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# **THE TRAINING OF LEADERS FOR THE MINISTRY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

Victor Cole

One of the critical issues facing the church in Africa today is a dearth of leadership. As calls are heard to train competent leaders for the church, some pertinent questions are in order: What is leadership? Can leaders be trained? How does one go about training leaders for the church? Specifically, what types of training will make leaders out of the trainees? Are church leaders exhibiting the same characteristics the world over, or is leadership culturally-defined? If culturally-defined, do our theological schools have the resources to train culturally-attuned leaders?

However, before addressing what church leadership looks like, it is useful first to attempt to define leadership.

## **Leadership Defined**

For the purpose of this paper, three broadly encompassing views will be presented.

### *The Trait Approach*

The most widely held view of leadership falls under the category called "trait approach." Lay people in general conceive of leadership in terms of traits the leader possesses. Researchers therefore have sought to identify the leader traits. The variables become so broad and diversified that many theorists and researchers had to abandon this approach.

What then is a "trait" view of leadership? This view defines the leader as one uniquely endowed with abilities to meet group needs. The leader is, therefore, one endowed with superior qualities that differentiate him/her from the followers. Proponents of this view include Bernard (1926). Leadership is then defined in terms of personality and character. This approach may be called a personal focus.

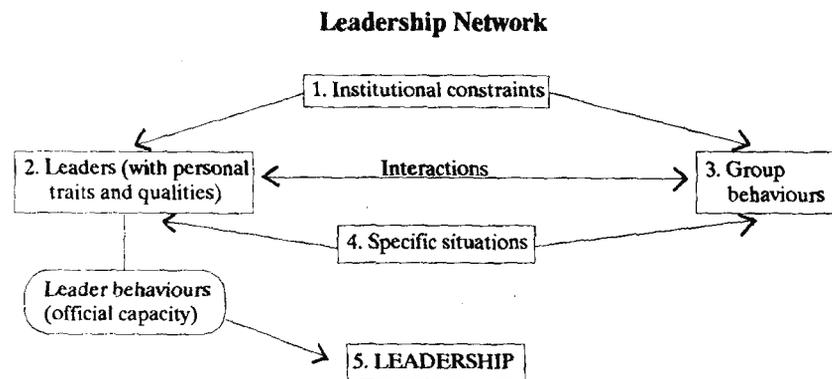
### *The Situationist Approach*

When theorists and researchers became disillusioned with the trait approach, they started to define leadership in operational terms, especially for the purpose of measurement in research. The focus then shifted to leader behaviours that may constitute leadership. The situationist approach defines leadership as a function of needs existing within a given situation and consists of a relationship between the individual leader and the group in context-specific situations. This approach then does at least two things: first, it focuses on behaviours that may characterise a leader, and second, it acknowledges variations in leadership styles as demanded by given situations. Merton (1969) represents this point of view.

The situationist approach may be called an inter-personal focus in which, according to Merton, people comply in group activities because they want to, not because they have to. Leadership therefore grows out of the interaction process of the group.

### *The Personal-Situationist Approach*

Some other theorists such as Westburgh (1931) stress two factors that are important to the concept of leadership. They are: 1) effective, intellectual and action traits of an individual, and 2) the specific conditions under which the individual operates. This point of view combines the personal and interpersonal relationships within specific contexts. For our purpose, we will adopt the personal-situationist approach. We will therefore attempt to propose a conceptual framework for understanding leadership, taking into account the personal-situationist approach. We shall call this framework a "leadership network."



In the diagram above the assumption is that in any social group or organisation, whether secular or religious, the principles involved in this leadership network

will be the same. Items 1-4 used in the diagram do not imply a sequence. If anything the variables identified operate simultaneously to produce leadership as observable in the official behaviours of a leader.

The institutional constraints (1) include the norms, standards and values of an institution comprising individual members. These norms could be derived from unwritten tradition, bureaucratic rules and regulations, normatively codified documents such as a written Constitution, or the Bible, or a combination of at least two of these sources. These constraints impact on both group members and the identified leader in varying degrees.

