



ST AUGUSTINE'S PERSPECTIVE OF LEADERSHIP IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY



Okoro, Oghenero John

Nigeria Defence Academy, Kaduna

korojohn2002@gmail.com

Abstract

St. Augustine's perspective of Leadership in a pluralistic society anchored on servant leadership speaks to the bane of leadership deficit in contemporary society. This study makes explicit his contributions to the question of the efficacy of leadership in the unique context of pluralistic societies and discusses the extent to which his insights can be useful for scholars and statesmen in contemporary times. The study concludes while recommending the cultivation of attitudes and skills that build a good leader drawing from St Augustine's prescription of the Servant leadership model so as to activate healthy growth and development in our communities and society.

Key words: Servant Leadership, Pluralistic, Society

Introduction

By the middle of the fourth century AD, the high point of the Roman Empire in the West had passed and both internal and external forces were contributing to guarantee its eventual demise (Gibbon, 1959). The collapse of the republican constitutional order by 27 BC saw the establishment of the Principate which was a quasi-republican arrangement with the emperor as the first citizen. The convergence of institutions that gave the Principate its coherence and stability was irreparably disrupted during the Crisis of the Third Century (AD 235-284) leading to the rise of the Dominate which was an autocratic dictatorship. The Dominate lasted from 284 till 476 when the office of the Roman Emperor in the West was finally abolished (Syme, 1939).

From its foundations as a kingdom, through its development as a republic to its collapse as an empire the Roman state had an almost inordinate concern with the imperatives of leadership in pluralistic societies such as it was. This is somewhat unhealthy since both homogenous and non-homogenous societies are not immune to conflicts and crises that can defeat the very basis of governance and the viability of the state.

In Africa, most of the post-colonial states are pluralistic (Non-homogenous) in nature. Hence the desire for a good and successful leadership in a

continent like Africa poses a problem for the social sciences as a whole and political science in particular (Focus Economics, 2022). Therefore, the extent to which African societies can identify good leadership variables and principles and apply them in the context of political leadership determines their probability of participating in the comity of advanced nations or not.

The search for these variables among scholars reveals that so much of the insights into the leadership question in the context of pluralistic societies of the Roman world were preserved by St Augustine in his writings. St Augustine is notably a renowned theologian, rhetorician, preacher and prolific writer in history. He was born in the city of Thagaste in the Roman province of Numidia in North Africa (in modern Tunisia) into the family of a Roman citizen named Patricius and his wife Monica in 354. He lived in the era known to history as Late Antiquity and was an important personage from that period. Through his numerous, voluminous and varied writings, St Augustine virtually shaped the intellectual development of the medieval era in the West (Bourke, 1958). He wrote 118 treatises on subjects as varied as the interior life of faith conveyed in the Confessions and the novel approach to the principles that underpin the state as an institution and the interplay between citizenship and the state in *The City of God* which is one of his best-known works. In developing the themes for leadership in pluralistic societies, St Augustine captures

his leadership discourses in Christological terms and he uses Neo-Platonism to frame the philosophical foundations of his arguments (Bourke, 1958).

In view of the above, this study sets out to examine the problem of leadership in pluralistic societies. It teases out the contributions of St Augustine to the question of the efficacy of leadership in the context of a pluralistic society and discusses the extent to which his insights can be useful for scholars and statesmen in contemporary times. The study identifies the challenges therein and recommends policy ideas as relevant prescriptions for quality leadership service delivery in contemporary pluralistic societies.

