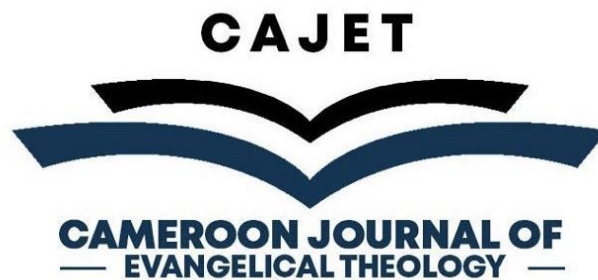


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Leadership Tussles in the Church: Reasons, Effects, and Remedy

Les querelles de leadership dans l'église : raisons, effets et solutions

Shem Danlami Gumap¹

Abstract

Leadership occupies a unique position in every organization, society, or community. There is bound to be confusion, disorder, and crisis in a church circle where people struggle for leadership positions at all costs. The paper through a descriptive method explains church leadership, investigates the factors responsible for leadership tussles in the church, negative effects of leadership tussles in the church, and suggests a remedy. It is discovered that leadership tussles in the church arise from material benefits, desire for control, tribal interests, office incentives, appreciation of service after tenure, and special recognition accorded to former church leaders. The effects of leadership tussles in the church are that they reduce the spiritual growth/zeal and commitment of members. Soul winning becomes flavorless and also affects the sermons of the pastor since they spend their time scrambling for leadership positions rather than seeking God's face. This writer recommends that the biblical qualifications for selecting church leaders recorded in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 should be strictly adhered to.

Key words: leadership, tussle, church, investigation

Résumé

Le leadership occupe une position unique dans toute organisation, société ou communauté. La confusion, le désordre et la crise sont inévitables dans un cercle ecclésiastique où les gens se battent à tout prix pour obtenir des postes de direction. L'article, par le biais d'une méthode descriptive, explique le leadership dans l'église, étudie les facteurs responsables des luttes de leadership dans l'église, les effets négatifs des luttes de leadership dans l'église et suggère des solutions. Il en ressort que les querelles de leadership dans l'église découlent des avantages matériels, du désir de contrôle, des intérêts tribaux, des incitations à la fonction, de l'appréciation du service après le mandat et de la reconnaissance spéciale accordée aux anciens dirigeants d'église. Les effets des querelles de leadership dans l'église sont qu'elles réduisent la croissance spirituelle, le zèle et l'engagement des membres. La quête des âmes perd de sa saveur et affecte également les sermons du pasteur qui passe son temps à se battre pour des postes de direction plutôt qu'à chercher la face de Dieu. Cet auteur recommande de respecter strictement les critères bibliques de sélection des dirigeants d'église énoncés dans 1 Timothée 3 :1-13.

Mots clés : leadership, lutte, église, enquête

Introduction

One of the most important aspects in the life of any society or organization is that of leadership. Biwul notes that "Whether it is in an organization or a particular human society, leadership is something that can neither be neglected nor taken casually."² Stephen Itika concurs in stating

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²Joel K. T. Biwul, *Character as an Essential Quality in Leadership* (Jos, Nigeria:Equity Press, 2017), n. p.

that the “progress of any society or organization is largely determined or known by the caliber of her leaders.”³ Reflecting on the above assertions, it is evident that without effective leadership, people and organizations flounder and fail to achieve what they should have achieved. Leadership becomes an influential aspect of every society. The crises that some churches are facing because of leadership tussles are amazing. Many pastors crave leadership positions in the church without considering the implications. This leadership tussle is affecting both the physical and spiritual growth of the church. This paper explains church leadership, factors responsible for leadership tussles in the church, negative effects of church leadership tussles, and proposes a remedy for them.

Understanding Church Leadership

Harold R. Eberle observes, “Many Christians today have not recognized the key role that leaders are to play in God’s plan. Some have negative attitudes concerning the whole concept of leadership, an attitude which developed through bad experiences or misunderstanding the Bible.”⁴ As it is, many church leaders today strive for leadership positions so that they gain material prosperity and social recognition. They see church leadership as a means of acquiring wealth and recognition.