The leader (2) has to meet certain laid down (written or unwritten) qualities demanded by the group, based on the constraints of the institution. These are qualities any group will be looking for in one who aspires to a leadership role. The potential leader then must possess the group-specified requirements or characteristics in form of personality traits, qualities or even credentials.

The group (3) need not necessarily be homogeneous. The word, "group" is here employed loosely. It could be diverse and scattered geographically. The group could also be in the form of "groups within a group". The model here set forth accommodates cases of spontaneously emerging, appointed or elected leaders. However, the rigour with which the group demands the specified qualities or traits in the potential leader will vary from case to case and from group to group.

The group and the leader engage, in varying degrees, in interpersonal interactions. The one has influence on the other's behaviours. Therefore a leader's style of leadership would be shaped by group behaviours, among other influences. The group behaviours – whether passive, active or indifferent, do contribute to observable leadership.

However, the resultant behaviours of the group and the leader are influenced by the demands of the particular, and specific situations (4). Situations tend to vary and as such are dynamic. A general but erroneous belief in the group is that situations are forced upon the leader and the group by uncontrollable and impersonal forces. The fact is, many times situations are manipulated by the leader or some members of a group. The effects of the institutional constraints, group behaviours and the demands of the context-specific situations all impact on the leader's behaviours. The resultant leader behaviours then constitute observable leadership (5).

Note that the behaviours that constitute leadership derive eventually from the leader (the connection from 2 to 5). Those who define leadership only as a function of group interactions will have to also make a connection from point 3 to 5, but that is not the view espoused here. To make the 3 to 5 connection will be to concede that leadership is a joint venture between the group and the

leader. One would then wonder, in that view, why the leader- group interaction does not result in leader-group behaviours!

As intimated above, this model of leadership is the same for any group or organisation. However, our concern is not global leadership, but context-specific leadership, namely, pastoral leadership. Within the church, the institutional constraints ought to come mainly from Biblical norms. Therefore, before one can begin to talk of the training of church leaders, one ought to cast the setting within a Biblical, normative perspective.

### **A Biblical Perspective of Church Leadership**

The Bible seems to identify both personal characteristics as well as the situational dimensions of church leadership. The following are the concepts inherent in the Biblical description of the leader and leadership within the church.

#### *Concepts Inherent in Church Leadership*

*Personal Characteristics.* The Bible clearly sets forth personal requirements for aspirants to leadership positions. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 list among other qualities and requirements, the need for a candidate for leadership to be above reproach, a “one-woman man,” temperate, respectable, not violent, managing his own home well, not a recent convert, and reputable before outsiders (i.e. unbelievers outside the church group). These are personal qualities that may serve as institutional constraints upon a leader.

*Situational Dimensions.* The Bible specifies the context in which the church leader operates. The leader operates in time- space relationship within the church group. The Pauline instructions to Timothy (1 Tim. 3) for appointing leaders for the church have their referent point in “the household of God.” This is not a reference to buildings; rather “household” is a metaphor for “the people of God.” Since people – believers – are in view, the implication then is the expectation of interpersonal relationships.

The situational dimensions also include behavioural indicators of leadership roles. We might identify four. First, the *kerygmatic/didactic* ministry of the church leader. The behaviours in leadership roles of a church leader include teaching and preaching, and public reading of Scripture (1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3). The leader should also handle correctly the “Word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2), and should testify publicly of Jesus (2 Tim. 1). Second, the *counselling* ministry. The leader corrects, rebukes, encourages, counsels (2 Tim. 3), and admonishes members (1 Thess. 5). Third, the *pastoral* ministry. The leader protects his followers against error – using a shepherd metaphor – Acts 20; 1 Peter 5. The leader is deeply and emotionally concerned about the well-being of members, at times to the point of tears (Acts 20:19). The leader tends and feeds the “flock” – i.e. cares for and instructs (John 21:15-17). Fourth, the *service*

*ministry* of the leader. Undergirding the three ministries listed above – kerygmatic/didactic, counselling, and “pastoral” – is the concept of service or servanthood. Lording over members of the church is specifically forbidden of the leader (Mk. 9). The essence of Christian leadership is *diakonia* (Lk. 22). *Diakonia* (service) is not used here for the office of “deacon” as practised in certain Protestant circles, but used as a reference to service. The supreme example of Christ is cited. This service of the church leader must be done in humility (Mk. 9:33-37).

