

Political Landscape

**Being and Choosing Good Leaders**  
**A Seminar Book for Preparing Our lives to Participate in**  
**Flourishing Democracy**

**Building One Nation through Neighbourliness**  
**A Study Program to be**  
**Used for Group Seminars and Practical Life Change**

**Christian Faith Ministries**  
**Foreword & Teachings by Kent Hodge**  
**Author: Ebute Ralph Ebute**

## **FOREWORD**

I was with Ralph Ebute at Plateau State Radio one Sunday afternoon, enjoying robust discussions on air with our friend and radio Anchorman Tunji Adewuni. Our attention turned to recently held elections and the need to elect men and women who will truly bring healing to our communities.

One thing we all notice, and this happens in all our nations, is the electioneers often distract our attention away from bad styles of leadership by appealing to our divisions. Would-be elected officials know instinctively the nature of mankind, and our propensity to form divisions along ethnic, social or religious lines. These divisions become our main focus at elections, rather than the potential for good governance that will heal all our relationships and the community as a whole. “Divide and conquer” is an age-old strategy. We must be wise and steer our communities away from this destructive sentiment in electioneering: hatred between groups of people, violence and finally the detrimental governance that we choose as a result.

On the radio that day we spoke of Archbishop Ben Kwashi, who prior to the state and local elections published a list of qualities to consider when electing good leaders. He spoke of the candidate’s lifestyle of genuine care for the unfortunate and their personal long-term, sacrificial duty in caring for their family and world around them. He stated that these issues, and not our racial and religious divisions, must be paramount to us when voting.

Then, on radio that afternoon, we asked the question, “How can we ensure we have elected officials who will lead for the common good and genuinely care for the whole community?” And the best answer we could come to, was that if we refuse to allow the candidates to divide us between our separate groups, to fight emotionally or

physically against each other, then the attention of us all will be focused where it should be: on the candidate's true character and true ability to govern honestly for the wellbeing of the poor in society. When the poor are served, no matter their background or group, the nation will heal.

We should come together in our communities, from our ethnic, religious and social backgrounds, and agree to hold electioneers to account, to act truthfully for the good of the whole community. The "winner takes all" attitude must stop and be replaced with the "winner serves all groups" in our land equally. When a person wins an election, he or she is bound to serve the whole electorate equally, not just those who voted for them. We must allow our leaders to serve other groups, and not just expect them to serve us.

Politics is just like life. When we are blessed, we share that blessing with others. We help pay the school fees of those less fortunate than ourselves. We don't just share with our own people. If children from other ethnic groups can't get education or help, then our nation will move to violence. If we don't share with all our neighbours, the peace of our land breaks down. So, in politics, if we win an election, we share the blessing of government with all the people in our land, and only then will we have peace. We should expect all our leaders to serve all those in our state, and never be tribal about caring for all in need. This is true leadership and that is why this book focuses on leadership that will heal our local government and our nation. All our cultures teach us this is right.

Martin Luther King Jr. said we move to peace by moving together. If we leave the poor behind, or people from other tribal groups or faiths behind, then we will face trouble. We move into the future together, with everyone, or we will not have peace. We move into the future together, or we will not have a future. The apostle Paul said, if one part of the body is sick, the whole body is sick. We can't

ignore our neighbor in need, not even our enemy in need. We must reach out to heal those different to ourselves. When we heal others, we heal ourselves.

The reason for poor governance is that we allow ourselves to be divided. We believe the stories that divide us, instead of focusing on building healing bridges amongst us all in the community. We must stop allowing religious or political leaders the easy path of dividing us for the sake of their own personal ambitions. They divide and they take the plunder for themselves. Dividing us distracts us from their real aim: to take the plunder of the office for themselves. If we don't allow ourselves to be divided, we can all work together against corruption and ensure our environments are built for us all.

This happens globally. Bad leaders tell us this group of people or that group is the problem, or this other nation is our problem, but really what is happening is the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Good leaders know that we need to be in unity so we can come together to serve the poor, and then our nation will be healed socially and politically. Christ shows us the way of leadership. He served people from all backgrounds. He refused to discriminate. This is what we must do also.

Instead of telling stories of what other groups of people did wrong against us, we should tell stories about what other groups did that was good to us. There are plenty of good stories around. When we focus on the negative, it is because we want to please people who will call us great. We say, "The other people are bad, and I will save you from them, if you come to my church, or if you elect me to public office." This is a very bad strategy for true leadership, but it is a common strategy we see in the world.

We need to add to the number of good stories ourselves, by the way we treat those in other ethnic and religious groups, with love and

care. These true stories will change our communities and lead our own politicians to behave the same way. They will have to copy us.

For example, from the Nigerian civil war, we can tell stories of how people badly treated us, but it is far better to tell stories of how people risked their own lives to serve, care for and love those on the other side, on the enemy's side. Many such great stories exist. These stories inspire us to copy these people. These stories inspire us to care for one other from our different backgrounds. These are the kind of stories that build a better nation, rather than stories that divide us.

After the radio program that day, I was speaking with Ralph Ebute and I asked him to put together this little book as a guide ahead of elections. The idea is that this book can help us to focus on the right sentiments and right strategy when we approach elections and vote for candidates. These notes can help us conduct elections peacefully, and to hear the true heart of the candidates who ask for our votes. This will improve our chances of electing people who truly care about us all, and will build us together as one community, and not divide us based on our selfish ideas.

Therefore, these notes have been put together to serve as seminar material, to teach principles and to give practical guidelines for preparing us for our democratic lives. God has blessed us with democratic possibilities that will only help us if we use them in a good way. We have a great opportunity to do it well and make good advances together. Let's take advantage of that opportunity by sharing good ideas of unity and cross-cultural service with our neighbours and then refusing the bad ideas of hatred and division that are spread by others in the community. It's our choice.

This book can be used by your church groups, or by bringing other groups of people together, to study and respond together to the

Practical Guidelines at the back of the book. These are practical steps that we can take to help ensure elections are peaceful and that leaders unite all people and don't just favour our own group. Then we can live and build as one people, the way God intended us to. We have to call leaders from our group to account, to be faithful to care for people in the other groups in our community also, to see everyone in the community as the same.

I would like to use the Fulani/ Farmer conflicts as one example to consider. Over many years the federal government has made many attempts to solve the issues involved. The issues are complex, ranging from environmental, to age-old customs, to religious and ethnic differences and to conflicts over land for the welfare of each group. The government has put forward many solutions, ranging from ranches, to environmental improvements, reversing desertification, sponsoring peace talks, restoring loss in communities, and others.

While the government can do a lot of good, the issue is really a local issue for us all. At the end, it's not up to the government, but up to ourselves. Will we develop the kind of neighbourly behavior and lifestyles at our own community/ grassroots level, to rebuild cooperative relationships between us? The real power is in our own hands. We cannot blame someone else or say it's up to government to fix our own behaviour.

Sometimes we prefer to live with the false conspiracy theories that tell us how bad others are, because then we don't have to serve them and take care to rebuild good relationships. It's easier to promote negativity. James, in the scriptures, called this a tongue that sets the world on fire, and he told us to stop it. If we want to build good relationships, then the government doesn't do that for us in our own neighbourhood. We do that ourselves, by the way that we live with each other. If our communities are experiencing trouble, it's

because we are sowing trouble. If we live differently, we build different kinds of communities that work much better for us all.

So how do we do it? We build neighbourly care by including all those in our community, from whatever background, and helping to meet their needs, just as we do for our own people. We don't make a difference between ourselves by what group a person belongs to. We treat all people as our family, to care for them with equal love.

Then when trouble breaks out, we come together and work together to resolve that trouble. Or if trouble comes from outside, from ambitious people who want to disturb us, or from external influences that want to break up our unity in our local area, then we band together in unity and refuse that external disease. It can be done. This is successful when we learn to love and respect each other in our own areas where we live. And then we make this love our strong choice when evil comes, and we stand together against that evil. No politician can promise to do this for us. Only we can do it.

Good deeds towards our neighbour rebuild our community. Love for all people, no matter their background. Forgiveness and care towards our fellow man/ woman. Visiting and talking with our different neighbours so that bad rumors can't build between us. This is the true heritage of Africa. This is the true cultural way, that has sustained the society for generations. This is what we must turn back to now. This is our key strategy.

We must not live separate lives from those different to ourselves. If our neighbor from another ethnic group has a baby, rejoice with them. If one among them dies, mourn with them and help them. Show solidarity with other humans. Let's make this change and refuse narratives of division and build a country that is truly one. Let's shame darkness by choosing light.

Nigeria is a nation of great resources and potential. The greatest need is to live as one people in Nigeria. When we built the water reservoir dam at Wurin Alheri, we needed to work together, Christians with Muslims. It was Ramadan month, and the Muslims lived on our Christian estate, and our staff cooked for them and fed them each morning before sunrise. The project was a great success, with people enjoying the work, building together.

If we can build a dam like that, that provides water for farmers and cattle alike, then we can build Nigeria like that. When we develop our environments, we do it for all the people, for farmers and for cattle herders and we learn to live together, by including each other. By treating others as we treat our self. We take the lead in forgiving and restoring relationships, when we have done wrong, and even if others in our view are the ones in the wrong.

Today we must deny those agendas that divide us, and build those agendas that unite us, by serving each other. Jesus said, “When you have a party, don’t just invite your friends. Or when go to the market, don’t just greet your friends. Even the pagans love their own. How are we better than pagans if we only love our own? Love your enemies and do good to them.”

If we divide, then division will never stop. We carry division in our hearts and false leaders will always rise to divide us more and more, into smaller and smaller groups against each other. Division is rooted in the heart. Division doesn’t come because others do bad things to us, it comes because division rises from within our own hearts. We must master this weakness. We must learn to live as one. This is the potential for the greatness of this nation.

Dividing isn’t the solution, because it makes us to divide into smaller and smaller groups, always against each other. Division will

become our practice and it will continue, down to dividing one village from the next neighbouring village. Division is a disease that must be overcome by caring for our different neighbours and treating them like we would treat ourselves. Jesus spoke in a parable about division, because he was showing us that some would refuse unity. We stand against disunity by building unity in all our communities.

The way we get there is by following the teachings of Jesus, in forgiving and serving those different to ourselves. If we don't learn this from Jesus, we have missed most of what he taught. Jesus told us to share with the poor, with the wounded on the road to Jericho, not minding their village, faith or ethnic roots, because Jesus knew this would heal our relationships and nations.

Let's agree with Jesus and follow him, together, uniting in our Christian denominations, uniting to build our nation of different cultures in love. Let's stop trying to get the competitive advantage by dividing from others. The Pharisees used a false sense of holiness as an excuse to divide, so they wouldn't have to serve and share with those different to themselves, to protect their own denominational interests. Let's not follow their example.

We have so many cultures in this nation. The best part of these cultures comes out and shines when we love each other. Let's show the world the way to do this and achieve the change in our societies that is needed.

We pray these notes and Practical Manuel from Christian Faith Ministries will be a blessing to you and your people. On the behalf of Christian Faith Ministries, Ralph Ebute worked hard in compiling some major thoughts from my own teaching in recent years to present to you in this book. It's a work presented to you by the whole team at Christian Faith Ministries, because we all work

together for you for this cause. Christian Faith Ministries as a team presents to you this seminar book to be a blessing to our communities. We know that what is said in this book will touch your life and make a great difference.

With gratitude to all the leadership and staff team of Christian Faith Ministries, and with gratitude to all of you who pray for and support our service of the whole human family, I present to you this book, as one of the tools in our learning and growing together.

We proclaim the Lordship of Christ by our love for one another, for all others, especially for those in need, in whom Christ lives, waiting for us to serve him in them. So, let's give up the "gospel" of self-profit and regain the gospel of new community and renewed creation.

Thank you and God bless you.

Kent Hodge: Christian Faith Ministries

## **PREFACE**

Leadership and the attitude of Christians and all alike to leadership is one subject that should be of particular interest to all of us today. We have said so much about leadership, but are yet to truly understand God's blueprint for leadership and the attitude towards leadership that promotes effective leadership.

