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CONCEPTS OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY

Victor Cole

The traditional method of ministerial training is based on a schooling approach whereby people get thrust into church leadership as a result of credentials and training received in a formal theological institution. In African contexts, the leaders of the people are traditionally old, experienced and married. However, in the church a role reversal often occurs because of this schooling approach. When the sole criterion for attaining church leadership is the amount of schooling one has received, then pastoral leadership inevitably tends to rest with the young, inexperienced and sometimes unmarried.

In the early 1980s a study was conducted among the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) in Nigeria to find out the expressed concepts of pastoral leadership within this group.[1] ECWA, then estimated at a half million in membership, is the indigenous church founded as a result of the labours of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in Nigeria since the beginning of the century. While the results of this study of one church constituency in Nigeria are of interest in their own right, they may also be found to bear significant implications for other parts of Africa, and may suggest the usefulness of similar studies in those contexts.

Purpose of This Study

The study was to answer the following questions:

1. What kinds of pastor-leaders do specified church groups find desirable?

2. What concepts do these specified church groups employ in describing pastoral leadership?

3. What are the sources of these concepts of pastoral leadership employed by these specified church groups?

The Research Questions

In this study, an attempt was made to answer the following research questions:

1. What methods of selecting and removing the pastor-leader do ECWA members prefer?

2. What conceptual descriptions of the pastor-leader exist among ECWA members?

3. What concepts of pastoral leadership are to be found in ECWA with respect to the following:

   a. the desirable personal characteristics of the pastor-leader?

   b. the desirable leadership styles of the pastor-leader?

   c. the desirable ministry skills of the pastor-leader?

   d. the desirable civic duties of the pastor-leader?

4. What are the sources of these concepts of pastoral leadership found in ECWA?

Importance of the Research

In the study, an attempt was made to find out the concepts of pastoral leadership espoused by ECWA members and the sources of these concepts.

Anticipated differences of opinion in the findings were expected thought to be quite helpful in informing the judgment of church leaders in appointing pastors for specified church types. In addition, the findings were expected to assist the judgment of those responsible for curricular development in ECWA theological institutions, since they would be able to take into account the opinions of the constituency in the task of training pastor-leaders for the church.

Research Design

A demographic approach to the determinants of opinions was adopted through the use of a cognitive response pattern to the study of attitudes.[2] In the research, the concept of "culture-contact" was assumed.[3] Based on this assumption, respondents in the study were expected to express pastoral leadership concepts that are derived mainly from traditional and acculturated values. The extent to which respondents had moved away from traditional values was expected to be reflected in the amount of schooling. Thus the concepts of pastoral leadership expressed and the sources of those concepts were both examined.[4]

Selection of Churches

Using intact local churches as the unit of analysis, representative church types were selected non-randomly. The church types classified were:

1. Ethno-rural churches — found in rural sectors across Nigeria, using either a major Nigerian language or a local dialect in worship. Membership in this type of church tends to be older and less acculturated. Three such church types participated in the study.

2. Ethno-urban churches — found in urban sectors across Nigeria, using a major Nigerian language in worship. Members are largely migrants, have a fairly balanced proportion of old and young, and both highly acculturated and less acculturated. Four such church types participated in the study.

3. English-using churches — found in urban sectors across Nigeria, using only English language for worship. The members are largely migrants, but tend to be young and highly acculturated. Two such church types participated in the study.

The selection of the participating local churches was based on their representative distinctions and their credibility in ECWA, largely due to their length of history or their general wide acceptance as local churches representing ECWA opinion.

The Instrument

A fifty-two item questionnaire was developed for probing the concepts of pastoral leadership and the sources of those concepts. As a result of a preliminary study, four areas of concern were identified, namely the personal characteristics, leadership styles, ministry skills and civic duties of the pastor-leader. The items were refined in accordance with the preliminary study until validity and reliability coefficients reached .80 level by the use of Jury procedure.

The Approach

Three independent variables were employed. They are: a bipolar age grade of the subjects within each local church; a seven-point, non-continuous interval scale measuring the subjects' level of acculturation; and the locales of the subjects. These variables constituted the demographic subdivisions of the study.