Unlike secular leadership, church leadership is God-centered. It is not about power and authority in the sense that the world understands and uses it, but it is about serving people. Biwul notes that, “church leadership is a unique type of leadership. It is unique because the people being led are themselves unique.”⁵ This type of leadership was fully demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry. He demonstrated church leadership by the humble service of washing his disciples’ feet. Osei-Mensah opines that “what so pleased the Lord at the beginning of Solomon’s reign was that this young king asked for a wise and discerning heart so that he might serve God’s people with justice”⁶ (1 Kings 3:9-10). Solomon did not regard his position as an opportunity to serve himself, in craving for long life, prosperity, or the liquidation of all who opposed him. Rather, he understood his position as one requiring special enablement for service to God’s people. Even when Aaron was consecrated as high priest among his people, the prescribed garments of his office were symbolic of the service that was required of him. His role as high priest was that of a servant, attending to the spiritual needs of his people.

Jesus Christ sets forth this same model of church leadership in both word and deed. He taught his disciples what sort of leaders they should aspire to become. First of all, he referred them to the style of leadership in the world of their day which was concerned with status, domination, and control. Jesus firmly rejected this style of leadership and insisted instead that church leadership must be characterized by humble service. As Jesus lived out his style of leadership, his apostles followed him closely and modeled their lives after his. The apostles, indeed, took up the cross in following the master. Pokol opines, “Church leadership is leadership without official recognition from man. It has an office, but no executive chair. It has a door, but one which is always open. It has a carpet, but for our knees when praying for the flock. It has a staff, but the one for shepherding God’s flock; every occupant of such office is a servant.”⁷

³Stephen Itika, *Fundamental of Human Resource Management* (Dar es Salaam: African Study Centre, 2011), 129.

⁴Harold R. Eberle, *God's Leaders for Tomorrow's World* (Kaduna: Evangel Publication, 1993), 5.

⁵Biwul, 2.

⁶Osei-Mensah, 9.

⁷Benjamin Pokol, *Church Leadership and the Challenges of Change* (Jos: Leadership Ministry Worldwide, 2009), 26.

The nature and characteristics of church leadership are rooted in that of the Lord Jesus Christ Lord who always remained loyal and obedient to the will of his Father. Servant leadership that is loyal and obedient to the Lord remains at the center of church leadership. Pokol notes, "Because we do not know the nature of church leadership, we have dyed it in our different cultural colors, so that not one iota of glory seems to have gone to the Lord of the church; instead, we unjustifiably claim the glory to our shame and destruction."⁸

Some Factors Responsible for Leadership Tussles in the Church

Leadership which is seen as the heart of every ministry, organization, and society, has the power to sustain and move any organization forward. It can also scatter any organization if it is mishandled. Adair J. avows, "Many people are crying for help both in the secular world and in the church due to the menace of some leaders today. The reason for this menace is tied to how leaders often get into leadership."⁹ Some of the perceived causes of leadership tussle among pastors in the church include but are not limited to:

The quest for material benefits: The quest by some pastors for material benefits such as cash gifts, allowances, and other gifts has been a problem to the unity and growth of the church. It is fast becoming a problem for the Christian ministry and living. Wealth in itself is not condemned in scripture. It is considered a gift and a blessing, especially when not sought (1 Kg. 3:13). But it should not be gained by injustice or oppression as it is in the world system. In this regard, the church is almost copying the world's system of leadership. Amos U.S. asserts, "It is evident today that the world has become churchy and the church has become worldly."¹⁰ By this, he means the church which is supposed to be the light to the world is learning from the world instead of the world learning from the church. In an attempt to become wealthy, some pastors have adopted the worldly pattern of leadership which is characterized mostly by corruption; hence, they have become largely corrupt because of their quest for material things. Anthony B. observes, "Leaders go all out after material things and feel they can get them at all cost not minding whether it endangers the lives of others as a result of their action or not."¹¹ According to Pokol, "If there are people who crave luxury in the church today, it is church leaders. Very many of them cannot read the Holy Scripture and explain it because they have been so soaked in the acquisition of position and material things that their Bibles have gathered dust."¹² Myles Munroe concurs: "Most church leaders struggle to ascend the next levels of leadership because of material benefits that are attached to it so that they can get more income and the prestige, as well as the popularity gained through leadership position."¹³ The basic and proper Christian attitude towards material prosperity is what Jesus taught. This attitude is captured in Matthew 6:33 which reads: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you as well." Material prosperity should not be seen as an automatic outcome of being a child of God since even non-believers are prosperous by the sheer love and grace of God.

