

Church Leadership in Nigeria in the Light of Leadership Qualifications in Timothy 3:1-7

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Abstract

Generally, effectiveness of any leader is measured by his ability to gain compromise and dedication to organizational objectives. Leader must possess the capability to influence the workers to work together willingly with confidence and keenness. These could be learnt, improved and developed. Church leadership is even more demanding and this is why Paul the Apostle in the pastorals lists what should constitute the qualifications for church leaders. But unfortunately, most church leaders in Nigeria fall short of these requirements and yet still glory in being led by the spirit of God even at the verge of making gross administrative errors. This is why this paper assessed church leadership in Nigeria, aiming at pointing out the inadequacies when compared with Pauline leadership qualifications in 1Timothy 3:1-7 and recommending appropriately.

Keywords: Church, Leadership, Nigeria, 1Tim 3:1-7.

Introduction

Leadership is indeed a dynamic reciprocal process of personal influence by which a manager or a leader shapes the attitudes and activities of others towards the achievement or attainment of organizational objectives. Even before the modern concepts of leadership came into being, Paul in the Pastorals lists the qualifications for church leaders. These have remained the model for ages. For any church leader to steer the ship of the church successfully, these qualities must be imbibed. But contemporary experience in Nigeria has shown a marked departure from this Pauline list of qualifications for church leaders. The level of understanding expected from both the leaders and the followers is missing in most cases. This often results in crises within “the body of Christ”.

In view of the above, this paper attempts a clarification of the qualifications according to Paul. It also relates them to the contemporary conceptions of church leadership in order to determine if the biblical injunctions are still being followed or not. To do this successfully, a critical exegesis of the Greek and English texts of the passages were examined in order to know what the texts meant in their original context and what they should mean in our own context today.

Leadership as a Concept

There are some common features in various definitions of leadership. It will be presumptuous for anyone to attempt a definition that will satisfy a student of leadership studies. Leadership is nothing if not linked to collective purpose; and the effectiveness of leaders must be judged not by press clippings but by actual social change, measured by intent and by satisfaction of human needs and expectations. This is why Cribbins as quoted by Oluwasegun (2005:4) defines leadership as:

The ability to gain consensus and commitment to common objectives beyond organizational requirements which are attained with experience or contribution and satisfaction on the part of the working group.

Leadership could be defined as the relationship in which one person or the leader influences others to work together willingly on related tasks to attain that which the leader desires. It is a means of direction. Leadership is the ability of management to induce the subordinates to work towards a group's goals with confidence and keenness. It implies that the leader accepts responsibility for the achievement of the group objectives and it is, therefore, essential for the trust and cooperation from both sides to be evidence all the time (Oluwasegun, 2005). Leadership is an art of getting things done. It can be learnt, improved, developed and perfected. It is the key process of influence and the process always includes a number of key components such as leader and followers, they interact in situations and means of influence which emerge from the leader and from the followers, based on their value system and goals which the leader and the followers seek to achieve.

In sum, leadership implies that:

- The leader gives direction, motivates, reprimands and develops a set objective along with his group and resolves individual or group needs.
- He represents the group, channeling information and maintaining perspectives.
- He develops the group, creating the group's ability to change and integrate the group with the environment.

Biblical Concept of Leadership

The word leader is from the Greek word ἀρχηγός, οὐ=, ο(*archēgos* leader. In the New Testament it was more often used as Christological title for the exalted Jesus. The results of semasiological and lexicographical investigation of secular Greek indicate an extremely polyvalent spectrum of meaning for the word, the basis being *he who is the first, who stands at the head of, who leads*. The expression occurs 35 times in the LXX with 9 Heb. equivalents bearing the senses of confidant, physician, family or tribal representative, head, tip, (tree-)top, supervisor, prince, and leader. Insistence upon the continuity of the OT and Jewish theme of Yahweh's leading in the course of salvation history with Christian use of the title can serve as a corrective to earlier exegesis which derived the title too one-sidedly from the Greco-Hellenistic cult of the hero or ruler (Delling, 1983) or exclusively from the Gnostic idea of the leader of souls (Käsemann, 1984). The credo theme of "led out of Egypt" is here transposed into Christological-titular usage and denotes the exalted Jesus as the eschatological *leader* of the new people of God on its exodus into the doxa of the resurrection.