All around us we are confronted with the failure of leadership. This failure is evidenced in the social, moral, family, communal, economic, religious and political dimensions of human endeavor. A failure that challenges our modern notion of what leadership entails; a failure for which we must collectively take responsibility.

We have often been very quick to blame the failure of leadership on those individuals specifically tasked with the responsibility to lead. We have not realized that these individuals reflect the image of the larger society, and that their actions are often not immune from the expectation that the general society creates. In other words, we influence the kind of leadership we experience by the kind of society we create and what expectations we who follow hold of our leaders.

This is true for leadership in all spheres of life whether it be religious or political. Christians have a responsibility to call for and support good leadership that is inclusive and indiscriminate. We are not to encourage segregation and corruption in our leaders but rather demand justice and equity. We are not to be blinded in our loyalty to corrupt leaders by ethnic and religious sentiments.

When leadership fails, society disintegrates. When leadership succeeds, relationships are healed and community thrives. The pace at which our present global community is disintegrating is an indictment on all of us and not just the few who hold leadership positions. Only a prompt return to the biblical model revealed in the

Torah and in Jesus' life and teachings guarantees us deliverance from the path of self-destruction we presently thread.

The time is upon us now to muster the boldness to critique our modern leadership/ followership dynamics and find the objectivity to embrace a more viable alternative in our quest for nation building – the biblical leadership model.

Ebute Ralph Ebute, CFM

## **THE CALL FOR A BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP/ FOLLOWERSHIP PATTERN**

I had just delivered a lecture on the topic “God’s eternal plan for man” at a seminar for Pastors/ Wives organized by the Christ Apostolic Church, Bukuru DCC, Jos. What followed in the process of interaction was a passionate exchange by some of those in attendance on the role of ministers and Christians in general in politics. What should be the attitude and character of Christians towards politics and in the practice of political leadership?

The question however goes beyond political leadership to leadership in all the various forms it can be exercised and the attitude of Christians to such leadership. As we attempted vigorously to chart a biblical course for Christian attitude toward leadership, a pastor suggested that a lack of understanding of biblical leadership was fundamental to the leadership failure among Christians today. There are too many Christians in politics today and leadership in general with a wrong view of leadership, likewise too many Christians blindly throwing their support behind such flawed leadership.

This encounter inspired Christian Faith Ministries (CFM), renowned for her efforts in sound biblical scholarship and community building initiatives to take up the challenge of producing a literary piece for instructing Christians on how to support sound leadership, and how to act soundly when in leadership.

We can no longer sit unconcerned while the world frames the patterns of leadership that Christians adopt to their own peril. We must make a bold statement of what biblical leadership/ followership entails and paint an even better picture of biblical leadership/ followership by our life examples. The way we live and

threat all around us must witness to the superiority of biblical leadership over worldly systems.

This book is written in plain and simple language for all to benefit. It is put together in brief paragraphs under short headings so as to facilitate understanding. Importantly, it concludes with a practical manual section that guides us on how to implement the lessons learnt while reading especially as it concerns choosing and relating to leadership.

The immediate goal of this book is not to enhance intellectualism, but to induce action, that kind of sustained positive action that begins to turn our world around, one bit at a time. It is written to show that the kind of successful leadership that translates into successful community is the collective responsibility of all (community as a whole). We are called by God to be light in a world full of darkness. We have a responsibility to lead out of the darkness by showing an example the world will follow, not the other way around. We have drifted with the world's tide for too long and as such become unable to help her plight.

The church of Christ must stand up, stand out and show the way by living and leading as Jesus did. It will not be easy but there is no other way the job gets done. By selfish actions our world lies in ruin and decay, only by deliberate selfless actions does she stand any chance of recovery. It is not enough to believe that change is possible; we must now make a deliberate commitment to see it happen. It begins with you and with me.

Ebute Ralph Ebute, CFM

# **CONTENTS**

## **PART I - THE OLD TESTAMENT**

**A People Called to be Different**

## **PART II - THE NEW TESTAMENT**

**Leadership in Jesus and the Early Apostolic Community**

## **PART III - PRACTICAL MANUAL**

**How to Respond During Campaigns and Elections**

By Ebute Ralph Ebute, CFM

**PART I**  
**THE OLD TESTAMENT**  
**A People Called to be Different**

**God Calls Leaders Because of People**

It is so often the case today that people (Christians alike) go into leadership with self-ambition. Leadership becomes a platform for promoting and advancing oneself. This is not what we find in the scriptures, God always certainly raises leaders with the welfare of the people in view. In other words, leadership is because of the people not the other way around.

Moses was called to lead God's people out of bondage, Joshua to get them to Canaan, David to shepherd God's flock. When leadership loses sight of the people's wellbeing, it becomes self centered and oppressive. Unfortunately, much of today's leadership across board prioritizes the well being of the leader over that of the people.

Our leaders live in untold excess whereas the people subsist in poverty. The resources that should ensure a decent living for the community are redirected to indulge the flamboyance of a few. We have misguidedly come to associate leadership success with material acquisition, and this has undermined the capacity of many Christian leaders to deliver on competent leadership.

God through Moses cautioned Israel against such attitude. A leader in Israel was not to set himself apart from the people, neither was he to see the people as a ladder for his personal advancement. The practice among the heathen nations was to employ the masses as instruments for ensuring the leaders comfort. God on the other hand demanded the people be first consideration on the leader's scale of preference.

The temptation to do it the world's way has dented the church's capacity to be the right example to the world today. We see the leadership ill in the world and turn to the church for encouragement and direction but find the church plagued by the same sickness. Christian leadership is smeared by division, nepotism, misappropriation and self interest. We have not borne the image of God through our leadership to the world. We have rather revealed a God crafted after our fallen nature, not the true God.

Our path to restoration must begin with a clear and precise understanding that biblical leadership puts a premium on the people. Leadership is with a view to ensuring a viable community, a community of mercy, love, care, peace and justice, traits so often shattered by greed and self interest. Christians in leadership and those aspiring for leadership requires this orientation, and in some cases re-orientation. If the foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do? People and communal well being is the foundation of biblical leadership and nothing short of this will suffice. As we associate with leadership therefore, we must encourage those in leadership to care for people not just our clicks.

## **Egypt and the Worldly Systems of Leadership**

Israel had been slaves in Egypt for nearly four centuries, they saw the form of leadership practiced in Egypt. Pharaoh was a son of the gods on who was bestowed the favor of the gods, and the people were mere mortals to indulge his very whim and desire.

This way of thinking came from how the Pharaohs understood the world's origin. The pagan cultures of the time had creation myths that suggested order came out of chaos through a violent conflict. The result of this being that the conquering gods vanquished their enemies and took control of the world, only delegating power to

their human descendants to wield on their behalf. In these myths, humans were often a ready work force to do the bidding of the gods, thus enslavement followed naturally.

In scriptures, we see this attitude demonstrated in the way the Pharaoh treated the Israelites. They were mere work force to build the glories of Egypt, Pharaoh and the gods. Their welfare and living conditions meant very little to the Pharaohs and any hint of resistance was met with maximum force. Without a re-orientation, Israel would leave Egypt with Pharaoh enshrined in their minds and treat others around them and each other as Pharaoh has done to them.

God counters this destructive mentality with the biblical creation account handed them through Moses. In the Genesis accounts, God is not a warrior, he is a loving creator who brings forth creatures he delights in and makes man in his own image. He sees good in his creation and takes pleasure in what he has made. What is seen here is not just his pre-eminence but his immanence as the almighty condescends to fellowship with his creation.

He is not detached from His creation as the deists would want to point out. His love compels him to be involved. He puts man in the garden and mandates man to care for it (Gen. 2:15). Man is to care for not plunder God's creation for his own personal pleasure; man is made a steward to ensure the well being of God's creation. Even at first glance, the difference between the pagan creation myths and the Genesis account is clear and obvious. God's message to His chosen people is clear from the onset, "you are called to be different".

## **A Different Path for God's People**

One's idea of how the world came about impacts on how they treat the world around them. The Pharaohs and pagan cultures saw creation birthed from violence and thus saw violence as the way of sustaining and maintaining control of the world. God would have His people partake in no such thinking; He crafts for them a world view that reveals His nature and character.

God's creation was not an act of violence but an act of love, creation is thus sustained by love not violence. This is key to how Israel ought to understand the world around them. It is only by loving care that they as the people of God sustain God's creation, not by acts of violence and oppression as demonstrated by the Pharaohs and other pagan civilizations.

Whereas the pagan myths depicted the sons of the gods (earthly rulers) as inheriting powers to subject creation to servitude for their pleasure and those of the gods, the Genesis account show God's son (Adam) as the steward of God's creation tasked with the responsibility to tend and care for creation. This is a remarkable shift in disposition for God's people who must see themselves as servants responsible for God's creation and not masters depleting the earth for personal glory.

The Pharaohs and Pagan kings ruled their empires as their gods had done the creation in their myths- with brute force. Israel on the other hand was to rule as their God had done the creation in the Genesis account – the servant rule (ruling through care and service). This new approach to life and leadership was to ensure Israel prospered as a nation, and fulfilled her purpose as a beacon to the nations.

This pagan ideology has simmered into our modern cultures where brute force is seen as the appropriate response to crises and strength is measured in military might. Modern day Pharaohs sit

over nations Plundering people and places to enrich family and friends. They destabilize less fortunate regions, displacing countless people to foster personal and corporate greed, while hiding their true intentions under pretense of seeking global peace and justice.

God's path for Christian leadership at all levels today is same as it was for Israel back then. We are called to be faithful stewards over God's creation, to care and serve just as Adam was required to do. Leadership not aloof from the sufferings of the people like Pharaoh, but involved with creation as God was in Genesis. Stewards over God's people (all men everywhere) to love and care, not masters who claim to own them. Leadership aligned with God's vision of a world prospering by love and care not violence and segregation. This is the example put forth by God in Christ, refusing to buy into the division and segregation in the world, he showed a more excellent way – the way of non – discriminatory love, care and mercy.

Christians in leadership must either choose to identify with Pharaoh and the pagan traditions or with God and his example in Christ. Whatever that choice is defines the destiny of Christian leadership, whether one of success or one doomed to fail in line with the world. Christians in general on the other hand cannot naively vow unflinching support for oppressive regimes because of whatever mundane benefits are promised to them.

### **Not Like the Nations Around**

Israel like the church today was called not to conform but to stand out. She was called to be light in a dark and oppressive world.

“When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and posses it and dwell in it, and say, “I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me” “you

shall set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.

“But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, you shall not return that way again’.

“Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites.

“And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes,

“that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.” (Deut 17:14-20)

In vivid terms, God paints a picture for Israel of what leadership ought to be when they were settled in Canaan. This picture was a stark contrast of the leadership modeled by the pagan nations around. Israel was not to imitate these nations but obey God and dare to be different. Clearly, a few elements stand out in God’s admonition to Israel that today’s church could use.

The leader was to be a brother – one who shared not merely blood, but their plight, their fears, their hopes, their humanity. When leadership is detached from the common humanity shared by all, then regardless of ethnic connections strangers are in rule. In

Christian leadership what binds us together is beyond blood and ethnicity, it is a common humanity shared by all men. It is understanding creation in God's image and our responsibility to seek the restoration and well being of God's creation regardless of ethnic, religious and political affiliation. We are called to seek the renewal of the world through servant rule, not the advancement of a segregated few who share our interests.

The leader in Israel was not to multiply horses and turn to Egypt's pattern of security- military might. The leader was rather to multiply mercy, care and justice, for these would eradicate the need for arms and occurrence of civil unrest. We must understand today that there is greater security in caring for the needy than taking up arms against those different from us. If we cared enough for the world, we might not need to take up arms against her because our care would bring healing and diminish the discontent that breeds war.

The moral bar for the king in Israel was as high as God expected of all his people. The pagan kings saw kingship as a license to indulge themselves, but the king in Israel was to use kingship to set a godly example of piety and humility. God discouraged the pursuit of personal wealth and greedy accumulation of material possession because it displaces others in society and engenders malcontent. A few (aristocrats) must not arrogate to themselves that which is for many. Need I say more? Let those who have ears listen and glean wisdom.