The accumulation of material goods through ungodly ways does not provide any satisfaction. Bauta Motty rightly points out that "if materialism was ever to appease anyone, it would have done so to Solomon, arguably the richest man the world has ever known. He had everything and had more of it than anyone, and yet he found it was futile. It does not produce

⁸Pokol, 26.

⁹Adair J, *Handbook of Management and Leadership* (London: Thorogood Publishing, 2006), 117.

¹⁰U. S. Amos, *Church Leadership: The Dynamism in Church Government* (Zaria: Esonaj Publishing Ltd., 2009), 284.

¹¹Anthony B, *Principles of Leadership* (London: Main way Publishing Co mpany,1998), 109.

¹²Pokol, *Church Leadership and the Challenges of Change*, 39.

¹³Myles Munroe, *The Spirit of Leadership: Cultivating the Attitudes that Influences Hum an Action* (Chicago: Whitaker House, 2005), 103.

the satisfaction our souls long for.”¹⁴ Solomon states, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver” (Ecclesiastes 5:10). When Christ’s followers concern themselves with the material world, they can be easily drawn by the deceit of riches (Mark 4:19), believing that they will be gratified if they had more of whatever it is they are chasing after. Materialism causes its seekers to strive for more and more, all the while telling them that, that will be the answer to all their needs. But the scripture establishes that, “man’s life consisted not in the abundance of the things which he possesses” (Luke 12:15). To some extent, material possession is a threat to godly leadership.

Self-centeredness/opinion enforcement: Self-centeredness and people’s sinful desires are some of the major reasons that often motivate many pastors to want to get into leadership by all means so that they can gather wealth and riches for themselves. Motty explains that “Self-centeredness has an overwhelming sense of the centrality of the ‘Me’, that is to say of their personal qualities..., placing oneself at the core of one’s world with no concern for others.”¹⁵ Pandang Yamsat flows in the same direction when he writes: “There are several church leaders who are self-centered, egocentric and self-absorbed. The church is faced with this huge challenge, whereby, few true leaders embody the attitude of a servant leader.”¹⁶ The struggle for leadership positions has reached such an alarming proportion that members of the church know that some pastors are in the ministry just for what they will get out of it and are not gospel-minded pastors. Motty affirms, “Self-centered leaders have a strong tendency to talk about themselves in a self-promoting fashion, and they may well be arrogant and boastful with an imposing sense of their importance.”¹⁷ As Robin M. Kowalski argues, “their inability to recognize the accomplishments of others leaves them profoundly self-promoting; while sensitivity to criticism may lead on the egotist’s part to self-centered rage at a sense of insult.”¹⁸ Self-centeredness is not a practice that is supposed to be found in the church that is purchased by the precious blood of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case. ‘Self’ seems to dominate almost every activity in the church today. The reason is that almost every leader wants praise for any achievement in the church, especially during his or her tenure of office. Many Christian leaders seem not to keep in view David Garland’s admonition: “Honor and privilege are out of place in the church that names Jesus as Lord. Self-seeking has no place in a church founded on the ultimate self-giving Christ.”¹⁹