Conceptual Clarification Leadership

To begin with the concept of leadership is elusive as far as definitions go though it has enjoyed contributions towards its clarification from various authors. Peter Northouse (2016) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2016; 27). This definition emphasizes that leadership is primarily about the ability of a person to elicit cooperation toward goals set by him from other individuals. It holds that leadership is not a trait or behavior nor is it a position. Job titles do not make a leader rather a leader is made out of his ability to influence followers in achieving a set of goals (Northouse, 2016). Allan Fitzgerald (2020) defines leadership as an

attitude rather than an office or a role. All are called to exercise leadership, both in terms of good example and healthy initiative; leadership is not, in other words, limited to those in positions of authority. Those with responsibility for more than themselves may bear greater burdens in some ways, but that provides an opportunity for highlighting the fact of interdependence and the importance of mutual respect (Fitzgerald, 2020). St Augustine holds that the essence of good leadership in any society entails the following, "Good leaders rebuke those who stir up strife, comfort those of little courage, take the part of the weak, refute opponents and guard against traps. They teach the ignorant, awake the indolent, put the presumptuous in their place, mollify the quarrelsome, help the poor, liberate the oppressed, encourage the good, suffer the wicked , and love everyone" (Augustine 1995; 140,1).

Leaders implement and accomplish their plans using various styles. Kendra Cherry (2022) relates a leadership style to the characteristic behaviours of a leader when directing, motivating, guiding and managing groups of people. Through their styles, leaders inspire, motivate and influence the action of a group to achieve the goals and objectives of an

organization (Kendra, 2022). They are classifications of how a person behaves while leading a group. Fahad Usmani (2022) defines it as a method of managing, directing and motivating followers. It describes how leaders strategize their relationships with their followers. It increases the effectiveness of the leader and loyalty of the followers (Usmani, 2022). There are some factors that affect a leadership style namely the leader, Followers, Situation and Communication. These factors dictate the style that a leader may use at any given time.

Servant Leadership

As a departure from the traditional leadership styles where the leader is seen as the central point of the team and employees are there to support the leader's efforts to meet company goals, the Servant Leadership, also called 'servant' first leadership philosophy, made popular by Robert Greenleaf holds that the more you invest in serving as a "scaffold" for your employees, the more productive your team becomes (Aida 2022). The driving force of a good leader is predicated on his willingness and disposition to serve. It is the foundation for authentic development. Robert Greenleaf holds that the first and most important choice a leader makes is the choice to serve, without which one's capacity to lead is severely limited. He further posits that the Servant Leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, first (Greenleaf,

2011). This conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The litmus test for every leader rests on interrogating oneself: do those you serve grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves, become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in the society? Will they benefit, or at least, not be further harmed? (Sipe & Frick, 2015). Greenleaf further elucidates that every Servant Leader must rest on seven pillars. A servant leader is a person of character who puts people first. Such a leader is a skilled communicator, a compassionate collaborator who has foresight, a systems thinker and leads with moral authority (Greenleaf, 2011).

These seven pillars lure us to a vision, a voyage of discovery beyond the known world of linear management and isolated heroism as posited by Trait theories of leadership into the flat world of global business, connectivity, shared leadership, and the kind of community that makes it all worthwhile. Therefore, in developing the Servant Leadership attitude there are some attitudes that a leader exhibits that promote their adaptation to identify, reflect, change and growth while reinforcing their strength and striving to overcome their weakness in serving others. Such a leader takes stock of the gains and returns on Investment occasioned by the change. They are disposed to access knowledge and skills associated with the target behaviour while leading by serving. At

the heart of servant leadership is the contribution toward the greater good of my organization, family and society.

Aida (2022) observes that the servant leadership style was based on the idea that leaders prioritize serving the greater good. Leaders with this style serve their team and organization first. They do not prioritize their own objectives. Thus, Servant leadership seeks to achieve a vision by providing strong support to followers. In turn, this allows followers to learn and grow while using their own expertise and vision to enhance leadership. This hinges on building influence and authority rather than using control and toxic leadership tactics.

The servant leader focuses on: setting up strategic leadership and communicating that down to the team level; encouraging ownership and extending supported trust to the team; making sure that the team has the required resources, budget, skills, and attention to make an impact; and providing a framework within which their team can flourish (instead of prescribing them specific directions on each of their duties) (Aida, 2022). The Servant Leadership that focuses on the development of the human person especially on their welfare, enhanced human relationship, shared decision making processes between the leader and followers in an organization, establishing a friendly environment devoid of hateful competitions and disdain to followers

should be the focus of leaders. This focus is more humane and more productive in most environments.