The biblical concept of leadership also appears in Acts 3:15, where the Lukan Peter accuses the Jews of having killed the messianic one *who has led the way to [the] life* (NEB) of the resurrection. They acted in stubbornness and ignorance, but Jesus did not remain dead, but was raised by God and thus became the one who leads the way into the resurrection life. According to Heb 6:20, Jesus is the one who goes before into the inner sanctum behind the curtain of God's holy of holies. In contrast to Heb 5:9, "originator of eternal salvation," Acts 3:15 should be translated not as "originator of life," but rather as "one who leads the way into life." In a further speech of Peter Acts 5:31 says of the crucified and resurrected Jesus that "God exalted him at his right hand as [eschatological] *Leader* and Saviour. The predication "Leader and Saviour" is plainly near to Heb 2:10 "pioneer of their salvation." The linguistic similarities between Luke and Hebrews leads one to conclude that they reflect a common liturgical tradition; this in turn leads one to suspect that they also reflect here a fixed formula originating in an ancient Christology of the Hellenistic Church.

Heb 2:10 has: "make the *leader* who delivers them perfect through sufferings" (NEB). Jesus' function as *leader* results from the cross and the resurrection from the dead (13:20); he brings to completion God's promises of salvation by leading many sons into God's doxa. In Heb 12:2 the formulation "*author* and perfecter of the faith" does not mean that Jesus "as the first man gave an example of faith in God" or that "by His death He 'fulfilled' this faith in God's unconditional love" (Delling, 1983), but rather that the earthly Jesus, here as the exalted Lord of his Church, is presented as the leader of the faith in order to encourage believers to endure in their Christological life of faith.

The Exegesis of 1 Timothy 3:1-7

The saying is sure; if anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, and hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (RSV).

According to the New Testament, the terms "bishop," "pastor," and "elder" are synonymous. *Bishop* means "overseer," and the elders had the responsibility of overseeing the work of the church (Acts 20:17,28; 1Pet 5:1-3). "Elder" is the translation of the Greek word presbutes, which means "an old man." Paul used the word presbytery in (1Tim 4:14), referring not to a denomination, but to the "eldership" of the assembly that ordained Timothy. Elders and bishops (two names for the same office, (cf Titus 1:5,7) were mature people with spiritual wisdom and experience. Also, "pastor" means "shepherd," one who leads and cares for the flock of God (Vine, 1996:67).

When one compares the qualifications given here for bishops with those given for elders in (Titus 1:5-9), one quickly sees that the same office is in view. Church organization was quite simple in apostolic days: There were pastors (elders, bishops) and deacons (Phil 1:1). It seems that there was a plurality of elders overseeing the work of each church, some involved in "ruling" (organization and government), others in teaching (1Tim 5:17)

But these men were leaders in their various fields and they had to be qualified. It was good for a growing believer to aspire to the office of bishop, but the best way to achieve it was to develop Christian character and meet the requirements (Vine, 1996:67). To become an elder/bishop was a serious decision, one not treated lightly in the early church. Paul gave sixteen qualifications for a man to meet if he expected to serve as an elder/bishop/pastor (Vine, 1996:67). These were stated by Bible Exposition Commentary, in *PC Study Bible*

V5 as follows:

Blameless (v. 2a). This word literally means "nothing to take hold upon"; that is, there must be nothing in his life that Satan or the unsaved can take hold of to criticize or attack the church. No man living is sinless, but we must strive to be blameless, or "above reproach" (NIV).

The husband of one wife (v. 2b). All of the qualifying adjectives in this passage are masculine. While there is ample scope for feminine ministry in a local assembly, the office of elder is not given to women. However, a pastor's home life is very important, and especially his marital status. It means that a pastor must not be divorced and remarried. Paul was certainly not referring to polygamy, since no church member, let alone a pastor, would be accepted if he had more than one wife. Nor is he referring to remarriage after the death of the wife.

It is clear that a man's ability to manage his own marriage and home indicate ability to oversee a local church (1Tim 3:4-5). A pastor who has been divorced opens himself and the church to criticism from outsiders, and it is not likely that people with marital difficulties would consult a man who could not keep his own marriage together.