*Official Dimension.* Apart from the personal and situational dimensions mentioned above, the Bible acknowledges the official capacity in which an incumbent serves. For example, Paul instructs Timothy about the appointing leaders to the specific office of overseer. This “officialness” of the church leader’s role is derived from the Jewish practice in the synagogues. For example, Jesus recognised in Matthew 23:1-2 that the Jewish leaders occupied an office. He talks of the Pharisees occupying “Moses’ seat.” This case is interesting for the concept of leadership in that it does not confuse leadership per se with good leadership. The tendency is to think only “good” leadership is leadership. In the case cited in Matthew 23, Jesus told the Jews to obey what the Pharisees command when they speak in their official capacity from the Torah, but not to do what they do! Apparently these leaders preached one thing and did another. What they said fell under their official capacity. What they did, they did in their own personal rights.

The implication of these Biblical perspectives for the training of leaders today is the need to account for the personal, situational and official variables when trainers of church leaders engage in their tasks. Later on we will try to identify the tasks of the trainers, but for now we must handle one other issue, namely ascension to church leadership from the Biblical perspective.

#### *Ascension to a Leadership Position in the First Century Church*

Our examples come from the Jewish Church of Jerusalem and the Gentiles/Hellenist Churches beyond Jerusalem. It is noteworthy that researchers such as Stogdill (1974) recognised that concepts of leadership are culturally defined. That is, people think of leadership expectations in terms of their cultural practices. It is of little wonder that the literature on leadership coming from the Western industrialised societies identifies leadership variables in bureaucratic terms. Most of the research that has been conducted has been in the military or the business world, using business executives and managers. Therefore, leadership roles and behaviours will differ from culture to culture. To the extent that two cultures are similar, by that much will the concepts agree on what a leader does.

In light of the above, it is interesting that the Bible, given in a definite, cultural and historical setting, does not prescribe a definitive organisational structure

for church practice everywhere. The Bible seems to allow for cultural diversities. However, suffice it to note that the New Testament practices of ascension to leadership roles within the church had local church emphases rather than a denominational one.

*The Jewish Church of Jerusalem.* At least three types of methods of ascension could be identified. The first is: rise to apostolic leadership following at least three years' internship of the disciples under Jesus' tutelage. The second is: recognition, or a seemingly spontaneous rise to leadership. This could be said of James "the brother of our Lord." The text is silent about how he rose to leadership status; one can only assume spontaneity. The third is: nomination and casting of lots. The case in point is that of Matthias (Acts 1) who filled the spot vacated by Judas Iscariot.

*The Gentile-Hellenist Churches.* The few recorded instances of ascension have to do with direct or indirect Apostolic involvement. First, we see direct Apostolic appointments made by Paul and Barnabas when they worked in the churches of South Galatia (Acts 14). Second are the cases of Apostolic legates doing the appointing under Apostolic directives. For example in Titus 1, Titus was given directives by Paul to appoint leaders in Crete. Also at Ephesus, Timothy was given Pauline directives on the appointing of leaders in the Church.

*Basic Principles for Today.* One can observe that the method for ascension to Church leadership positions in the first century involved appointments and selection/election. As to the agents in the ascension procedure, a "synergetic" principle was at work. There was a recognition of both the human and the Divine agents by the early Church.

The implication for the Church today is first to be able to say that the choice of leaders, by whatever culturally-relevant but Biblically tolerable means, has divine approval. This however is subjective, and so a personal matter. Today, human agents in the ascension of leaders to church office are not lacking; what is crucial is this subjective aspect.