St Augustine perspective of Leadership

Having taken leadership role from his earliest days among his peer groups to his sojourn into the quest for truth and ecclesial responsibilities, the writings of St Augustine tease out clearly what leadership entails with a great tilting towards Servant Leadership. His perspective can be understood under the themes of Service, Harmony and Fraternity.

Service

From the vantage point of analyzing the insights of Greenleaf's servant leadership style, it could be seen clearly that St Augustine's style of leadership leans towards Servant Leadership. St Augustine is emphatic on being first a servant and being willing to serve as he submits, 'The first thing good superiors must realize is that they are servants. They should not consider it beneath their dignity to be servants to many. Indeed, the Lord of lords did not consider it beneath His dignity to be a servant to us' (Augustine 1994; 340A, 1). Further he writes, "We are put in charge and we are servants; we possess authority, but only if we serve. "The man, you see, who presides over the people out first of all to understand that he is the servant of many masters. And let him not disdain this role; let him not, I repeat, disdain to be the servant of many people, because the Lord of lords did not disdain to serve us" (Augustine 1994; 340A, 1).

In accounting for his servant leadership style as an ecclesial leader to the Venerable Venatius and taking cognizant of the onerous task it takes to be one, he holds, "“Nothing in this life, and especially at this time, is more difficult, more laborious, and more dangerous than the office of a bishop, priest, or deacon” (Augustine 2001;21, 4), 'Where I am terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you', He further says, 'For you, I am a bishop but with you I am a Christian' (Augustine 1994; 340,1). For St Augustine, it is a process and its ultimate goal would be development of people and transformation of society as he notes, 'Those... if they also have the skill of governing peoples, there is no happier state of human affairs than when, by God's mercy, they hold power.' (Augustine, 2012; 5.19).

Fraternity

At the heart of the Servant leadership style is teamwork. Building from his Christological background (Fitzgerald, 2020) he echoes the need for togetherness with common vision and purpose in achieving organizational goals. Leadership, in other words, had a communal dimension, or simply put, Fraternity, a position which St Augustine put into action in his respectful dialogue with the Donatist bishop Fortunius, and in his invitation to others to join him in a search for truth. In his Rule he states the reason we have all come together is to live in harmoniously in the house with one mind and one heart intent upon God (Augustine 2022; 1:2)

This attitude extended to all aspects of his leadership within the Catholic community, where he insisted on shared service rather than on his own individual ministry (Fitzgerald, 2020). In fact, St Augustine mirrored his fraternal teaching on Service. He insisted on the work of many, not on personal service. His approach was not so much that of a servant leader as it was of a fellow servant—a description that aligns with his understanding of others as members of the Body of Christ (Fitzgerald, 2020). Fraternity is a life of sharing so as to be in solidarity with the one to be served. Therefore, any endeavor to distinguish between solidarity with those to be served and those in service can be a basis for mistrust and undedicated service. The servant leadership emanating from fraternity promotes collaboration and a true team spirit.

He expresses his disdain for transactional and autocratic styles of leadership that puts all the responsibility of leadership on the leader especially on his threats to punish discordant voices and positions, and achieves their goals through coercion when he holds, be assured that abuses are not done away with by harsh or severe or autocratic measures, but by teaching rather than by commanding, by persuasion rather than by threats. This is the way to deal with the people in general, reserving severity for the sins of the few. If we make threats, let it be done sorrowfully, in the words of Scripture, and in terms of the world to come.

In this way, it is not we who are feared because of our power, but God because of our words” (Augustine, 2001; 22, 5). All are called to exercise leadership, both in terms of good example and healthy initiative; leadership, is not, in other words, limited to those in positions of authority. Those with responsibility for more than themselves may bear greater burdens in some ways, but that provides an opportunity for highlighting the fact of interdependence and the importance of mutual respect (Fitzgerald, 2022).