Another factor associated with self-centeredness is the search for status recognition. Garland, quoting John R.W. Stott, writes, “Our world is full of status seekers, hungry for honor and prestige, measuring life by achievements and everlastingly dreaming of success.”²⁰ This is also very practical in our churches today, and such misnomers are being spearheaded by pastors. The church today is filled with status seekers who are hungry for honor and greatness. If the church is seeking to glorify God not self, then the issue of struggling for power will not arise. As Biwul correctly points out, the “basic essence of true leadership is service. This service is not to self but to people.”²¹ A greedy leader is always a self-centered leader. Some leaders scramble to ascend to the next level of leadership position just to acquire wealth for themselves. Leaders who are self-centered, egocentric, and self-absorbed are always in the habit of scrambling for leadership positions for personal benefits to the detriment of the organization, the ministry, and the members of the church.

¹⁴Bauta D. Motty, *Dividends of Integrity* (Nigeria: Yakson Printing Press, 2016), 5.

¹⁵Motty, 6.

¹⁶Pandang Yamsat, *The Work of a Pastor* (Jos, Nigeria: Millennium Printing Press, 2009), 9.

¹⁷Motty, 6-7.

¹⁸Robin M. Kowalski, *Aversive Interpersonal Behaviors* (London: Water Brooks Press, 1997), 112.

¹⁹David E. Garland, *The NW Application Commentary: Mark* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 415.

²⁰Ibid., 415.

²¹Biwul, 3.

Tribalism (Ethnicity): Tribal interest in terms of occupying an office to protect/defend one's tribe makes most pastors struggle to occupy leadership positions in the church. It is one of the challenges confronting the church today. R. B. Thieme Jr. understands tribalism as, "a belief which places one tribe superior to others."²² Tribalism, to some extent, has succeeded in creating disunity, anger, and even quarreling among members and co-workers in God's church. Its practitioners forget that God had a purpose for identifying everybody with a tribe. Yamsat notes, "Tribe is God's gift and everybody is identified with a particular tribe where he or she is coming from. Identifying oneself with his or her tribe is not a sin, but let this identification not divide us as a church."²³ McCain agrees when he observes that,

There is no sin in identifying with your ethnic group by the way you dress or by the language you speak. There is no sin in conducting a church service in a particular dialect; the problem is when we allow our ethnicity to divide us. When we refuse to have Christian fellowship with someone from another tribe or ethnic group, we have turned our ethnicity into sin.²⁴

Tribal sentiments play a negative role during church elections in some churches. Tribes within the church usually team up to elect a leader from their tribe into the next level of leadership position by all means. As a result, leaders and members have turned church leadership into a *House of Representatives* where every tribe struggles to have representation. Pastors with tribalistic leanings tend to force their ascension to the next level of leadership position to ensure that their tribe have a representative in the leadership. Maxwell Dayok identifies the problem, "If as a Christian and a pastor, you still have the tendencies of tribalism in you, then you still have not understood what Christianity is all about, how much more of your calling."²⁵ Church leaders should always remember that whenever the people they lead know that they (leaders) are concerned about their tribal people, they lose confidence in leadership and learn nothing from it. It is this tribal sentiment that, in most cases, causes tribalistic leaders to consider some tribes or ethnic groups as less important and unable to achieve anything for the church. Mark Shuttleworth decries this tribalistic feelings: "I have traveled the world and I have never met a single company, country or church where everybody there did nothing useful, so if you hear someone saying that a tribe is less important, that is a big red flag for tribal thinking."²⁶ The minister of economic planning in Kenya, Tom Mboya, lamented about the damage tribalism causes as follows: "for all my brilliance may never reach to power in Kenya because we belong to the less recognized tribe and therefore cannot have the chance to exercise our gift for our nation."²⁷ It follows that tribalism is more detrimental than beneficial to the church, even though it is making a headway in some churches.

Negative Effects of Leadership Tussles in the Church

A common adage states that "when two elephants fight, the grass gets hurt." When pastors are competing for leadership positions in church, the church suffers. Following are some adverse effects of church leadership tussles:

²²R. B. Thieme Jr, *The integrity of God* (USA: The London Foundation Press, 2005), 8.