Vigilant (v. 2c). This means "temperate" or "sober." "Temperate in all things". Or "keep his head in all situations" (NIV). A pastor needs to exercise sober, sensible judgment in all things.

Sober (v. 2d). He must have a serious attitude and be in earnest about His work. This does not mean he has no sense of humour, or that he is always solemn and sober. Rather it suggests that he knows the value of things and does not cheapen the ministry or the Gospel message by foolish behaviour.

Of good behaviour (v. 2e). "Orderly" would be a good translation. The pastor should be organized in his thinking and his living, as well as in his teaching and preaching.

Given to hospitality (v. 2f). Literally, "loving the stranger." This was an important ministry in the early church when traveling believers would need places to stay. But even today, a pastor and wife who are hospitable are a great help to the fellowship of a local church.

Apt to teach (v. 2g). Teaching the Word of God is one of an elder's main ministries. In fact, many scholars believe that "pastors and teachers" in Eph 4:11 refer to one person but to two functions. A pastor is automatically a teacher (2Tim 2:2). A pastor must be a careful student of the Word of God, and of all that assists him in knowing and teaching that Word. The pastor who is lazy in his study is a disgrace in the pulpit.

Not given to wine (v. 3a). The word describes a person who sits long with the cup and thus drinks to excess. The fact that Paul advised Timothy to use wine for medicinal purposes (1Tim 5:23) indicates that total abstinence was not demanded of believers. Sad to say, some of the members of the Corinthian church got drunk, even at the love feast that accompanied the Lord's Supper (1Cor 11:21). The Jewish people diluted their wine with water to make sure it was not too strong. It was a well-known fact that water was not pure in those days, so that weak wine taken in moderation would have been healthier to drink.

However, there is a vast difference between the cultural use of wine in Bible days and supporting the alcohol industry of today. Paul's admonition and example in Rom 14 (especially (Rom 14:21) would apply today in a special way. A godly pastor would certainly want to give the best example and not be an excuse for sin in the life of some weaker brothers.

No striker (v. 3b). "Not contentious, not looking for a fight." Charles Spurgeon told his Pastor's College students, "Don't go about the world with your fist doubled up for fighting, carrying a theological revolver in the leg of your trousers."

Not greedy of filthy lucre (v. 3c). Paul will have more to say about money in 1Tim 6: 3ff. It is possible to use the ministry as an easy way to make money, if a man has no conscience or integrity. Covetous pastors always have "deals" going on outside their churches, and these activities erode their character and hinder their ministry. Pastors should "not [work] for filthy lucre" (1Pet 5:2).

Patient (v. 3d). "Gentle" is a better translation. The pastor must listen to people and be able to take criticism without reacting. He should permit others to serve God in the church without dictating to them.

Not a brawler (v. 3e). Pastors must be peacemakers, not troublemakers. This does not mean they must compromise their convictions, but that they must "disagree" without being "disagreeable."

Not covetous (v. 3f). You can covet many things beside money: popularity, a large ministry that makes you famous, denominational advancement, etc. This word centres mainly on money.

A godly family (vv. 4-5). This does not mean that a pastor must be married, or, if married, must have children. However, marriage and a family are probably in the will of God for most pastors. If a man's own children cannot obey and respect him, then his church is not likely to respect and obey his leadership. For Christians, the church and the home are one. Church leaders should oversee both of them with love, truth, and discipline. The pastor cannot be one thing at home and something else in church. If he is, his children will detect it, and there will be problems. The words "rule" and "ruleth" in (1Tim 3: 4,5) mean "to preside over, to govern," and suggest that a pastor is the one who directs the business of the church. (Not as a dictator, but a loving shepherd (1Pet 5:3.) The word translated "take care of" in (1Tim 3:5) suggests a personal ministry to

the needs of the church. It is used in the Parable of the Good Samaritan to describe the care given to the injured man (Luke 10:34,35).

Not a novice (v. 6). "Novice" literally means "one newly planted," referring to a young Christian. Age is no guarantee of maturity, but it is good for a man to give himself time for study and growth before he accepts a church. Some men mature faster than others.