Four categories of dependent variables were also used. They are the personal characteristics, leadership styles, ministry skills and civic duties of the pastor-leader.

Data analyses were performed using chi square and qualitative methods of analysis.[5]

The Major Findings[6]

The major findings were in three areas: the conceptual description of the pastor-leader; the concepts of pastoral leadership espoused; and the sources of the concepts of pastoral leadership espoused.

The Conceptual Description of the Pastor-Leader.

Generally, ECWA members tended to see the pastor as a resource person; that is, one who serves as a source of information, guidance and instruction. In the hierarchy of preference, the next descriptor of the pastor was that of an authority figure. The respondents with more formal schooling preferred to describe the pastor as a resource person, while those with little or no schooling preferred to describe the pastor as an authority figure.

The Concepts of Pastoral Leadership found in ECWA.

Personal Characteristics of the Pastor-Leader. Most respondents from all levels of acculturation,[7] from all age grades and from the three church types tended to prefer pastoral experience in the pastor-leader above any other choice given them. Next to experience, ECWA members valued high education for a pastor. In short, the ideal for a pastor was that he should be experienced, highly educated and married. The matter of experience was so significant to the respondents that many of them indicated reluctance to seek counsel from a pastor who is young, inexperienced and unmarried.

When the analysis by church types was taken into consideration, the following was discovered: both the ethno-rural and ethno-urban churches preferred a pastor who is over forty years of age and highly educated. For their part, the ethno-rural church would still readily welcome a pastor who is over forty years of age but has little education. The English-using churches, however, preferred a pastor who is under forty years of age, highly educated and has some pastoral experience. Not one church type, nor any single respondent for that matter, favoured a young pastor who also has little formal education.

On the issue of ethnicity, both ethno-rural and ethno-urban churches would readily welcome a pastor from their own ethnic group. This matter was considered quite unimportant by the English-using churches.

Leadership Styles of the Pastor-Leader. In the matter of planning church affairs, both ethno-rural and ethno-urban church types tended to prefer a joint pastor-elder decision. Respondents who were younger and had more formal education wanted the generality of church members as well to be given a say in decision-making. The English-using churches wanted a participatory form

of leadership style far more than either of the other two church types. They wanted the pastor to allow gifted members also to perform some of the duties normally associated with the pastor-leader.

Ministry Skills of the Pastor-Leader. Most ECWA respondents saw ability to teach and preach the Bible as the priority skill most needed by the pastor. The least acculturated respondents felt slightly more so than all others, maybe trying to compensate for their own personal deficiency. When the data was examined in terms of church types, the English-using churches felt more this way than the other two church types.

Some of the other skills strongly favoured in a pastor were as follows. The ethno-rural church wanted the pastor to be able to give them good advice and to have skills in controlling the members. The ethno-urban and English-using churches saw ability to get along with members, and ability to listen to members' point of view, as the most important skills needed by the pastor.

Civic Duties of the Pastor-Leader. Most ECWA respondents, in particular the youths, felt that the pastor-leader should be aware of local customs and politics.

It was of interest to find that the older respondents with very little formal education felt the need for the pastor to instruct them in matters concerning voting rights, civil rights and how the civil government operates.

On social concerns, most respondents expressed the need for the pastor in a rural setting to be involved in rural development projects. They also wanted the pastor in an urban setting to get involved in issues of social reform. Respondents with the most formal education felt more so than all others.

Most respondents strongly felt that the pastor-leader ought to keep up with the news media. This concern was stressed most strongly among the younger respondents who have had more formal education.

The Sources of Pastoral Leadership Concepts Found in ECWA.

The four categories of the concepts of pastoral leadership found in ECWA churches were further probed to ascertain their sources. The following findings emerged.

On the Personal Characteristics of the Pastor-Leader. Pastoral experience was reported as the most preferred quality in a pastor-leader. The reason most frequently cited was that an experienced pastor would have a better knowledge of the Bible and would be better able to teach and preach the Bible. This response pattern was classified to be stemming from a combination of traditional and acculturated values.

Next to experience, high education was preferred in a pastor-leader. The major reason given by respondents with little formal education was that formal training will help the pastor in acquiring principles of teaching, preaching and counselling. For their part, respondents with more formal education felt such a pastor would have a sharp analytic mind to enable better communication with the more enlightened audience. All of these reasons stem from acculturated values.