Furthermore, in his Rule St Augustine places emphasis on the leader as one who is one of the group but comes first in terms of fraternity and not in the terms of lording it over the group nor above the group is clearly seen in its original tenses. “*Ipse vero qui vobis praeest, non se existimet potestate dominantem, sed caritatem servientem felicem.*” (Augustine 2022; 7, 46). As Prevost observes, in English, this can be translated as: “The superior, for his part, must not think himself fortunate in his exercise of authority, but in his role of serving you in love.” However, this particular translation does not do justice to St Augustine's thought for different reasons. First of all, Augustine, in the Rule, does not speak of “the superior”, but of the “Praepositus” – the one who is before you. This is in harmony with the usage of the term among Augustinians historically. They use the word “prior” – the “*primus inter pares*”, to indicate the one who is before you as a leader, but not dominating over you as a ruler with power (Prevost, 2005).

Humility

The Servant Leader stems from a humble disposition without which Service is not genuine and it is rendered either grudgingly or devoid of its fervor. Humility is the virtue from which other aspects of true leadership will be constructed. If we want to understand servant leadership, we must begin with the virtue of humility. So often, when one is called to a role of authority, it is pride that becomes an operating force, leading us to consider ourselves more important, higher in rank, in power, and more worthy of respect.

Without humility, there can be no true “leadership” within the framework of St Augustine's perspective (Augustine 1991; 68). Pride impacts negatively on our relationship with other people as our motivations move more and more towards the self rather than towards the common good of all people whom we serve in our actions. It manipulates and distorts our motivations (Hiers, 2021). St Augustine therefore writes, “Those... if they also have the skill of governing peoples, there is no happier state of human affairs than when, by God's mercy, they hold power. Such men attribute their virtues, so far as they are able to have virtue in this life, only to the grace of God, for it is God who has given them virtues in response to their willing, their believing, their entreating. At the same time, they understand how far they fall short of perfect righteousness as it is found in the company of holy angels, for which they are striving to prepare themselves” (Augustine, 2012; 5.19).

Humility must be the foundation of effective leadership in a pluralistic society. If directives are given out of an air of superiority and power by leaders, subordinates will carry out instructions given to them out of fear. This in turn creates gaps between the leader and those led preventing them from acting in sync with one another to maximize the benefits of their cooperation for the organization they work for. Instead of imposing his will, the actions and words of the leader should be a credible and genuine model to follow and base the confidence of the led for the leader in a pluralistic society. (Aida, 2022)

St Augustine's Influence on Leadership in Pluralistic Societies in the Modern World

Considering the nature of Late Antiquity in the Roman world which was politically autocratic and despotic, it is remarkable that St Augustine has a clear grasp of the importance of principles like the rule of law, the rights of citizens and the contingent nature of political arrangements. These ideas are prominently presented in *The City of God* when St Augustine is discussing the foundations of the greatness of the Roman state. He argues that the true foundations of the power of the Roman state is found in the just conduct of its administrators and magistrates, the protection it gives to its citizens who can come from any background once they have met the required legal imperatives as well as the dedication of its rulers to principles of equity (Augustine, 1958).

These principles taken together show that leadership for St Augustine must be grounded on concern for the common good and in service for the people over whom the leader acts. In practice this means that the true basis of proper conduct is to be found in just laws that prioritize justice in the sense used by Plato which requires that it is predicated in an arrangement in which each man is given his due (The Republic). For St Augustine to the extent that leaders of the Roman world pursued policies that resulted in the entrenching of principles of justice to all and sundry without partiality, then to that extent was the outcome of state policy consistent with right conduct. In this manner, he recognized clearly that a well-ordered state and society did not necessarily have to be a confessional state. In other words the religious confession of a polity did not necessarily tell whether the polity was properly governed. Rather the adherence to principles of justice by its leaders determined the extent to which a given polity was properly run (Augustine, 1958). A similar conclusion was reached by the pre-colonial Nigerian scholar Usman Dan Fodio when he observed that “a state can endure with unbelief but cannot endure with injustice” (Anuga, 2013). The relevance of these insights on leadership in post-colonial states and societies in Africa cannot be lost to the scholar of political activity. The atomization of individuals as persons before the law in contemporary times requires a framework that prioritizes justice and equity to all citizens irrespective of regional or ethnic origins or religious creed or for that