²³Pandang Yamsat, "Tribalism as a threat to the unity of the church" (A paper presented at the leadership retreat programmed of COCIN RCC Namu, 17th June 2016), 5.

²⁴Danny McCain, *Tough Tests for Top Leaders* (Jos: Prints Biz-More Books Production, 2005), 98.

²⁵Maxwell Dayok, "The Risk of Tribal Sentiments in the Church" (A paper presented to the Student Union Government, Gindiri Theological Seminary, 18th November 2012), 2.

²⁶Mark Shuttleworth, "Tribalism is the Enemy Within," n. p. (cited 19 April 2017). Online: <http://www.markshuttleworth.com/article/2001> accessed November 11, 2023.

²⁷Tom Mboya, "Tribalism the Black Malis Burden," n. p. [cited 21 April 2017]. Online: <http://www.time.com/magazine/article>, accessed November 11, 2023.

Reduced spiritual growth/zeal and commitment of members: The spiritual growth of church members as well as their zeal and commitment to evangelism is affected as a result of leadership tussle when some pastors struggle to push themselves into leadership positions by all means. It affects every aspect of the church life such as attendance of church programs, collection of offerings, and contributions towards project developments. Members become passive and the enthusiasm to do the work of God is lost. Consequently, there is retardation in the growth and expansion of the gospel efforts in the events of leadership struggle.

Winning souls into the kingdom of God becomes weak and flavorless: The energy that ought to be used in the propagation of the gospel is used to attack one another in an attempt to get into a leadership position. This affects the entire life and ministry of the church.

The quality of pastors' sermons pales out: The attitude and practice of leadership struggle among some pastors in church affects in no small measure the quality of the sermons that these pastors preach. When they expend their energy on struggling for power, they do not give quality time to scriptural study and sermon preparation. Also, the struggle for leadership affects the respect that congregants have for pastors, particularly, those who use church members to campaign to be elected into leadership positions. Naturally, these members will show no respect for the sermons of pastors who are involved in power struggle. If one is not respected as a pastor, what then has one to offer? Pastors who struggle for leadership positions in the church are most likely to be arrogant. As a result, their members will tend to despise their sermons. Some members may become discouraged and decide to leave for other churches. Some others may choose to sit on the fence and, thus, become silent, watching events as they unfold without any meaningful contribution because of the prevailing situation in the church.

Remedy for Leadership Tussles in Church

As Christians, the most important step in determining answers to life problems is not primarily to seek secular information, but to seek the guidance of scripture. Recognizing the supremacy of the Bible involves the recognition that within its pages are found the essential principles that provide the necessary wisdom to respond to any situation that Christians are confronted with within the church. The application of these principles to the situation that confronts the church is critical for maintaining a healthy congregation. Therefore, the church should note that the guidelines or qualifications for church leadership as recorded in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 are of critical importance for selecting church leaders. The church should apply these basic qualifications in appointing leaders of various levels of its life.

Conclusion

The writer has attempted to explain church leadership, factors responsible for leadership tussles in church, the negative effects of leadership tussles in church and their remedy. Church leadership is carried out through the enabling leadership of the Holy Spirit. Keeping this constantly in mind can enhance the effectiveness of church leaders. Leaders at all levels of the church must remember that church leadership calls for sacrifice in every aspect of life. If the founder of the church established it through sacrifice, how can his followers do less in the service of the master?

Ensuing from the research findings, this writer recommends the following: (1) The church should put in place policies that will regulate the practice of appreciating service leaders after tenure. (2) Guidelines or spiritual, moral, and social qualifications for church leadership as recorded in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 are critical for selecting church leaders in the church circle. The church should emphasize these basic biblical qualifications in appointing leaders in church services. (3) Since Hosea 4:6 teaches that "my [God's] people are destroyed from lack of

knowledge,” church leadership should organize seminars and equip pastors in active service with the knowledge of servant-leadership to familiarize them with Jesus’ style of leadership. This may help to curtail the rate of leadership tussles in the church.

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