The king's heart was never to be lifted above his brothers. His equality and commonality with the people he led was to be evident in the way he lived and related with them. A Christian in leadership cannot become like Pharaoh who lords over the people, but like Christ who gives himself for the people. Christian leadership does not exalt itself but condescends. Understanding this would remedy

Christian leadership of the unwanted flamboyance and ego tripping that unfortunately characterizes Christian leadership today. God's pathway is simplicity and humility as seen in Christ. It is not the pomp and pageantry of the pagan kings of old adopted today by the systems of the world. God's way may not be attractive but it is for sure most effective. Even today he calls us not to be like the nations around (worldly system) but chart a course for the nations to follow.

### **Israel's Temptation – to Become like the Nations**

Although God had explicitly warned the Israelites not to emulate the nations around, it was a caution that fell on deaf ears. The attraction of pagan ideology was too strong for them to resist, just like is often the case for the present church. Israel embraced the pagan leadership practices of the nations around them, and in the process failed to serve as a leading example to the nations.

Israel demanded of Samuel a king who would fight their wars, and God saw this as a rejection of his government over them. Even today, when we resort to brute force and violence as our primary instrument for conflict resolution, it is evidence that we have rejected God's kind of government choosing rather the world's approach. Israel got a king (Saul) who conscripted their young men, took lands and taxes, and favored his kinsmen the Benjamites. This state of affairs unsettled the social fabric and sowed the seeds for civil unrest within the nation. The kings who followed after Saul were not much different, multiplying horses, wives, and material possessions to themselves. They neglected the pathway of God bringing about the desolation of the united monarchy and ultimately Israel's captivity by other pagan nations.

Christian leadership/followership must shun the temptation that swept Israel astray. That desire to be like the nations around rather

than be God's peculiar nation as Peter puts it. We must learn from the failure of these Israelite kings how that affinity with the world's system only brings about the desolation of genuine community. Greed, self interest, favoritism, scape goating are all elements that will undermine leadership at any level and spell its doom.

When leadership prioritizes physical projects over people, the people are exploited and enslaved to deliver personal and corporate ambition. This creates a rift between leadership and the people and eventually degenerates into civil unrest, resistance, revolution and ultimately anarchy. An example you are sure to find in the history of most modern day nations. Sadly enough, the church has not stayed untainted of this cancer as a casual perusal of church history will reveal. The onus is upon us today to recover biblical leadership desperately and show the world a better path. This we should seek to achieve by backing the right kind of leadership.

### **The Rule of God – Sabbath Rest**

In the creational account of Genesis, God rested on the seventh day. This is generally referred to as the Sabbath, and in our current religious climate represents a day of idling (no work) as reverence for God. The Sabbath ideology is loaded with theological and socio cultural truths to aid nation building.

On the seventh day (Sabbath) God rested. This rest however was not merely desisting from work, but actually entering into His reign (government) over His creation. In six days God creates the world and on the seventh, He enters his rest – the fullness of His rule or government over what he has created. Thus, the Sabbath is God's rule or government over His creation.

What is this government of God we see over creation? God cares for His creation, he delights in what He has made and sees good in

creation. His love for man is evident in the fellowship he shares with him, the almighty and transcendent God condescends and becomes immanent in his creation. God tasks the man he created to share His care for the creation by tending and caring for creation (Gen. 2:15). God's Sabbath rule is a rule of care and the preservation of the social order, not chaos and anarchy as depicted in the pagan myths of creation. This was significant for Israel who had recently come out of Egypt to understand that God's expectation of them differed from what was obtainable in Egypt. Understanding God's Sabbath rule was crucial to their identity as a nation, just as it is crucial to our present identity as the people of God, extending his rule over the world. Israel was to relate with the world on the basis of God's Sabbath rule, not Pharaoh's rule.

In the Sabbath rule, the Principle of 'rest' is expounded. Israel was to care enough for God's creation to give the land and its resources rest periodically. They were also mandated to extend the same periodic rest to servants and the disadvantaged in their midst. The idea of rest was to curb the tendency for exploitation and restore some form of dignity, equality and humaneness.

Pharaoh's rule cared little about rest for the people; they labored until they dropped dead with whips crushing their backs to urge them on. The minimum wage was not decent and the living conditions deplorable but who cared? They were Pharaoh's slaves, his workforce to build his empire. God discouraged Israel from having this view of humanity; man was to be seen as God's creation to be treated with honor and dignity regardless of socio-cultural and religio-political differences.

Modern society is crazed about profit margins and reducing production cost. These desires to raise profit margins and cut production costs often leads to a 'Pharaonic economy' where man's humanity is secondary to his productivity. People are exploited and

subjected to unhealthy working conditions so that organizations and corporations can enhance the bottom line. Cultural capitalism in all its attendant forms has created a new slave economy where some are certainly more equal than others.

The church must arise to challenge the status quo, not just with lofty words but by becoming an example for the world to follow. So far, we have not only been guilty of condoning this inhumanity, but of aiding and abating it by our misguided interpretation of scripture that invariably encourages this unjust system to thrive. We have not called our leaders to order as we ought to have done but rather participated in their segregation of others.

The church and Christians in leadership are called to extend God's Sabbath rule over the world. A rule of care, mercy and justice, Christians in leadership must become examples of God's Sabbath government, not Pharaoh's oppressive and marginalizing regime. Sabbath rule is inclusive as it cares for all people as part of God's creation. It is a care on the basis of a common humanity that we share. It is not divisive, it does not segregate, it does not represent the interest of us and ours but of all.

Pharaoh divides, God brings together, Pharaoh binds, God's liberates from oppression, Pharaoh enriches himself, God empowers people; Pharaoh builds projects, God renews people, Pharaoh detaches from people, God suffers with them; Pharaoh is ultimately destroyed, God's kingdom endures forever. This is our heritage, God's kingdom, God's rule not Pharaoh's.

### **Jubilee- A Celebration of Humanity**

The Sabbath had its climax in the celebration of the jubilee. The jubilee was commemorated every 50 years (after seven Sabbath). As part of the jubilee celebration, debts were forgiven and lost

ancestral lands restored. The jubilee was Gods second chance at life for people who otherwise would have none. It was Gods mechanism for ensuring some form of societal socio-economic equilibrium. People whose fore-bearers had through misfortune or irresponsibility lost family fortunes would not be doomed to suffer the consequences forever. Those who had run into debt likewise were assured an opportunity for a fresh start. The focus was not to be on why the people were in misfortune (whether as a result of carelessness) but on care and support for those in need.

Jubilee ensured some measure of stability and equity in society. Wealth did not shift completely from many into the hands of a few, neither could a few privileged individuals own the nation nor enslave its people as pharaoh did in Egypt. Virtually every instruction of God turned Israel away from the pagan system of the world.

Christians in leadership must strive to employ the principles and lessons of jubilee in our polity today. This would eradicate much of the differences and inequality in the nation. This might not be easy as debt servicing and private acquisition of public assets serve to fuel the economic imbalance. In our private affairs also, we must pursue these principle by seeking to restore the downtrodden, not profit from their misfortune. When jubilee is at force misfortune is not transgeneration, but hope and mercy turn the tide. It is not possible to speak about biblical leadership/followership without a firm appropriation of jubilee as its center.

## **Restoration and Peace**

Jubilee drives a restoration agenda that facilitates peace in the community. Families would recover lost heritage and this hope kept people from resorting to the kind of dubious tendencies that would be the case if no such hope existed. If people were disadvantaged

with no hope of getting any form of justice and mercy, they would take matters into their hands in a manner that brings about social break down and chaos.

We see this trend today in our modern societies, where individuals from perennially poor and uneducated backgrounds become a pain in the neck to the society. They constitute a large percentage of the thieves, hoodlums and terrorists who undermine our social order. When leadership policies create economic imbalance and social segregation, those on the negative end of the spectrum lash out. What we now have on our hands is social disorder, revolution, terrorism and anarchy.

Christians backing leadership and leadership in general must take deliberate steps to live and act restoratively. Deliberate actions to restore people in our nation and community who have been displaced by misguided policies of our predecessors. We cannot justify such atrocious policies by demonizing such marginalized people on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or political persuasion. Until our attitude and approach towards people in distress changes, our attempts at evolving a peaceful society will be met with frustrations.

A leadership/politics of exploitation must be replaced by a leadership/politics of care; that (leadership/politics) of division must be replaced by one of inclusion; that of scapegoating must be replaced by one of mercy and forgiveness; that of self interest must be replaced by one of selfless service; that of greedy accumulation must be replaced by one of genuine concern and generous distribution towards the downtrodden. We who support from near and afar must insist upon the leaders we choose to follow this example.

## **Encouraging a Leadership of Restoration**

We see also in the jubilee, the principle of wealth re-distribution. Land was key to wealth and well being especially in the agrarian society of the Jews. Land lost could imply unhealthy economic and social conditions for future generations, so God stepped in to ensure a fighting chance for posterity. Every fifty years, land was restored back to the original family and debts were cancelled. Every generation got an opportunity at a fresh start, or let's say, got a second chance. God's character and nature is clearly revealed in the way he expected Israel to treat wealth. Not as an instrument for enslavement of others, but as an instrument for building cohesion and community. In Egypt, pharaoh owned the resources and the people, but in Israel, wealth was to be a communal heritage. Wealth was to be circulated and re-circulated in the community, such that no one's portion is lost. Even strangers had provisions made for them by God in the communal prosperity.

The practice of hoarding was discouraged neither could any in position to help deny another financial/material assistance, because the jubilee was near. The capacity to help meant an obligation to help, that is, if you could then you should. God's approach was to discourage the kind of economic competition that stratifies society. The mechanism was to ensure society balances out over time, and that this cycle of balance is maintained.

Israel did not stay faithful to the stipulations of God. Her desire to emulate the pagan regimes resulted in oppression, injustice, marginalization and corruption both at a social and religious scale. We see this in the writings of the prophets who painfully sought to turn Israel back to the path of mercy and justice, and away from oppression and greed. The failure of the nation and its leadership to heed these warnings brought Israel's eventual destruction.

Our times are not any different from those of the failed Israelite state of the Old Testament. We see corporate greed and sentiments of national supremacy threaten to unravel community. Economic competition and personal greed have canonized the maxim of 'survival of the fittest', so that there is no place for the weak and the disadvantaged in our communities. 50% of world's wealth is in the hands of 1% of the world's population, and no one raises a brow. Social and economic inequalities have become core values of our modern national and global heritage. Wealthy nations make a fortune from impoverishing and indebting developing nations, under the pretext of providing aid.

Israel as a nation fell before the pagan empires she would have led. Rome and all such civilizations founded on national supremacy, greed and oppression fell. History shows us that empires built on exploitation will eventually fall. Therein lies a subtle warning for our world today; unless we turn from our greed and injustice, we will self-destruct. This is why terrorism is difficult to eradicate. Our greed and lack of care creates a natural breeding ground for terrorism and social revolution.

Christians in leadership must possess a different orientation towards wealth and its use. Wealth must become for us a tool for building community, not alienating others; empowerment, not self-advancement must become our philosophy of leadership. Anxiety forces us to keep accumulating, whereas faith in God breeds contentment and predisposes us to help others in need. We cannot have Christians go into leadership and amass wealth just for themselves; this is shaming the name of God which we bear. Our example must be that of Christ, giving ourselves and our resources to alleviate suffering in others. We must understand that our nation is not truly blessed until what belongs to the people is given the people. A people exploited are a disaster waiting to happen.

Christians must seek to elect leaders who will justly care for all not just us, and be committed to holding them to this responsibility.

### **Order Comes by Care not by Force**

The message we get from the creation account in Genesis is that order comes about by care not violence. God brings light out of the darkness and gives form to formlessness. He lovingly crafts creation and sees that what he has made is good, he blesses his creation and extends his goodwill over the earth. This is not the account of a violent God fighting to displace others and take what he perceives to be his. It is a good God creating a world to reflect his goodness.