matter social or economic class distinctions. Outside such a system, oppression and political instability easily become the framework in which leadership is projected. Leadership in such a context increasingly becomes organized brigandage as rights are selectively granted and justice selectively applied. In social environments such as these as Augustine warns in *The City of God*, conflicts easily degenerate into chaos risking the possibility of the collapse of the polity as Rome witnessed during the sack of the city by Gothic soldiers under their leader Alaric in the year 410. The inability of leaders to maintain a policy of meting out justice to all citizens and residents no matter their origin, faith or status is therefore a sine qua non for the degeneration of the polity over time. This is one of the important lessons for people aspiring to leadership in contemporary times that comes to us from St Augustine.

Our world today is in dire need of quality leadership as it is often characterized by selfish aggrandizement that has opened the way to abuses of power through high handedness and greed amongst other actions that destroys the very fabric of our society. This has made many hold that one of the problems of humanity is the problem of leadership (Achebe, 1980). One of the ways the problem of leadership can be resolved or at least brought to its lowest negative impact is the inculcation of Servant Leadership in our curriculum at all levels.

The positive impact of the servant Leadership style is obviously not in doubt even in the life of the church. Its influence in changing the leadership model in the post-Vatican II era is also profound. Christine Moulton of Salt Lake Tribune writes: “Vatican II [1960-1965] is considered the most pivotal Church Council in recent centuries, not because it declared new doctrines but because it changed the way the faith engages the modern world” (Moulton, 2011).

Leadership style in the church as taught by the Conciliar Fathers is a departure from the pyramid model which is predominantly hierarchical. John O' Malley (2015) best explains it when he remarks, 'All through the Council this triad occurs: prophet, priest, king. This triad traditionally, at least since the 16th century, has been applied only to the clergy. Prophet, the one who speaks on God's behalf; Priest, the one who prays for the people and king, the one who governs. Well Vatican II takes that triad and applies it to bishops, it applies it to priests, and it applies it to laypeople, of course with a slightly different nuance at every level. And in this application, the Council offers a radical redefinition of “king,”- namely as servant...a very important and radical move. This goes back to the Gospel, Jesus washing the feet of his disciples... this is how the church is called to govern. The church is the servant, the church is the one who goes out and helps” (O'Malley, 2015). This is the vision for ecclesial leadership when Augustine alluded to this style of leadership when he

writes, 'to those of us who have been selected as bishops, people whom God has put in charge of others must not use their authority for their own advantage but the good of those they rule, a bishop who just enjoys being the boss and seeks his own convenience is feeding himself, not the sheep' (Augustine 1990;46.2).

Conclusions

Though there have been many models of leadership styles, one model of leadership that can fast track the transformation of pluralistic society and organizations in contemporary times is the servant leadership model. The obvious drift from this model by some leaders represents deviations from focusing on fulfilling the imperatives of the people's common good. In this regard it is a clarion call to chaos and instability unless leadership is returned and made to imbibe the servant leader as the foundational principle for organizing leadership arrangements in our communities and society.

By adopting this style in most organizations, most followers are themselves carried along and become part and parcel of the decision-making process and are directly involved in the operational and strategic organizations of the bodies in the actualization of their goals. Though it has been argued that there is a need to be autocratic in handling cases of deviations so as to instill discipline, it is still relevant for individual and communal development in the quest for a better

society to adopt the servant leader model of leadership in pluralistic societies in contemporary times.

