. Headed by Wesley, the early Wesleyan movements were responsible for the establishment of schools for adults, free education for children whose parents could not afford their tuition, and the establishment of schools for children who had to work during the week and could not attend school. He and his followers engaged with government and society with regard to economic justice (the taxation of the wealthy in order to support the poor), and they challenged the legal system, providing humanitarian aid to prisoners who lived in dreadful conditions, many of whom would be hanged for minor misdemeanours (Gooch, 2006). Another significant achievement of the Wesley movements was their contribution to the start of the labour movement. In 1746, Wesley established the first clinic for the poor, who otherwise would not have been able to afford medical treatment and later played an important role in advocating the equal treatment of slaves. This was the first place where these slaves were admitted to worship and celebrating the Eucharist alongside any other person who wished to worship (Gooch, 2006).

These achievements by Wesley and his followers hinge on the visionary leadership of Wesley and the support he had from his followers. If one was to attribute Wesley's success to the traditional models of leadership, where Wesley was identified as a leader and all others merely served as obedient followers, then one may suggest that

Wesley used the Church as a form to advance his own agenda. Instead, he engaged each issue of social justice on the basis of his personal conviction that God values every person and that every person has the ability to become an instrument of God's presence within their particular context. Ghanaian clergy first need to understand that they are in their leadership roles not for self aggrandizement but for the sake of others. Nothing is able to prove this than suffering. Wesley had proved that he indeed was seeking the salvation of many. He travelled extensively, endured persecution and opposition. Sacrifice is the key issue here.

Again, the Ghanaian clergy need to be committed and build a credible character. Commitment is paramount to the success of a leader. The need to demonstrate one's passion and belief for the cause of God is paramount if one can gain the trust of his or her followers. Wesley was unwavering and committed in his cause. Such commitment needs to be learned by the Ghanaian clergy because a congregation desires to be led by one who knows where he/she is going and who inspire confidence. A good leader is one who is steeped in the Scriptures as a source of authority and is willing upon that authority to engage and stimulate the congregants in their Bible study and spiritual formation as an interpreter of the biblical stories and message. Preaching and teaching are therefore pivotal vehicles for communication.

### Conclusion

In spite of the fact that Christianity is the dominant faith in Ghana, it is bedeviled with indiscipline among the clergy and this has been a source of concern to most, if not all, Ghanaians and non-Ghanaian leaving in Ghana. This situation has made the Ghanaian clergy to come under severe attacks from some of their colleagues, the laity and the media. This issue raises concern about the caliber of leadership the Ghanaian Church has and continues to produce. The indiscipline nature among the clergy attests to the fact that some clergy lack moral values and leadership qualities. Such leaders based their values on their circumstances and personal interest and thus crave for wealth and fame. This has led some of the clergy to attribute the current social vices in the country to the inability of the clergy to live worthy of emulation. In order to live a life worthy of emulation, this paper suggests that Ghanaian clergy could emulate the leadership style of John Wesley as explored in this write-up.

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