What we as Christians in leadership and those who follow must take from this is the fact that, order in our society emanates more from care for others, than from brute force. So much emphasis is put on investing in arms, strengthening the police force, increasing military presence in our communities as means to restore order. I am not particularly against any of these as it has its place in governance if employed with moderation. The point I am making is that if we commit as a nation and as individuals to caring for others more than policing them, we would certainly have a better society to live in. When people experience genuine care and love, their tendency towards aggression is quelled. The extra funding that would be used to impose order can now be put into providing schools and basic amenities to alleviate the social imbalance in our community.

Pharaoh saw force as the means of achieving order, he brutalized Israel and the nations around. He built an empire on the back of oppression and social injustice, enslaving others to achieve personal ambition. A few enjoyed prosperity while the larger populace languished in poverty. In the end, the Egyptian empire disintegrated from within and collapsed eventually. Israel followed

pharaoh's example, Solomon built an empire on slave labour, making slaves of even his kinsmen. He created a society of social inequality and economic disequilibrium. The masses broke their backs to ensure the aristocrats lived in affluence and debauchery. This is how Solomon appropriated God's wisdom and it brought about the fall of his kingdom.

We must learn from history to be a people who care, rather than people who embrace oppression. If we are to realize order in our nation and preserve the social fabric, we must become predisposed to care than we are to violence. Violence breeds more violence and reprisals, but care that does not discriminate, heals relationships and brings people of different backgrounds together. When the world turned its back on God who had made it, he did not respond with anger and violence, rather he responded with love and self-giving sacrifice to bring us back.

### **Inclusive Leadership**

Representation is a core value of our modern democratic heritage, and for good reason, because without representation, there can be no democracy. The problem arises when representation in political leadership or leadership of any form becomes marginal, and to the exclusion of others who should equally benefit from such a leadership. Marginal or segregated representation alienates community and sows the seeds for eventual social unrest and the breakdown of the social order.

Biblical leadership is inclusive. It retains a vision of humanity as God's creation and understands her responsibility as renewing agents of God's creation. This inclusive vision widens the scope of representation for the Christian leader who cares not only for the interests of a few, but the interest of all in need. Christians in leadership must realize that our duty is not to just our clan, family,

religious group, or political affiliates. We have a duty to cater for the interests of all within our jurisdiction, regardless of our socio-economic and religio-political difference.

“One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you”. Exod. 12:49.

“You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress them, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt”.

“You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child”.

(Exod 22:21-22)

We have abused democracy and leadership in our communities and nations today by using it to scapegoat and marginalize other groups while serving the interests of our own people. Even when Christians go into leadership, people say to them, “It is our turn, your predecessor did so and so for his own people, now you have to focus on us”. This kind of thinking divides a nation, because groups of people with genuine needs are not considered for intervention, because they are different. They in turn, form pockets of resistance and plague our peace and security. Until this exclusive mentality is replaced with inclusive thinking that accommodates those different from us, we cannot build true community.

When Christians go into leadership, the aim must be to correct such ills not to foster them. We have too many Christians in leadership representing their self-interests and those of associate groups, and too many Christians blindly supporting them. This is not the image of God that we have been called to bear. Often, we have justified our walls by demonizing those different to us, calling them the enemies of God and seeing our actions as God’s judgment on his enemies. One is forced to ask, “Which God do we really serve?”

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways

and to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.”

“...and to keep the commandments of the LORD and all his statutes which I command you today, for your good

..... “For the LORD your God is God of gods and LORD of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

“He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.

“Therefore love the stranger, for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt”.

(Deut 10:122-13, 17-19)

It is interesting to see that in the context of God’s requirement for his people and how they were to walk in his ways. He spoke to them about caring for the orphan, widow and stranger – people who too often go under the radar. God loves and cares for the stranger, so which ever group of people we are quick to categorize as strangers are the same people we have a responsibility to love and care for. This is what inclusive leadership stands for; it is reaching out to all, even those our socio-cultural programming brands as ‘outcasts’ and ‘enemies’. This has to be the vision of Christians encourage in leadership.

## **Seeking Restorative Justice**

This is a subject that tends to be quite controversial and culturally challenging. I should state from the onset that I am not questioning the morality of punitive measures as deterrent to unacceptable behavior. Ideally punishment is intended to preserve the social structure and provide closure for those who have been violated. My contention is that the soaring crime rate in our nation implies we have not had much success with this approach. Our prisons are congested yet fresh criminals are convicted every day. Is this the

result of a failure of our punitive mechanism or of failure of society on a much larger scale?

The bible engages punishment from a restorative perspective; it is with a view to re-integrating the offender into community in love and mercy. It is not primarily concerned about exerting the proverbial 'pound of flesh', but giving the guilty a second chance. This is how God deals with his creation, love always seeks to correct and restore not to kill. While we yet enemies of God, he gave himself for us, he did not kill us for his satisfaction.

Today we employ our punitive mechanisms to keep in check those we feel threaten our socio-economic wellbeing. We have not shared with the downtrodden, neither reached out to those in needs, our greed tells us they will come for what is ours, so we lock them away. When we create socio-economic inequality by our greed and people in desperation compromise morality to survive, we must address the elephant in the room, by restructuring society to provide equal opportunities for all, not merely scapegoating the offender.

In Nigeria today, when a different political party assumes leadership, they prosecute people who held public offices in the past administration for corruption but pay little attention to the ills happening in their regime. This is scape goating, not fighting corruption. If we must truly fight corruption, it must be across board with no exception. We cannot build a nation by scape goating because the cycle will continue and social relationships will disintegrate.

When any form of leadership employs punishment as a tool to maintain its economic advantage over others, more lawlessness is unleashed upon society. If we are not sincere in our appropriation of punishment, our hypocrisy will breed social unrest and destructive revolution. Christians in leadership cannot hide behind

punitive measures to prosecute and condemn those of other groups and those we refuse to help just to ease our hurting conscience.

I know this kind of change is not easy to implement but we must make a commitment to try, it is what Jesus did. We don't act this way because it is convenient, it is the right way to act and the only way that heals our world. The Pharisees wanted to stone the woman caught in adultery to fulfill their understanding of the law, but Jesus forgave her, restored her in love as this is how the law is fulfilled. They would stone the woman but covered for the man who shared the guilt, this for them was justice. We must do better, we must seek to forgive, heal and restore in mercy and love.

### **Community- The Key to Understanding God's Plan**

A fundamental misjudgment about the way we have understood God and his work in Christ is seeing the eternal plan of God as climaxing in our personal salvation. Indeed our personal salvation is very important in the plan of God for the world, because it forms the foundation for something even grander – the renewal and restoration of creation. God is concerned about humanity as a community not just individuals living in isolation striving to please him.

This flawed orientation towards God's eternal agenda has resulted in many unfortunate interpretations of the biblical text. The rise of post modernism with its emphasis on the pursuit of personal happiness and the supremacy of the self has only exacerbated the problem. This ideological shift in the way man now understands himself challenges his view of God and the scriptures, the temptation is to conform scripture to fit his socio-cultural ideology rather than submit himself and his culture to God word.

The notion of advancing the self that prevails in the world today has generally created a personalized and individualistic paradigm of engaging and appropriating the scriptures. We tend to see the Bible as speaking to us as individuals rather than as a community and what roles we as transformed individuals play in realizing that renewed community. The Bible has become our manual for personal success rather than God's blue print for evolving community and building harmony.

The endeavor of Martin Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century which accelerated the protestant reformation was a blessing for the church at the time and beyond. He called attention to the need for moral and religious reform, and challenged the church to be objective in interpreting the scripture. His emphasis on salvation (personal) by the free grace of God through faith liberated the people from the institutional oppression and tyranny of the Church. Over time however, this heritage of personal salvation began to water down the sense of strong community orientation of the gospel evident in the New Testament and early church community of Acts of the Apostles.

Today, as a result of our western Christian heritage, this individualistic orientation towards the gospel is prevalent in our religious terrain and has modeled our approach towards social relationships. We come to God and his word with the mindset of what we can get for ourselves as opposed to how we can be changed to help others. Relationships tend to be exploited when our focus is on self, we see others as instruments for our own self advancement.

Community is paramount to understanding God's plan for man. In Genesis, we see God's creation as a community. The fall of Adam led to the corruption of God's created order as Paul states in (Romans 8:22). In the same vein, it is the renewal of man's heart by the new birth that brings about the renewal and restoration of creation.

Transformed individuals would result in a renewed community walking in love, mercy, forgiveness, restoration, peace and justice.

This is how the world is healed, by seeking to restore relationships which translate into healthier communities building up each other. God demanded this community orientation from Israel, not the separation that characterized the pagan cultures of the time. Israel was to see herself as God's chosen community to model brotherly love and indiscriminate care for the needy to a divisive world.

We see this theme of community even in the administration of justice and punishment, where entire families or the whole nation suffered for the sin of one or a few. They had to learn to be responsible for each other, also that the actions of an individual were of consequence to the entire community. I am responsible for my brother/sister, and my brother/sister is responsible for me.

Together our actions enhance or undermine the fabric of community. The leaders in Israel became selfish and greedy; they failed in their communal responsibility and the nation disintegrated internally until they were destroyed by the pagan powers around them.

Individualism is a cancer that wastes community from the inside. It encourages greed and lack of care for others. It is employed by ungodly leadership to gain advantage over others and ensure their economic dominance. Christians in leadership (secular or spiritual) cannot tow this path, this is not God's way. The gospel is 'good tidings of great joy to all people', not some people.

“And behold an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy

which will be to all people... Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” (Luke 2:9-10, 14)

Christ came to bring peace and the goodwill of God to mankind. We must realize that as ministers of reconciliation (whether in political leadership or wherever), we are called to extend God’s peace and goodwill over all mankind. Humanity as a community interest’s God, so should begin to interest us too if we are truly servants of God.

Leadership must be built on communal values and should seek to foster community not encourage individualism and sectarian sentiments. One must have in mind that when we speak about community, it is not defined by race, ethnicity, geography, religion or politics. Community and brotherhood in the eyes of God is defined by our shared humanity.

### **Taxes for Care or for the King?**

In the book of Deuteronomy, God charged Moses to instruct Israel not to encourage any form of socio-economic exploitation. An Israelite king was not to multiply horses for himself, neither was he to amass material possessions and women for himself. The bottom line is that this kind of living is often sustained by exploiting the masses, so if a king chose to live this way the tendency to exploit people would be a real possibility. The king was to deliver himself from the temptation to exploit his people by living in simplicity.

The pagan kings around Israel took huge taxes from their subjects to sustain their excessive life styles and to build massive armies which they in turn used to enslave and displace more people. These taxes impoverished the nation and maintained the economic imbalance. The poor people had to work longer hours and under

deplorable conditions to keep their heads above water. The contrast between the flaunted prosperity of the aristocrats and the abject poverty of the masses was staggering. The abused masses were disaffected towards such leadership, which created suspicion on the part of the leaders who would pre-emptively oppress the masses to forestall any uprising. This cycle eventually broke down the social order spelling the end of such empires. God did not want this to be the end of Israel as a nation.

God required that tithes of agricultural yields be brought to the store house so that there will be 'food in his house' Mal. 3:10. This was not so that the priests and the Levites could live in excess (for when the sons of Eli did God judged them), but so there is provision in the house of God to support those in need like the stranger, widow, and orphan. This should also be the case today, when tithes and offerings are used to support the extravagant lives of spiritual leaders without just consideration for other disadvantaged people in church, we abuse the privilege to lead. I do not speak to judge but as a note of caution so that we can turn away from greed and build communities of love, care and mercy.

Taxes are appropriate to the degree that the resources realized is re-invested to ensure better socio-economic conditions for the people. Leadership must strive to translate income generated into more schools, hospitals, access roads, portable drinking water, scholarships and other developmental initiatives. This would bridge the current socio-economic gap and contribute to healing presently strained relationships. Christians in leadership should not treat public funds as a personal treasure chest, but see themselves rather as stewards of communal wealth that must be used to better the livelihood of all within the community. We show our faith in God by conquering the god of mammon, not letting it dictate our life. We conquer mammon by trusting God and living generously, not accumulating for ourselves in anxiety.