The second implication is the allowance for cultural diversities. This writer assumes that the basic modes of ascension to leadership found in the New Testament Churches (direct Apostolic appointments, and Apostolic directives through legates) do not survive till today.

The third implication concerns trainers of leaders directly. For trainers to claim to be training leaders for the Church in theological institutions, one must ascertain whether the personal, situational, and official dimensions identified above are directly attended to in the curricula of theological institutions.

We have so far said that leadership is a function of personal qualities, group behaviours, and organisational constraints—all interacting within certain given contexts. For a context-specific leadership such as church leadership,

these interacting factors mentioned above have been demonstrated to be applicable, drawing the categories from Biblical norms to which many churches adhere. However, these Biblical norms allow for cultural diversities in organisational structures of the church.

It will be pertinent at this juncture to examine what theological institutions do or don't do in their attempts to train leadership for the church.

### **What Theological Institutions Do and Don't Do**

Among other functions of theological institutions are four basic things.

#### *Equip Candidates with Knowledge*

All theological institutions will boast of dissemination of knowledge. Specifically, many equip their trainees with knowledge of the Bible. This function is a direct one. The curricula of many theological institutions bear testimony to this fact. Methods used in equipping candidates with knowledge include lectures, note taking, drills, etc.—vestiges from the Middle Ages scholastic practices. The effects of this impartation of knowledge include the quest for academic excellence. However, not without the “schooling effect.” The schooling effect involves an emphasis on cognitive processes. This type of knowledge impartation potentially equips trainees for the didactic ministry required of church leaders. The schooling effect also involves emphases on credentials with prerequisites and requisites. How all these schooling effects are necessary to church leadership is however not clear.

#### *Make Candidates into “Professionals”*

This function of theological institutions is an indirect one. It falls under the “hidden curriculum.” Professionalism as used here presupposes need for expertise knowledge, and a client-professional relationship. Professionals are the experts, while clients are those who depend on the experts' services. With “professionalism” comes elitism to the detriment of the Biblical roles of the members. What one observes today is a congregation sitting back to let the “professionals” who are paid for their services, do the job. Whereas Ephesians 4 stipulates that leaders of the church are “gifted people” or rather are “gifts” to the church, and they function in the equipping of the church members for the work of the ministry.

What one observes today is “professional” specialisations. There are counseling specialists trained by theological institutions, music specialists, Christian Education specialists, etc. Some of these specialisations may certainly equip the leader in certain pastoral ministries. However, these specialisations tend to train people for certain narrow aspects of the tasks essential for leadership

as outlined above. The pastor-leader role however, is meant to be a composite one.

Note also that there is a subtle difference between the “professionalism” mentioned here and the “officialness” discussed above. The church leader occupies an official capacity all right, but the type of “professionalism” here described is foreign to Biblical norms. There is room for cultural ingenuities, etc., but when the training offered narrows the equipping of potential leaders for leadership roles and limits the potential leaders, something is amiss.

#### *Attempt to Train Men and Women of God*

Many theological institutions have stipulated in their brochures their function in training “men and women of God.” What is implied here is godly character. This aspect touches on the personal prerequisites for leadership listed above under the section on Biblical perspectives.

At best, theological institutions can only touch this area indirectly. It is a mere assumption that the type of information-oriented training we give candidates will somehow translate into godliness. Subject matter content only has indirect bearing on prayer, faith, truthfulness, patience, love, humility, etc. Research very well demonstrates that words and even statements of faith do not necessarily result in action. The Biblical demands on the personal requirements for leadership seem to hitherto elude curriculum planners of our theological institutions. Hence, one of the leading complaints expressed by lay members in the churches is the inability of many Seminary graduates to get along with people. Granted that attaining to these qualities in curriculum is a very tough task, one does not have to despair.

#### *Claim to Train Leaders*

One of the major and widely accepted notions of the function of theological institutions is that they train leaders. This is why people automatically look to theological institutions when they talk of the need for trained leaders within the Church.