A good testimony outside the church (v. 7). Does he pay his bills? Does he have a good reputation among unsaved people with whom he does business? (PC Study Bible V5).

All the above without exception are vitally required in the life of any Church leader. We shall now examine if these are applicable in Nigeria.

Church leadership: Nigerian Experience

In many Churches in Nigeria (Dairo, 2001-2008) false teaching, preconceived ideas and human-formed regulations have too often undermined the Holy Spirit's specification about the choice of leaders. Paul said the church leader must be kind of man he described above. All church leaders may not possess these qualities in the same measure but a leader must have these quality attributes to a degree that is noticeable in his life. If a man is known to be harsh instead of being gentle, intemperate instead of being temperate, disgraceful instead of being respectable, he has disqualified himself (Bible Org. 2004). The work of church leadership is a noble task. Such an office needs the right kind of people to serve. No doubt, the problem of erring church leaders is not peculiar to Nigeria or Africa. Rancorous divisions, muddled thinking and double loyalty have marked the history of the churches down the ages. However, some of the problems about church leadership in Nigeria are traceable to the prevailing economic condition. Food security is threatened. Privatization and commercialization of education, which have increased the cost of education, resulted in mass dropouts; added to this is the mass unemployment (Kaula, 1998). What we are witnessing today is aggressive proselytizing in which each denomination seeks for domination. The struggle for soul winning cum supremacy and also social-economic considerations constituted major reasons for proliferation of churches. The messages are no longer about salvation, heaven and hell but the acquiring of material wealth, by capitalizing on the "gross ignorance" of the people about the teaching of the Bible on wealth. All over the world and particularly in Nigeria 'marketing' God is fast becoming a top bracket business. Today religion has become the "food basket of the nation, billowing into a flourishing agro-allied industrial complex" (Obiora, 1998). There is a market value for everything under the sun and religion is not an exception. This is why people establish Churches today regardless of whether or not they possess the leadership qualifications listed by Paul.

Conclusion

Why did Paul dwell so much on the character of church leaders? He was well aware that the church situation cannot but be determined by the type of leadership it enjoys. The spiritual level of a church leader often determines the spiritual level of the generality of the church membership. Foreigners cannot rescue the Nigerian church from her present plight. The salvaging of the situation will have to be done by Nigerians themselves. The situation in Nigeria demands more than mere pretence; it needs concrete solutions (Abogunrin, 1986).

True leaders, who are living examples in integrity, honesty, consistency, and are deeply spiritual, are so few. Self-made leaders may possess a form of godliness, but would deny the power of God, in their actions. If the Body of Christ will get into prophetic "promised land", this situation must change. Where capable leadership is not in place, most things do not work out, as they should. God's people in all ages have always suffered because of lack of good leadership (Dairo, 2007). Throughout the scriptures, all God's servants must be qualified spiritually and properly trained (Ex. 18:13-25; Acts 6:3-5). Church leadership is more than mere academic qualifications. It requires combining the spiritual qualifications with the organizational ability" (Dairo, 2007).

One of the solutions is to have disciplined leadership which, in turn will be able to discipline others. The solution, therefore, requires a deliberate partnership between the churches and theological institution/Departments of Religious Studies all over the country. This is so because the responsibility to train such Christian leaders is ours together. Together, we can help individuals to be authentic African Christian leaders who know how to deal with the contemporary problems in their communities and in the nation. The churches in Nigeria have no other option than partnership with the theological training institutions (Nakah, 2003).

The success will depend on the church's ability to respond holistically to the massive challenges facing its leadership. The church in Nigeria needs leaders who can adapt the gospel message to meet harsh difficulties facing our people. A large number of courageous, faith-oriented leaders are needed to serve the growing church. They need to be biblically rooted, culturally sensitive and proactive visional men and women of God. The overwhelming challenges facing Nigeria church today require dynamic agents of change. The churches of today must not turn from the righteous requirements for leadership, which God has sent forth through the apostles. The church must also require from its leaders the highest standard of holiness, perseverance in faithfulness to God and His word and godly life as demanded by Paul in 1Tim 3: 1-7. They are to be earnestly prayed for,

encouraged and supported; while they too must be examples to believers in word in conversation, charity, faith, and purity”(1 Tim. 4:12).

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