We who are followers should not encourage our leaders to loot public funds because we stand to benefit personally as their friends and kinsmen. We have not often sought to correct erring leaders because we profit from their greed. If we are to build a strong and united nation this can no longer be the case. We must all stand for what is right and challenge that which divides.

## **Isaiah 58**

The prophet Isaiah in his writing deals decisively with the question of the nature and character of biblical leadership. He exposes the hypocrisy of the Israelite nation leaving no place for the religious bigots to hide.

“Why have we fasted; they say, ‘and you have not seen?  
Why have we afflicted our souls, and you take no notice?

“Infact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers.

Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and you strike with the first of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high.

Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sack cloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and

your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.” (Isa 58: 3-8)

What Isaiah was saying to Israel was simply this, “Your feasts, your fasts, your religious paraphernalia and long prayers without proportional acts of mercy and justice are a nuisance to God”. The religious and political leaders’ indulged in and encouraged corruption, oppression and injustice while leading endless religious processions and routine. Their hypocrisy sickened God who demanded immediate social and economic reforms if the nation was to escape their impending self destruction.

The words of Isaiah are as potent for us today as they were for Israel of old. Our nation is enamored with countless religious outfits and institutions, yet the social decay and moral bankruptcy is not redressed. We have taken a view of religion more as an outward activity expressed in feasts and rituals rather than an inwardly transformative experience that re-orientates us towards neighborly love.

We cannot divorce our faith from social care because God is seen in the acts of those who profess Him, how we care for and treat the world about us. Our nation is not healed by night vigils and endless fasts alone, but a radical commitment to seeking and doing justice, equity, hospitality and mercy. We must seek the restoration of those who are down and fellowship with the suffering of those less fortunate than we are. God is not as interested in our offerings and tithes to Him as He is our care and compassion for the downtrodden and needy. When we lift up those forsaken in society, we heal relationships and build community. When we care only for our self interest, we build walls and alienate possible allies in the quest for peace.

Those in leadership must understand the essence of true religion and true leadership. It is not fighting in the name of God, but healing in the name of God. It is partnering with God to make creation whole and dignify humanity. It is building bridges, extending our tables and reconciling our enemies. This is the only pathway to nation building.

**PART II**  
**THE NEW TESTAMENT**  
**Jesus and the Early Apostolic Community**

**The Messianic Hope**

The coming of a messiah who would restore Israel to glory and national prosperity is a theme that runs through the Old Testament especially the prophets. This messiah would vanquish the enemies of Israel and bring the kingdom of God, that is, God's rule and favor over his people. This expectation shaped Israel's outlook as a nation, for they were a people of hope, a people awaiting a promise.

Israel came to view this messianic hope as assurance of deliverance from pagan oppression and the future socio-political enthronement of the nation over pagan powers as was the case during the reign of David and Solomon. The messiah would be the seed of David, so he would bring Israel back to that height of power and political dominance enjoyed under David and his son Solomon. He was sure to restore national pride and dignity, making Israel a force to reckon with in the world again.

How did Israel expect the messiah to accomplish his destiny? Well, same way the pagan nations went about achieving economic and political dominance- force and aggression. They expected the messiah would raise an army, identify Israel's enemies and take them out, then re-distribute the wealth of these enemies among God's chosen people to enhance Israel's prosperity. They were in for a big surprise.

**Jesus' Kingdom Manifesto**

Both John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministry with the words "The kingdom of God is at hand". This declaration was more

than a theological refrain; it resonated with Israel's national hope of a coming messiah and the realization of the kingdom. When John declared the kingdom of God was at hand, the Jewish religious leaders sent a delegation to inquire if he was the expected messiah. He replied that he was only sent to prepare the way for the messiah. John eventually identified Jesus as the messiah, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29-34).

Our elected officials today take out time during the campaign period to assure the people of how they intend to execute the office they aspire for and deliver the dividends of leadership. They have a clear blue (at least in words) of how they will bring about the kind of society the people craved – a just and prosperous society. This plan of action is what is commonly known as a “manifesto”.

Jesus was the long-awaited messiah, he would bring about a new order, a new community, the realization of shalom. In Christ centuries of national hope and yearning finally came to fruition. When Jesus began His ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit declaring that the kingdom of God was at hand, many of the Jews immediately identified Him with messianic prophecy, Jews who had for so long suffered at the hands of oppressive pagan regimes. They flocked around Him in hope and expectation, excited about the prospects of what lay ahead.

In Matthew 5, Jesus who heralds this new order and community makes a bold declaration of his manifesto before the Jews. He declares to them how this long awaited kingdom of God would be realized in their lives and community. Many had gathered to hear him teach, they had come to hear how this young and powerful teacher intended to deal with Israel's enemies and restore the kingdom.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for there is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:3-10)

Outrageous! The opening words of his kingdom manifesto incited many to doubt his messianic credentials. How could a deliverer talk like this? How would he get us to overcome our enemies thinking like this? The meek don’t inherit the earth, no; they get trodden upon. That was the reality of the world they lived in at the time, with the Romans and wealthy Jewish aristocracy trampling the poor. The way to overcome this for the subdued Jews was not meekness, but by merciless aggression and revolution. However, the kingdom of God Jesus came to bring about would not be realized this way; it could only come about by adopting a different approach; an approach that is more relational than revolution.

At a time of cruelty, oppression, injustice, deprivation and socio-economic exploitation, Jesus advocated for mercy, kindness, meekness, endurance, submission, forgiveness, contentment and love. All these were the themes expounded in his manifesto; it was a radical paradigm shift, a completely new way of engaging evil, but if God’s kingdom were ever to be realized they must be built on these values. This was a difficult pill to swallow, all the pent up anger and frustration, all the hope of revenge, what were they to do with all that? Just let it go? Precisely so! Jesus was advocating for them a

way of treating others that mirrored the way God would treat the world in Christ.

We are caught today in the same web as the Jews of Jesus' day. Our response to all the socio-political upheavals of our time is fight fire with fire. We seek to cure society of evil, by unleashing further mayhem, we think evil must be conquered with evil but Jesus taught us to conquer evil with good. The ways of Christ appear weak in the reality of a cruel and hostile world, but this is how evil is overcome and the world is healed. The world teaches that only the fittest survive; Jesus taught that only the meek shall inherit the earth. The world teaches that do unto your neighbor before they do to you; Jesus taught that peacemakers are the sons of God. We see a stark contrast between the values of the world and those Jesus taught.

Jesus taught the Jews to love their enemies, to shock the Romans (soldiers) with their hospitality and submission, to be caring and compassionate towards those of low estate, to seek the good of all men. This he maintained is the only way, the long awaited kingdom of God comes. It would not come by vengeful vendetta aimed at the Romans and other perceived enemies, but by restorative service and love for others. The Jews did not heed the teachings of Jesus, they persisted in their selfish and vindictive ways which undermined their national unity and resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70AD as Christ had foretold.

Jesus' kingdom manifesto declared in the Sermon on the Mount must become the blueprint for Christian life and Christian leadership. Christians cannot endeavor to go into leadership seeking to change the world by adopting the world's approach. If it worked, we would not be in the mess we currently find ourselves in. A Christian leader must first change his approach towards leadership; he/she must approach leadership from the Sermon on

the Mount perspective, not the erring philosophies of the world. A new community requires a new way of doing things, we cannot continue to do the same old things and expect a new and changed world. For the world to change, our hearts must change (new creation), followed by a change in the way we treat others (healing relationships).

We have a problem in the church and world today, because like the Jews we have also largely rejected the teachings of Jesus. Our community is divided and impoverished because of our refusal to take care of and to serve others. We have preached a very individualistic gospel and encouraged isolated living. We have done little to bridge the gap between the poor and the affluent in our community. We have turned our eyes from the sufferings of others, believing their plight to be divine justice. We have not helped the world, yet we have dared to judge her present deplorable state. Unless we amend our ways and begin to live restorative and redemptive lives, our self-destruction is eminent like it happened to the Jews in 70AD.

## **Relationships not Revolution**

The zealots in Israel believed in changing the world. Their approach however brought doom to their community. They thought that by raising a revolutionary force, and engaging in guerilla warfare, they would destabilize Rome. On occasions, they had undertaken military campaigns against the Romans which failed miserably, leading to much loss of life. They thought the kingdom of God could be realized through violence and warfare. In the end, this kind of approach did not work, it resulted in further misery, not the kingdom of God.

Jesus proffered a more practical and constructive way of rebuilding community. He nipped the problem in the bud; it was not a Rome

problem primarily, but a problem of self-interest. Change would come when people become more selfless in their relationships. In other words, Israel had to look in the mirror before pointing a finger at Rome. How were they treating their brothers, those who were weak and needy, the widow and orphan. This was to be the report card on the state of their nation, not what Rome did. They were to judge themselves first, before pointing a finger at Rome as the enemy.

The same can be said of us too, who are quicker to blame those of other race, religion and political persuasion for our problems, when we are as equally as unjust in our handling of others as those we seek to blame. Scapegoating and demonizing others to ease our conscience and excuse our predicament does not bring about community. Jesus never provided the Jews an opportunity to use his teachings as a basis for bloody revolution against Rome. The kind of revolution he taught was a revolution of love and mercy, a radical change in our treatment of others. It was not the carrying of arms against others, but the extending of our alms to support others.

By consistent acts of care, mercy, forgiveness and love, we begin to reconstruct the broken social fabric of society. We heal society by healing our relationships, this truth is evident in what Jesus taught and how he treated the downtrodden and outcasts during his lifetime on earth. Jesus broke the walls in relating with people the Jews would naturally term 'outcasts', he helped tax collectors, gentiles, even a prostitute. This is our pathway to rebuilding community, not by dividing society or siding against the weak, but by incorporating them into our prosperity.

The message of Jesus is not just a gospel of personal salvation, but a personal salvation that is appropriated in the way we relate with others. Social care cannot be disassociated from our responsibility

as Christians; we show our love for God by how we treat the world around us. The bible is clear that we cannot profess to love God we don't see, while hating a brother or neighbor whom we see (1 John 4:20).

Healing relationships has to be at the forefront of Christian leadership today. Too much of the leadership in the world today preoccupies itself with advancing the interests of specific groups to the exclusion of others. This breaks down communities so we must not lead like this. Until we commit ourselves to breaking our walls and opening constructive channels of interaction with those different to us, we cannot achieve the kind of community we all dream of. Our leaders must craft a framework for healthy cross-cultural engagement to replace scapegoating.

### **Dealing with our Division**

The failure to heal relationships and treat others with the humanity that each deserves divides our community and society. It creates a massive rift in our social fabric that gradually drifts society apart until we can no longer relate humanely. This form of division characterizes our modern societies generating a suspicion of others which hampers open and sincere interactions. Any society built on greed and self interest certainly becomes a divided society.

The division we see in our communities today is manmade. Socio-economic aristocrats and religious bigots use division as a tool to create suspicion of those who are different in the society. This suspicion turns to fear and a perceived need to preemptively ostracize them. By ostracizing them, they do not share in our prosperity therefore we are able to keep more for ourselves. Division always leads to deprivation because those who have been made scapegoats are not cared for, they are not provided for in the national or communal budget.

Jesus warned Israel about the division apparent in their society, the huge gulf between the rich and the poor. The parable of Lazarus at the rich man's table was taught by Jesus to challenge the socio-economic oppression in Israel. The rich man cared more for himself and his dogs than he did for Lazarus, yet Lazarus was a human in need who deserved mercy and assistance.

The Israelite political elites stood in favor with Rome and the religious leaders profited from the temple. Those who should have represented the people's interests cared only for themselves and what they could take from the people. This resulted in civil unrest and internal conflict. Jesus did not condemn Zaccheaus as many wanted him to, but shared fellowship with him, this act of love transformed him, turning him from the economics of greed to a life of sharing. It is amazing what progress we will make towards renewing society when we truly open our hearts to those different to us and resist the temptation to stereotype them.

When leadership of any form treats people on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, politics or socio-economic status, it fractures society into competing social units. Each unit strives to take power or retain power so as to further the interest of its people; what we have on our hands as a result of this is a politics of desperation, witch-hunting and bloodshed. Only the tearing down of walls and the building of bridges can remedy the ills that our proclivity for division has inflicted upon our nation.