The test of whether theological institutions train church leaders could lie in tracing where the graduates end up. Although some graduates do not end up in leadership roles within the church, many do. However, another test, which is in keeping with the thesis advanced here, is first to identify personal qualities and situational roles of church leadership as demanded by specific church situations, and second to check the institutions’ curricula to see if they provide for these qualities. The qualities and behaviours of leadership within the church must be taught, modelled and simulated within the training programmes of our theological institutions for one to claim that what goes on in the schools constitutes leadership training. The writer is inclined towards the second evaluative approach.

### **Ministerial Training in Cultural Perspectives: Relevance to Africa**

We note right away that cultures are not static. Cultures interact and borrow values and ideas from one to the other. This borrowing is called acculturation. Therefore, when we state below the need for culturally-attuned training of leaders, we recognise the transitory nature of societies as they borrow from and imbibe other cultural values. The attempt at this point is to establish some basic and general principles salient to African cultures vis-a-vis training for church leadership. Ministerial training in Africa must take into account the following:

#### *Local Cultural Concepts of Leadership*

While Scripture should continue to be the standard of excellence, local cultural practices are allowable and encouraged. For instance, some generally valued concepts of leadership found in Africa include under personal qualities: age and seniority, marital status, respectability in the family and community, teachability, etc. Valued leader behaviours include: direction of group efforts in a consensual manner, moderation of opinions of group members, and the need of a leader to continually validate his right to leadership (See Fadipe, 1970). These local cultural concepts need to be taken into account in the selection of candidates for training, lest the theological schools in Africa train candidates who are culturally unacceptable.

#### *Training Cost-Effectiveness*

The ministerial form of training adopted in Africa is closely patterned after the Western style, hence the heavy emphasis placed on knowledge, credentials, etc. However, the cost of training along this Western line is enormous. When one puts this cost factor beside the fact that many trainees end up in other than church ministry, one realises the need for re-evaluation.

It has been pointed out above that part of the leader role includes the didactic ministry which presupposes a thorough knowledge of the Bible, the people and the socio-cultural needs. Theological institutions can and do train candidates in this role. However, what must not be assumed is that the present practice is the only way. We must realise that theological institutions as we know them today did not exist before the eighteenth century. What must also be taken into account is the cultural setting found in various African countries. Leadership in African traditional settings does not hinge solely on who knows the most, or who can recite the most. The knowledge emphasis is the overriding criterion of leadership as intimated directly or indirectly by our theological training. Can one therefore function as a church leader without ever stepping into the four walls of a theological institution? Our answer is yes. However, we also ask, can one serve effectively as a church leader without meeting the personal-situational demands set forth above? Maybe not.

*Training Grounded in the Local Church Context*

In the final analysis, we cannot afford to train leaders out of the context in which they will function. To this end, church-school relationships must be strengthened. Theological schools must not serve as ivory towers removed from the real day-to-day situations in the churches for which candidates are being trained. Theological schools in Africa should therefore serve as resource centres for the churches – finding ways to help answer questions raised in the churches.

Finally, emphasis should be placed on church-sponsored candidates for theological education. This is a crucial point. If the church contributes to the selection and training of a person, it will more likely value that person. Today, many who are unknown in the local churches come in for training, and when they graduate they expect to be placed in leadership roles in the churches. If the church and school work hand in hand, so that the church selects candidates in a healthy way and recommends them for training, an African distinctive would have been achieved. The churches will likely pick out and back those potential candidates who have either shown potential for leadership or have been serving in responsible roles within the church. This done, theological institutions will probably significantly rid themselves of the perennial problem of training local church rejects.

**Conclusion**

The training of leaders for the church must be conducted in light of the personal, situational and contextual demands of Biblical norms and the cultural dimensions. Trainers of potential leaders for the church cannot continue to assume that the status quo necessarily fulfils the leadership demands on candidates for leadership. Trainers also must not assume that training for leadership roles will necessarily be the same from culture to culture. Hence the need to focus on the training programme's culturally-relevant demands on potential leaders for the church. All of these pose as a challenge for theological educators towards achieving renewal in training for church leadership.

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