Recommendations

Servant leadership style is a process and not an end in itself. In the quest to build transformational leadership that will influence followers to achieve organizational goals, it is important to develop attitudes that build a good leader with the hope of achieving great things. It is with these insights in mind that we recommend the following:

For the importance of the perspective of St Augustine of Hippo on leadership in pluralistic societies in the context of contemporary society to be properly grasped, clear communication of the vision and mission of the various organizations in pluralistic societies needs to be developed between leaders and followers. This can be done through an appreciation of feedback mechanisms that form the foundations of teamwork that in turn leads to the development of empathy and self-awareness for team members thereby reinforcing the philosophy of others first in the context of leadership.

To guarantee that the challenges involved in making St Augustine of Hippo's perspective on leadership in pluralistic societies relevant to contemporary societies are overcome students at all levels of our educational institutions should be taught the dangers of bad governance occasioned by bad leadership and, in its place, they should be taught to cultivate the servant leadership model in their services to the society. If these recommendations are implemented, then the relevance of the perspectives of St Augustine on leadership in a pluralistic society can be made relevant to the contemporary world.

References

- Achebe, C. (1980). *The trouble with Nigeria* Longman
- Aida L. G., (2022). What is servant leadership and how can it empower your team? www.betterup.com assessed on 3 November, 2022
- Anuga, J., (2013). One entity; conflicting views *Baobab Africa Magazine* [https://www.baobabafrikaonline.com/archives/page/43/assessed on 4 December 2022](https://www.baobabafrikaonline.com/archives/page/43/assessed%20on%204%20December%202022)
- Augustine, Saint, (1958). *City of God* edited by Bourke, V. Garden City: Image Books
- Augustine, Saint, (2012). *City of God* trans. William Babcock. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press.
- Augustine, (1997). *Confessions*, trans. Maria

Boulding. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press.

Augustine, (2001). Letters 1-99, trans, Roland Teske. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press

Augustine, Saint, (1990). Sermons 20-50, trans. Edmund Hill, Brooklyn, NY: New City Press.

Augustine, Saint, (1991). Sermons 51-94, trans. Edmund Hill, Brooklyn, NY: New City Press.

Augustine, Saint, (1994). Sermons 306-340A, trans. Edmund Hill, Hyde Park, NY: New City Press.

Augustine, (2022). The Rule of St. Augustine.
www.augustinians.squarespace.com

Balbino, R., (1994). Augustinian origins, charism, and spirituality edited by Rotelle J.

Villanova, Augustinian Press

Fitzgerald, A., (2020). Augustine for Leadership
www.augustine.villanova.edu/augustinian-leadership accessed on 3 November, 2022

Gibbon Edward (1959) The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire edited by Saunders D. The Portable Gibbon: The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire The Viking Press New York 8th Edition 1959 (1st Edition 1788) USA

Greenleaf, R., (2011). Principles of servant leadership and how they enhance practice
www.journals.rcni.com.

Hiers, J., (2021). What is Augustinian humility?
www.augustinianspirituality.org assessed on 3 November, 2022

- Kaufman, I. P., (2017). *Augustine's Leaders* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books
- Kendra, C., (2022). How to lead;6 leadership styles and frameworks www.blog.hubspot.com.
- Moulton, C. (2011). *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in American*. www.sltrib.com
- Northouse, Peter Guy, (2016). *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed. www.amazon.com. Assessed on 3 November,2022.
- O'Malley, J., ((2015). *Looking at Vatican II with Pope Francis' eyes: leadership and spirituality Santa Clara Lecture*. Georgetown University
- Sipe, W. J. & Dom, M. F., (2015). *Seven pillars of servant leadership* New Jersey Paulist Press USA
- Syme, Roland (1939). *The Roman Revolution* Oxford University Press
- Usmani, F., (2022). *Leadership styles: definition, meaning, & types of leadership styles*. www.pmstudycircle.com
- Will K., (2022). *Servant leadership: characteristics, pros and cons , examples* www.investopedia.com assessed on 3 November,2022
ies-in-the-world assessed on 3 December 2022