Most of the respondents placed high importance on marital status of the pastor-leader. The major reason given was the need to avert susceptibility to temptation. Another reason was that a pastor who is married is qualified to advise members on marital issues. These reasons given could somehow be derived from traditional, acculturated and normative biblical values.

Many respondents felt some reluctance to approach a young pastor for counselling. The main reason was that such a one was regarded as inexperienced and would not be able to give sound advice. Many of the older respondents who also had little formal education regarded such a pastor as still a child. Even many of the youths in the study and those with more formal education felt such a pastor himself stands in need of someone to give him advice. We may trace all of these reasons in large part to traditional values.

On the other hand, most respondents felt that they would be very free to seek counsel from an older pastor-leader, merely because he was old, and because he was regarded as having experience and having knowledge about the facts of life. All of these reasons are traceable in large part to traditional values.

On Leadership Styles of the Pastor-Leader. Most respondents felt decision-making by the pastor and church elders should be arrived at on the basis of consensus. The two main reasons for feeling this way were these: (i) since the decision affects all, each one had a right to express an opinion; and (ii) in the course of reaching a consensus, everyone would have been pacified, thus giving an air of unity. These reasons are traceable in large part to traditional values.

Most respondents expressed aversion to the pastor-leader leading his members like traditional leaders do, or like business executives lead their employees. The reasons given include the following: the church is not a worldly organisation, nor is it a profit-making organisation. The respondents wanted the pastor to lead with a servant attitude and with love, not as a ruler or dictator or by compulsion. All of these reasons are traceable to biblical values.

On Ministry Skills of the Pastor-Leader. On what was regarded as the major skill-enhancing resource needed by a pastor-leader, most of the respondents identified schooling. The major reason given was that training in the theological institution will equip the pastor with the needed training (skills) and knowledge for pastoral work. We may attribute this reason to acculturated values.

On Civic Duties of the Pastor-Leader. Among other civic-related duties desired for a pastor-leader was that he should keep up with current events in the news. Most respondents felt the pastor should keep up with the news over radio and through print more often. The major reason for feeling this way was that the information gathered would help the pastor to be aware of the world around him and that such awareness would be helpful in application to the ministry. This stated reason is largely traceable to acculturated values.

In summary form, the following pattern emerged on sources for concepts of pastoral leadership:

1. ECWA members' concepts of pastoral leadership were derived most often from traditional values (such as age, marital status and experience). These values were generally applicable in assigning roles and status.

2. In their description of concepts of pastoral leadership, ECWA members tended to give allegiance to professed biblical values if those values are plainly contrasted with traditional or acculturated values.

3. A popular notion among ECWA members was that, in order to do an effective job as a pastor-leader, one needed to attend a theological institution.

Conclusions

Whereas the findings stated above have wider application than may at first meet the eye, it is appropriate to draw conclusions that have both policy and curricular dimensions.

As a matter of concern for policy makers in the church, these findings would clearly warn against treating the different church types at the same level.

In the very late 1980s, some parts of ECWA's northern church districts made it a matter of policy that each ethno-urban church in some big city centres should make a conscious effort to establish an English-using church. As more of the English-using churches are established by the turn of the century, church leaders would be under increasing pressure to adopt different styles of leadership. Whereas the ethno-rural churches may not mind being told what to do, the ethno-urban churches are already questioning. And the English-using churches clearly want to have a say in their own affairs. An authoritarian style of leadership in the churches situated in urban areas will continue to meet with resistance. In consonance with the theory of culture contact and the resultant acculturation effect, an ethno-rural church of today that wants to be told what to do may tomorrow want to have some say in its affairs.