Jesus ministered unto the Samaritans, bridging centuries of division, suspicion and hostility between Jews and Samaritans. He took so much heat for living and acting this way but he did anyway. He did not come to add bricks to the walls of division, but to pull them down and to replace them with bridges and longer tables of unconditional fellowship. This is how we must live and lead as

Christians; it is a leadership of inclusive representation and indiscriminate compassion for humanity.

The hour is upon us to pull down our religious walls, our cultural barricades and our stigmatization of others. The hour is upon us to bring in Zaccheus (the wealthy outcasts), Lazarus (the poor), Mary Magdalene (the morally bankrupt), the man on the road to Jericho (those of other faiths) into our fellowship. This is how to follow the example of Jesus; we build community not by dividing but by sincerely reaching out to those different to us.

## **Feet Washing**

“Jesus knowing that the father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside his garments, took a towel and girded himself.

After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.

Then he came to Simon Peter. And Peter said unto him “Lord, are you washing my feet?”

Jesus answered and said unto him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this”.

Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.” (John 13:3-8)

The way John renders this account is full with lessons for us. Jesus knew that God had given all things into his hands (leadership), yet he arose and laid aside his garment. This theme of Christ laying aside his garment is essential to understanding the gospel and the work of God in Christ.

“Who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.”

(Phil 2:6-7)

We see the same theme of Jesus' condescension referenced in Philippians. Christ is God, but lays aside privilege in order to put on humanity and suffer shame. The same God, who lays aside reputation to become man in the incarnation, now sets aside the privilege of being master to do the work of a servant. In washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus reiterates the message of the incarnation that the almighty condescends to save lost humanity. He did not look from the heights of heaven to condemn man, but involves himself in man's suffering, sharing his guilt and penalty so as to bring man into fellowship.

Jesus turned the tables on his disciples and the world. It was his right to be served, but he forfeited that right choosing rather to serve as an example for us to follow. This is restorative leadership, the kind of leadership that bridges the social chasm that our alienation of others has created. This kind of leadership builds harmony because it identifies the lowly and serves them. It removes socio-economic classifications and treats people with human dignity.

Peter would have none of such; Jesus by his action was threatening to unsettle the social norm. He was too 'respectful' to have his master serve him, it had to be the other way around. Jesus was quick to point out to Peter that if you don't live this way, then you have no part with me. If you don't understand what I am doing and seek to live like this, then you cannot be a partaker of this kingdom that I bring. Jesus' life and example was the model for the new community God would birth (the church); no one could be a part of

that community who did not follow Christ' example in dealing with the world.

Persons in leadership must lay aside the concept of 'Bigmanism' and become true servants and stewards over God's household (humanity). Our calling is a call to serve not to be served. God served us in love as an example that we must serve others in love. The true character of Christian leadership is not in ascension, but condescension. Every man's desire is to ascend, but only renewed hearts will voluntarily condescend. When leaders serve, it sets the tone for how society runs because everyone must serve; when leaders impose themselves on people, others want to lead so they can also throw their weight around. Leadership is with a towel and a bowl of water, not a throne and titles to go with.

### **The Communion Table**

“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying ‘this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’” (Luke 22:19)

Just like feet washing, the communion table has lost its actual weight and significance for us today. We have become so pre-occupied with the ritual that we are blinded to what they symbolize for our lives and relationships. I have been in meetings where feet's washing was employed as a prophetic action to empower God's people to take territories and avert calamity without any reference to serving one another. The same way we take the communion today to fulfill a religious obligation or for the healing of our bodies, or for protection; which is not wrong per say if we keep in mind and practice the primary message of the communion.

Jesus said this is my body broken for you, so do same in remembrance of me. How do we remember Jesus? By breaking

bread (or its equivalent) or by breaking our bodies (giving ourselves)? His body was broken for our wholeness; this is the message of the communion table. This is how we remember Jesus everyday in our lives; it is not merely breaking of physical bread, but the giving up of ourselves so that those less fortunate can be restored. Do this in remembrance of me is not a call to dogmatic obedience to liturgical ritual, but a challenge to follow the example of Jesus' self-giving sacrifice everyday of our lives. He spent himself for us so that we would spend ourselves for others.

This is the heart of Christian life and leadership. The communion table shows how God healed the world, and how we are to heal the world today by giving ourselves. This is Christ-likeness, this is how we remember Jesus. It is not in the pursuit of discriminatory holiness, or belief in doctrines that show our superiority over others. It is folding our sleeves, working our butts off to bring hope and help to a desperate and needy world about us. The message of the communion is not fulfilled towards fellow Christians alone. That would violate Jesus' example who gave himself not just for Christians but for the world. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son is what the bible teaches us. We must feel a genuine sense of care and responsibility over the world.

To remember Jesus in our lives, our sacrificial self-giving must be directed indiscriminately towards all humanity. If we sacrifice ourselves only for those who will return the favor, then we are in business for ourselves, not following Jesus. Jesus demanded that our self-giving incorporate people who cannot return the favor, this is how we know the love of God. The communion is beyond faithfuls of a common faith or denomination gathering routinely to break bread; it is followers of Jesus living everyday in sacrificial self-giving and restorative service towards the world which brings healing, peace and wholeness.

The message of the communion indicts our modern leadership ideals where self advancement trumps self-giving. Jesus was a leader who gave himself so that his followers and the world would be made whole. Christians in leadership should carry this ideal of Christ, the ideal of putting the interest of the people ahead of ours. Worldly leaders enslave people for their own self propagation, but the Christian leader gives himself to ensure the well-being of the people.

We have not naturally followed this path of Jesus in recent times. It is common place today to see acclaimed Christian leaders prosecuted for corruption and embezzlement of public funds after their time in office. Unfortunately, examples like this occur more often than finding wealthy Christians giving up their wealth to serve the downtrodden. The challenge for Christians in leadership and all who lead therefore is to reverse the trend and live out the communion in our leadership ideals.

The message of the communion is how God expects us all to live as his children. I do not propose this path merely for Christian leaders, but for everyone who professes to follow Jesus. The time has come to shun our religious hypocrisy, our desire to run away to heaven while caring less about a world in ruin and decay. We want the blessings of God, but have no desire to share it with the needy in our communities. We want to live in prosperity and claim before others less fortunate that it is a sign of God's favor. God's favor is towards all men, he does not desire that any should perish, so if we stand in favor with God, it should reflect on others as well.

We have attended communion services, broken bread together, yet at the close of the service driven off alone in our cars, with brothers standing by hoping for a lift. We have broken bread together in church but we turned our eyes from the lack, pain, sickness, and discouragement in the lives of neighbors. Society is not healed by

the mere breaking of bread, but the merciful service and sacrificial love shown by those who follow Jesus towards community's healing and restoration. This is the communion!

## **Living and Leading with Hope**

Christians today are generally guilty of possessing a doomsday attitude in our dealings with the world. The belief is that the world is corrupt, and as such, will be destroyed by God. Our comfort therefore as Christians should be in knowing that God will take us away before he destroys the world. Our attitude while here on earth becomes one of concerned apathy; we sympathize with the world but do nothing to help her plight because destruction is her destiny. All we do is separate ourselves from the corruption in the world and maintain a condition of personal holiness that keeps us ready to go with the Lord.

This attitude is counterproductive in the light of Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations and to be ministers of reconciliation. Unless we truly begin to believe that a renewed community is possible here on earth, we will not get to work doing the master's bidding. This is what living in hope implies. It means exchanging our depressed view of humanity for a more positive outlook where community is healed and lives are transformed. This positive vision originates from us knowing that a change of action plan will eventually lead to a change of the societal condition.

When we engage society not with apathy and disdain but by mercy, love and care, things will begin to shape up. We don't treat the world with hate and cruelty and expect it to respond with transformation; it responds with deformation and chaos. If God had retained a doomed view of mankind, he would not endeavor to save humanity by coming in the flesh (incarnation). The original creation was good (Gen. 1:31), God was convinced that that goodness could

be recovered, so he gave himself to redeem mankind and all of creation. This is how we must see and treat the world, with the mindset of redemption not one of destruction.

A redemptive mindset will expel apathy, shake us from our spiritual slumber and get us working on healing relationships by building bridges and genuine acts of mercy and care. A destructive mindset will make us care less about the world's plight, in so far as we are divinely insured. Christ lived redemptively, acting consistently to bring the best out of others by graciously loving and serving them, even those the world would reject and stone, he redeemed. This is how we must live, by following his example.

When we retain a hopeless view of humanity, we create a world where depression and pessimism thrive. Our youths become lazy and demoralized because there is not really a future to look to with hope. People live for the now, exploiting others and the environment because today is all we have. This is how we create a world where exploitation is on the rampage and oppression and greed blooms unchecked. Changing our world begins with changing our outlook. We must become a people of hope, a people who believed that a better world is possible here and now.

When Christians carry a hopeless vision of the world into leadership, they care little about the community and the environment. They crush the 'enemy' and deplete the environment believing they are doing God's work. They loot to live excessively because today is all they have. If the world is nearing her destruction, then 'we might as well serve ourselves and our own' they think. We are stewards of God's beautiful earth, and must show great care and responsibility in the way we handle the world. We tend to live carelessly and destroy the environment, but when our actions engender fatal environmental consequences, we scapegoat God and those too weak to fight back. We cannot continue like this!

Leading with hope ensures a redemptive view of leadership; that we (leaders) are acting consciously and consistently in ways that help to heal the hurt and damage that has been done to the world.

Leading with hope ensures that we see the world as God sees the world- with compassion and love, and that this compassion is translated into practical acts of indiscriminate love, kindness and mercy, justice and forgiveness, reconciliation and healing towards all men. This is the call to, and the challenge for every Christian today (and humanity in general), to see the world differently (with hope) and treat her differently (with mercy).

We see the outlook of the early church (first 200 years of Christianity). It was one of hope that was reflected in the way they treated the world about them. They lived in love and mercy towards each other and towards their adversaries (Roman oppression). In the face of relentless persecution, they shone brighter and loved deeper, never taking up arms against their oppressors, but praying for them and serving them none-the-less. They died in weakness and submission, giving up themselves in the hope of realizing the vision of a reconciled and transformed world. Their witness was not in vain, because Christianity overran the Roman Empire and much of the world within a couple of centuries of their sacrifice.

### **Caring Enough to Act**

“And when Jesus went out, he saw a great multitude; and he was moved with compassion for them and healed their sick. When it was evening, his disciples came to him saying, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitude away, that they may go unto the villages and buy themselves food’. But Jesus said unto them, ‘They do not need to go away, you give them something to eat’.” (Matt 14:14-16)

The crowd had followed Jesus for a while listening to him teach. Christ demonstrated his commitment to their wellbeing by ministering to them spiritually, but also caring enough to attend to their physical needs. He had fed them with the word and healed their sick, now he sought to feed their hungry stomachs. This action of Jesus ought to challenge our understanding of ministry and leadership. He had compassion for the multitude which was expressed in a commitment to their holistic wellbeing (spirit, soul and body). When compassion drives us in leadership, we serve; but when personal ambition drives us, we exploit others.

It is common today to see leaders who think they ought to take from the people because they are serving or ministering to the people. It is their responsibility to minister to the people spiritually, and the people's responsibility to minister to them materially. Such quote texts such as; "If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?" (1 Cor. 9:11) they suppose that Paul establishes a tradition that mandates the leader to take from the people but the very next verse reveals Paul's heart and attitude, "If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12).

It is not my opinion that leaders should not be cared for by those whom they lead; leaders should be respected and adequately catered for by the people to the best of their ability. It is cruel to deliberately subject the people in leadership to harsh socio-economic conditions. My argument however is that leaders should not impose themselves on the people they lead, extorting them and forcing them beyond their means to ensure the leaders comfort and luxury. This is not the example we see in Jesus who lived a life of contentment and simplicity.