Since this study was first conducted, ECWA has witnessed the appointment of more and more younger and better schooled pastors in the churches. The recommendation that bigger churches appoint assistant pastors is gradually being adopted. For the time being, pastors who are over forty years and hold a B.Th. or equivalent are few and far between. ECWA will have to await the turn of the century to have this type of pastor in the numbers desired. The irony of the present days is that ECWA seminaries continue year after year to turn out young trainees with high qualifications, who then end up serving as teachers in government employment, while the church continues to be in need of manpower.[8] Whereas the young and highly credentialed graduates lack experience, this experience can only be gained within the context of service within the church. This is why we have recommended that the young graduates be given appointments to serve as assistants to the more mature and experienced pastors. In that way the younger generation of pastors would continue their training beyond the classrooms, and the church would have retained them instead of losing them to government service. We are convinced that more and more urban churches are able to afford two or more pastors. There are a number of churches with attendance of two thousand or more and yet they do not have more than one pastor.

As a matter of concern for those setting the theological curriculum, a traditional approach to training which is very heavy on Bible and theology but light on human relations and social awareness must be corrected. Graduates of our theological institutions must be knowledgeable about their social and contextual milieu. The servant model of leadership taught by our Lord must be evidenced in our curricula — both by precepts and by example. The curricula of our theological institutions must also reflect the needs of the different church types. All trainees should be made aware of these needs and characteristics right from the time of their training. This calls for integrated programmes.

We would, however, sound a note of warning in conclusion, namely that this study does not guarantee on-the-job effectiveness of the type of pastor desired by each church type. That is a matter for further study.

ENDNOTES

[1]This article is a summary of a doctoral dissertation submitted by the writer in 1982 at Michigan State University, in the Department of Administration and Curriculum of the College of Education.

[2]For an elaboration, consult: Milton J. Rosenberg, Carl I. Hovland, William J. McGuire, Robert P. Abelson and Jack W. Brehm, *Attitude Organization and Change*, Yale Studies in Attitude and Communication, Vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

[3]Some of the aspects of the process of acculturation applied in this study were adopted from Linton Redfield and M. J. Herskovits, "A Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation" *Man* 35 (1936) 145-48; M. J. Herskovits, *Accultura-tion: The Study of Culture Contact* (New York: J. J. Augustine Publisher, 1938).

[4]Three basic sources from which pastoral leadership concepts could be derived were anticipated before the study. These were: traditional values, acculturated values and normative biblical values. In the course of the study, a fourth source was detected, namely "idiosyncratic" responses. A response was classified as stemming from traditional values if it is in accord with value statements so recognised from the literature on cross-cultural studies specifically geared to the Nigerian society. Similarly, statements that conform to acculturated values as known in the literature were so classified. A response was classified under normative biblical values if it clearly betrays underlying values derived from Scripture. Responses that were clearly subjective in nature and do not go beyond self-derived standards of justification were classified as idiosyncratic.

[5]For the quantitative portion of the study, a helpful treatment of the statistics could be found in Sidney Siegel, *Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioual Sciences* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956). For the open-ended responses that were designed to probe for source, qualitative data analysis involved pooling of the universe of the range of responses both within and between groups, the classifying of responses into sources, and comparison made between group sources to test the relevant hypotheses.

[6]For the purpose of this presentation, I have deliberately avoided presenting findings in tabular form but have simply given in prose the results of the study.

[7]Levels of acculturation are hereinafter used to describe the amount of formal schooling received by a respondent. Seven such levels were categorised.

[8]ECWA Theological Seminary at Jos in Nigeria (JETS) has been perceived by some to have a better than usual success rate of graduates employed in church-related ministries. Nevertheless, a study done in August 1990 examining the breakdown of placements for the 156 JETS graduates of the regular programmes from 1983 to 1989 revealed that only 57% were in church-related ministries as indicated in the following table. For the other JETS graduates, 9.6% were pursuing further studies, and 12.8% were in civil government service. However, the placement of 16% was unknown at the time of the study.

Placement of JETS 1983 - 1989 Graduates as of August 1990

Further Studies	Church-related ministries					Government service		Place-ment un-known	Unem-ployed	Private busi-ness	Non-church lifestyle
	Pastor chap-lain	Evang & church planting	Church school teacher	Church admin-istration	Para-church mini-stries	Teach-ing	Admin-istration				
15	48	6	19	14	2	17	3	25	3	1	3
9.6	30.7	3.8	12.1	8.9	1.2	10.8	1.9	16.0	1.9	0.64	1.9

N = 156
Upper figures - raw scores
Lower figures - in %