It is wrong to see people break their backs to sustain a leader's flamboyant lifestyle when they can barely make ends meet. This is oppression not leadership. When a spiritual leader lives lavishly from tithes and offerings, whereas segments of the congregation can barely feed and some have children put out of school for fees, something is definitely not right. Christians who carry this kind of attitude into leadership loot public funds for personal pleasure because they think it is their right. Apostle Paul was right to think that living this way would hinder the gospel, because the gospel of Christ is about self-giving, not self advancement.

Jesus was concerned enough to act when he saw the need of the people. He did not say 'well, I have done my part, I have preached to them, they can go and fend for themselves', even when his disciples thought it was the right thing to do. He challenged his disciples to be concerned enough to act, not just send the people away but to do something to alleviate the suffering of the people. I have nothing against tithes and offering if they are channeled to serve the church and reach the needy, rather than serve a few people's greed.

The early church in Acts of the Apostles was one where what was laid at the Apostles' feet went to serve the collective needs of the community not the apostles alone. They had learnt from Christ, they were concerned enough not to think they were entitled to the offerings, but served the general needs of the community. We must learn from Jesus and the early church that we cannot lead without compassion, and that there can be no compassion without action; action targeted at enhancing others. Too much has gone wrong and continues to go wrong in this regard today.

It is no surprise that many are quick to desire leadership today because of the lucrative prospects it holds for them. These are the ones that subject the people to all forms of manipulation, and twist the truth so as to gain an economic advantage. Their greed would

not let them spare even the widow and the needy; these are cajoled into debt and deprivation to serve the bellies of these corrupt leaders with the false promises that God will bless them abundantly. Charlatans and extortionists, who have no business being anywhere near leadership. These have made leadership into a lucrative business, not a burden to care for and serve the people. Christians in leadership (be it spiritual or secular) must distance themselves from such attitude, and show the example of Jesus by being concerned enough to act when we see pain and suffering.

### **Leading Through a Vision of the Cross**

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2:5)

The cross must become the lens through which we view leadership, the world and our relationship with the world. To have the mind of Christ is to see and act through the cross. When we view leadership through the cross, it reveals a picture radically different from what we see happening in the world around us. The cross is God’s blueprint for our living and our leading, without an understanding of the cross we will lead no differently from the modern pharaohs destroying the world.

At the cross, we see the wickedness of man outmatched by the goodness of God. The cross is the clearest revelation of the nature and character of God. The cross is God saying to us; “If you want to know me, then this is who I am”. At the cross, a loving God gives himself up to heal the hostility of his aggressors and bring them back into reconciliatory fellowship. It is the same God who has been offended that takes the initiative to restore peace with mankind. When leadership is done through the cross, it is reconciliatory; painstakingly doing all that is possible to bring those outside into fellowship.

The cross is not primarily about God seeking recompense, wanting to exact due penalty for the wrong done to him. The cross primarily reveals the depth of God's love for his creation, a love revealed in the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. At the cross, God stands accused by the same people (humanity) who dishonored him, he absorbs all our hate, hostility and guilt, but responds in love by forgiving us. God reconciles the 'enemy' (man) not by subduing man, but by giving himself to die for man. This is the essence of God's kingdom, reconciliation not retaliation.

The whole drama of the cross is played out against the backdrop of the oppressive socio-political system of the world. This is what makes the message of the cross stand out. On the cross, Jesus becomes our substitute, the scapegoat (innocent), who takes the place of the guilty. All our shame, the guilt that gnaws at our hearts, the condemnation of sin, our anger and vindictiveness, Jesus bore voluntarily. He became us (humanity) and suffered in our place to relieve our hearts of the burden of guilt thereby bringing us peace.

A cross oriented leadership is substitutionary, taking the place of the enemy and suffering in their stead. It is identifying with the enemy not by ostracizing them, but by sharing in their shame. This kind of leadership heals and reconciles society because it makes enemies into neighbors, it breaks down the walls of separation, receiving outcasts into our fellowship. We do not live in fear that they (the outcasts) will hurt us because we, like Jesus have taken their hurt upon us; we have become them (outcasts) so as to make them us (one community of grace).

The cross is God identifying with the suffering and the rejection of humanity. Christ put himself in the place of the weak and rejected not the rich and powerful. He was conceived out of wedlock, born in a manger, walked with uneducated men, and died like a criminal.

His entire life and ministry portrays his identification with human plight and misery.

“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our sins was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4-5)

Jesus let a prostitute touch him; he reached out to a morally questionable Samaritan woman; he stood up for a woman caught in adultery; he ate at the house of a corrupt tax collector; he healed the daughter of Roman soldier; he let children run up to him, and he healed the lepers. The Pharisees excluded people from community, but Jesus brought them the free forgiveness of God. The religious elites demanded compensation in sacrifices for forgiveness to be granted, but Jesus forgave freely demanding no compensation. Jesus revealed the love of God that engaged and transformed the sinner, not the dogmatism of the Pharisees that condemned and ostracized the sinner.

Persons in leadership must follow this example of Jesus revealed by the cross. They cannot afford to remain detached from the suffering of others, but willingly identify with the plight of the weak and rejected. Leaders must consciously build bridges through our policies and in the way we live to reconnect those our past actions have estranged. But when we lead like this, we will suffer and be called names because the hostility and the selfishness of a hypocritical world are exposed when we lead like this. They will come for us like they came for Jesus, they will turn against us and stir trouble, but this is the cost of discipleship – following Jesus at any price like the early church did.

The world is cruel towards the weak and needy; the strong trample the weak to achieve personal glory. This has been a consistent theme in the evolution of human civilization from the fall of man to modern society. This cruelty is justified on the grounds of self-preservation (survival of the fittest). But on the cross, we see an opposite ideology; we see a God not seeking to preserve himself at the expense of others but a God who gives himself up to preserve others (even his enemies). In emptying himself, he fills up his creation with love, mercy, hope, healing, peace and restoration. This is God's model for nation building, his pathway to realizing genuine community in an otherwise hostile world. In Christ on the cross, we see a new kind of king, a new way of experiencing kingdom, a different path to relating with others.

Self preservation drives the world into a competitive frenzy that displaces the weak and estranges those different from us. On the other hand, sacrificial service and self giving reconciles broken humility by serving the needs of all (even the weak and outcasts) and incorporating the general interest into the welfare and wellbeing of the community. This is the only form of leadership that stands any chance of remedying the damage that our greed has done to society. It is only when leadership embraces the vision of the cross and appropriates its lessons in our policies and life style that our nations are made 'great again'. It is not by putting ourselves first to the detriment of others.

### **Building Community in Diversity**

“And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.

And when this sound occurred, the multitudes came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and

marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?”

And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? “ Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “whatever could this mean?” (Acts 2:5-12)

God’s agenda to build community in diversity is set forth clearly in the events of Pentecost. The disciples spoke in tongues the Holy Spirit gave them and all those diverse nations present each heard them in their own dialect declaring the wonderful works of God. The message communicated by the Holy Spirit through the disciples was understood by all regardless of race and ethnicity. The uniting of the languages at Pentecost underscored God’s global project; that God would bring together all races of men into one community. The Holy Spirit in our lives equips us to pursue this community project by shifting our focus from self to community.

The re-alignment of our vision positions us to break down the walls of division that separate us and to open up our lives and communities to people we had previously alienated. We see this community agenda of God instituted by the Holy Spirit in the early church in the Acts of the Apostles. Here, people of different races, ethnicity, gender and socio-cultural background form and sustain a supportive and productive community. They care for each other, serving the needs of the community and witnessing to the world by their living and preaching. This is the miracle of the Holy Spirit, that former enemies separated by centuries of hostility will live in genuine community towards each other.

The Holy Spirit continued the mission of Jesus by breaking down walls and proclaiming peace and goodwill to all men through the early church community. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is beyond physical miracles, prophecies, healings, gifts and much of the other experiences we have reduced him to today. The Holy Spirit renews (heals) our hearts so that we can walk in love and care towards those we previously called “enemies”. This renewed way of relating to others becomes the catalyst for building supportive communities. In this light, physical miracles and supernatural manifestations are not seen as isolated experiences to enhance personal ambition or spirituality but ingredients for building community and serving the needs within the community.

How was it possible for the community in the Acts of the Apostles to sustain community in diversity? The answer to this question is essential for us in our bid to build genuine community today. Early church community thrived in diversity because they focused on what they had in common (what united them) rather than their differences. They were united by their love for God and care for the world; they were united by their compassion for the needy and their passion to serve; they were united by their common desire to obey Jesus by being his witnesses to the world. They were a community determined to serve the needs of everyone equally, a community modeling the kingdom of God.

“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” (Acts 2:44-46)

“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.” (Acts 4:32-35)

Communal sharing, helping the weak, indiscriminate fellowship (house to house), equity in the distribution of resources, simplicity; these were the values the early church community was built on, the same values Jesus had taught and demonstrated as the pillar of God’s new community. Their equal care for the needs of everyone created an egalitarian community where class distinctions vanished; all were one and equal in Christ. This is how the Holy Spirit was manifested in the early church, not merely charisma accompanied by division and selfish ambition evident in our present religious communities.

Christian leaders and Christians in leadership should carry this model of the early apostolic community in Acts as our prototype for building and sustaining caring supportive communities. This is not a model we are prone to find in the world today; the world celebrates might over mercy and personal accumulation over communal sharing. This is the reason why we have discrimination and massive rifts in our present social fabric. The healing of our social fabric is tied to our commitment to adopting and implementing the community model in Acts of the Apostles.

This is God’s approach towards realizing his community project. It is renewed (regenerated) people living together in love and social

care towards each other and those around them (regardless of who they are); expressing the virtues of mercy, forgiveness, care and restorative service in their relationships with each other and the world. Their lives and love become an example for those in darkness, shining a light that draws such to the love of God and brings them into that community of grace. It is time for God's people to set the standard for what should pass for leadership and community; we are called to be light. This is what the Holy Spirit does in our lives – reveal the love of Jesus so the world can be healed.

## **Redemptive Leadership**

“Then the king will say to those on His right hand, “come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer Him saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and gave you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you?” And the king will answer and say to them, “assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” (Matt: 25:34-40)

Throughout the scriptures, God reminded His people that what He desired was mercy not sacrifice, and obedience rather than burnt offerings. This might sound strange to us given that we tend to think that the Old Covenant made such a big deal of sacrificial rituals. However, we see even Old Testament prophets calling Israel to the path of mercy rather than ritual sacrifice.

“For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” (Hosea 6:6)

This is what redemptive leadership entails – mercy rather than sacrifice. Israel under the Old Covenant turned away from the values of God, they oppressed the weak socially and economically, and from their ill acquired wealth multiplied sacrifices. God had no respect for their sacrifices because of the injustice prevalent in their society. They thought the sacrifices would save them, but their lack of mercy for others broke down their community until they were destroyed by the surrounding pagan nations. Modern society would do well to borrow a leaf from Israel's history.

We see through the life and teachings of Jesus that the greatest sacrifice to God are acts of genuine mercy and kindness done to those without the capacity to pay back. This is what the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us. The account shows the Priest and Levite neglecting a stranger in dire need probably to get to the temple and fulfill their religious obligation. It is the ‘Samaritan’, the one thought to be without God who stops to render life saving assistance to the dying stranger. Jesus in this account challenged Israel's concept of sacrifice showing them that no sacrifice is greater than mercy, love and kindness. The blood of animals doesn't save a nation; mercy and justice do.

Leadership should not become preoccupied with sacrifice at the expense of a life of mercy. It is saddening today to see ‘Christians’ in leadership plunder public funds for personal interest, neglect their responsibility to the people they represent, then get a free pass by making out heavy donations to the church. This is not the kind of leadership that God is looking for, and certainly not the kind that changes the world. We make long prayers and persist in vigils; we tarry long in fasts and give generously to the church purse. But until all of our religious ritual is matched by an equal or greater

dedication to social care and mercy towards the weak and suffering, we are offering strange sacrifices to God.

The church is not a place for showmanship, or spiritual competition to determine who is most religious. True religion is on the streets, in the home, hospitals, orphanages, prisons and market place; how leadership has dealt with people in these places – whether negligently or supportively. This is the true test of the character and competence of leadership. It is not the titles we bear or the spiritual shows we put up, it is how we have responded to the ‘stranger on the way to Jericho’, the widow, the orphan, the rejected and the destitute.

Jesus said that when we show kindness and care to the needy and destitute, we are doing it to Him. And when we fail to care for those in need around us, we are actually neglecting Jesus. A lot of Christians worry much about the final judgment and what would be their fate. We should know already by how we have related with the world about us; this is what the Bible reveals in Matthew 25:31-46. Redemptive leadership is leading through restorative service, reconciliatory kindness and self-giving care towards the plight of others.

In a time when men strove to be gods, God became man in order to serve and save mankind. God in Christ gave us the perfect example of what redemptive leadership is about. It is identifying with the suffering and rejection of the destitute and sinner so as to bring them into our fellowship and community; it is caring enough to do something that makes a difference (however little) in the lives of people in need; it is opening up our barns and inviting the hungry to our table; it is breaking down our walls and extending a hand of fellowship to the stranger; it is mercy rather than sacrifice. This is the model for leadership and Christians in leadership.

## **Stirring Leadership towards Peace not War**

This brief section is not an argument about the morality of war, but rather a reminder of Jesus' teaching on the subject and how the early church responded to aggression. The reason for this is because all too often when people clamor for war and retaliation in our present society, Christians, instead of calling for restraint from society fuel the flames of aggression and incite hate. This is a far cry from what Jesus taught and how He lived.

“You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”, but I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whosoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” (Matthew 5:38-39)

“You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your father in heaven. For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” (Matthew 5:43-47)

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

In a time of conflict and war, those who speak of peace are often unpopular and uncelebrated. But this is precisely what Jesus did in Israel; He challenged Israel to turn away from their hate and aggression towards the Romans and instead act with love and reconciliation towards the Romans and each other. Well, for talking like this and living this way towards the enemy, he paid with His

life. The challenge for us as Christians today is either to stand with Jesus and suffer or deny him in favor of the world's approach.

Regardless of how we feel about the words of Jesus, we cannot twist the scriptures to mean something different from what Jesus implied. This is because His life bore witness to His teachings, so if we change His teachings, how do we change His life example? On the cross, He forgave His killers; in the garden, he did not call upon a legion of angels to fight the soldiers and defend His cause. The Kingdom of God does not come the same way the kingdom of this world comes; the world's way is aggression; God's way is submission. Speaking like this makes one quite unpopular in our times but you would not be the first, Jesus bore that stigma too.

We are called to be peacemakers not war mongers; we are called to be salt which gives taste and preserves, not a fire that consumes and destroys; we have received a ministry of reconciliation not mastery for division. We ought to be partners with God in renewing and restoring creation not seeking its destruction. It is a shame today when Christians lend their voices to the pressure on their government and leaders to go to war against others. This is not the role we play in building community. We are to be emulsifying agents that hold society together against all the contending forces that seek to divide us.

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” (James 4:1)

Most wars are fought as a result of exploitation and oppression, and to gain an unfavorable economic advantage over others regardless of whatever justification we concoct for going to war. These are values that oppose the kingdom of God, God does not approve of oppression and exploitation. We cannot blindly support our leaders

to harm and displays others in the name of a just war. We must follow the Bible's injunction to do all that is within our power to live peacefully with all men. When we see the socio-economic and humanitarian disaster war leaves in its wake, we would not be quick to proffer war as a solution to our conflicts.

We cannot continue to allow greedy political and religious leaders manipulate us, using us as pawns to foster their economic agenda. They create suspicion and make us agitate for war as the most viable option so that they can profit from the aftermath. The people who make hefty profits from war supplying arm and logistics don't have their blood flowing on the streets. James the Apostle tells us that our true enemy is not the 'other man' but our unchecked lust and greed. Our pursuit of personal interest sets us at odds one against the other, and this is why we go to war. When we make a commitment to putting the other first and serving the needs of all equally, we will reduce the spate of conflicts.

The church in the first two centuries was completely pacifist, never taking up arms. She was harassed and persecuted by Rome and her allies but never responded with aggression. If in doubt, look up church history! Christians died in their thousands at the hands of the Romans, yet more were added to the church daily. How could the church have survived such difficult times? They survived by following the example of Jesus! They loved their enemies, cared for them and served them genuinely. So many of the Roman soldiers who participated in killing Christians became Christians themselves when they encountered this example of love and self-giving.

Why have we become wiser than our Christian ancestry? Why do we suppose we can come up with a way better than what Jesus offered? This is the folly of our times! The foolishness of God's wisdom has become too unattractive for us. Persons in leadership should follow the Prince of Peace and fight as He does- with self-giving love and

mercy towards the enemy. They cannot continue the error of perpetrating aggression in the name of the Lord because that is not how God fights. If leaders sustain the fight of love, mercy, kindness, hope, healing, reconciliation, bridge-building and socio-economic justice, they will find less reasons to take up arms and go to war against others.

Like I said, this is not a debate about the morality of war or its necessity. This is a reminder of who we are called to be in Christ, and what our role is in leading the world out of darkness into light. The time is upon us to be Christians not just in nomenclature, but act Christ-like in our relationships especially towards those we perceive as enemies.

### **Seeing Simplicity in Leadership**

Simplicity is a virtue that modern leadership needs to recover quickly. Simplicity characterized the life and ministry of Jesus, and also of the early apostolic community. A life of simplicity integrates, making room for others to come into and find expression in our community. When a culture or community becomes too flamboyant and materialistic, it creates division and displaces others. This kind of displacement is evident in our society today where the gap between the poor and the rich is staggering. This displacement is also seen in the lack of equal opportunities to education, healthcare, commerce, basic amenities and livelihood.

When simplicity is excluded from our philosophy of leadership, there is a frenzied obsession with the acquisition of material possession accompanied by an insipid desire to flaunt ourselves. This attitude creates an atmosphere of unhealthy competition that results in the redirection of communal wealth towards establishing the leaders as the 'Alpha dog'. The community is impoverished so that the leader can live in affluence. When this is the example set by

leaders, many others do whatever is needful to assume leadership so that they can also advance their self interest.

God had warned the Israelites in Deuteronomy that a king in Israel was not to multiply possessions to himself, neither was he to exalt himself over his kinsmen (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The order established by God for kings in Israel was that of simplicity. To deviate from this would distort the balance of society and socio-economic inequality would set in. When we deviate from the path of simplicity today, we restructure society along the lines of means and social status leaving little room for the weak and disadvantaged.

Persons in leadership must embrace a life of simplicity and contentment as Jesus modeled for us. They must seek to condescend as God did in the incarnation rather than pursue self-elevation. They must set an example for the next generation of leaders that leadership is not about self-promotion, but a viable platform to serve the needs of others. They must hold very closely the admonition of Jesus on the subject:

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36)

“And he said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” (Luke 12:15)

When leaders flaunt affluence in the face of mass deprivation and poverty without a sense of responsibility to bring community into that fortune, they show by their actions that they do not truly know God. For there to be objective representation of people’s interest in leadership, simplicity must be restored. Simplicity ensures the channel of interaction between a leader and those he leads remains intact; it banishes pride and promotes humility. This simplicity must be seen not just in the way we talk, but in the way we live, use

money and relate with others of lower rank. This simplicity must also characterize our church settings, structure and relationships so that we do not put projects before people.

## **Leadership, Mentorship and Youth Initiative**

A very significant aspect of leading is mentoring others who will carry on the responsibility of building community. When leaders are focused on themselves, they often lose sight of their responsibility to adequately prepare the next generation of leaders. This in itself sets a bad example for those who succeed them (negative mentoring). In our selfish and individualistic orientation of leadership, the concept of mentoring has become alien. This is because when leaders only think of themselves and not the community, they see little reason to ensure the health of posterity by equipping competent leaders. People who live for themselves will not prepare others to take their place.

The temptation for leaders to live for themselves creates an ‘Empire mentality’, where the leader tends to see his jurisdiction as his personal property; the people, the land and resources belong to him to do with as he pleases. This is one of the reasons why in our nation today, leaders seek to cling to power at all cost, and if they must move on, insist on family and friends succeeding them. This pathetic trend is visible in both the secular and spiritual spheres of our national life. It denies competent people the opportunity to lead and by implication denies the community the contribution of such to national development.

The key to understanding mentorship is the word ‘example’. Example is a practical word which implies that mentorship is a very practical activity. Mentorship is deliberately making the right investment in the lives of others to ensure our laudable strides towards building community are sustained; it ensures the future of

a vision. The way a leader chooses to live and lead ultimately becomes an example for those who are looking up to him/her. That example models the philosophy of leadership for his/her followers and becomes the way they lead when they succeed their predecessors.

This might help us understand why the fight against corruption in our nations fails miserably. We fight corruption primarily not with arms and litigations but by our leaders showing the right example in their lives and leadership. Their example becomes the standard norm of leadership expectation for those who come after; societies can thus build on enduring values. When leaders favor family and friends over all else, it becomes the standard; when they put their interest first, it becomes the standard; when they live in comfort and drive expensive cars while others watch, it becomes the standard; when they hold foreign accounts stocked with public funds, it becomes the standard.

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”  
(John 13:14-15)

The Idea of mentorship is leading by example. Unfortunately, spiritual and secular leadership in our nation has predominantly set the wrong examples. They have been examples of greed, selfishness, nepotism, materialism, vulgarity, immorality, lavishness, violence and in-hospitality. Yet people wonder why leadership failure has become the norm in our nation; the answer is before our eyes. Jesus practicalised his teachings by the way he lived and could therefore demand his disciples to follow his example of sacrificial service and self-giving care for others. Christian tradition and the Early Church succeeded by following and carefully handing down the example of

Jesus. The church began to struggle to lead when she abandoned the example of Jesus.

Those who aspire to leadership must strive to follow the example of Jesus, and by so doing become the right example for the younger generation to follow. We look to Christians in leadership to model the way for a new breed of leaders, who will lead by the values of the kingdom – mercy, kindness, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace building. People in leadership must make deliberate efforts to create mentorship platforms by opening up their lives to others (as Jesus did), teaching them in word and example to ensure the survival of community. The perception of leadership carried by this generation is far from desirable, and we owe that in large respect to those who went before us.

Effective leadership ought to carry everyone along, especially the younger generation. When leadership does not possess a viable youth initiative, society breaks down. Leadership must gainfully engage the energy and passion of the youths or that same energy and passion will be directed at undermining the social order. Leaders should strive to provide education, vocational training, and opportunities to earn a living for the youths. When they are empowered and see hope for the future, the tendency for restiveness and disorder are reduced. But when leaders are only committed to themselves and ignore youth empowerment, they sow the seeds for the disintegration of society. A society with a disgruntled youth force is a ticking time bomb.

We have had a perennial predicament in our nation where leaders have neither carried the youth along nor sufficiently cared for their well being. We have created an ‘aristocracy of elders’ in league on one hand and youths in need on the other hand. Our failure to integrate society by caring equally for the needs of everyone has created a general suspicion of others that puts us on a collision

course. When people go into leadership, it has to be with a desire to curb this trend, not to aid and abate it. They are not to stratify society but to unify the social structure. Let the younger generation be properly represented in our policies and projects, and then together we can work towards building a prosperous and egalitarian society.

## **A New Community is Possible**

I had stated from the onset that the goal of this book is not merely to enhance intellectualism but rather induce positive action. If information is not channeled towards a productive and constructive project then what is the value of knowing? For too long we have looked with gloom and dismay at the world. Christians have thought that the answer is in escaping this doomed earth to be with the Lord through the rapture. We have not cared enough for the world because we have not looked past ourselves.

God cared enough about the world to give himself for her and show her through his example how change can come about for good. A new community is possible when we change our inward attitude from that which prioritizes the self to that which holds the 'other' in esteem. This is a mental and attitudinal shift from selfishness to community. A new community is possible when our outward attitude and disposition becomes one of mercy, kindness, care, love, forgiveness, integration, bridge building and selfless service.

We can either decide to keep complaining about what's not working, or realize that change starts with me, and the way I treat my neighbor. We all hold a piece of this puzzle called community and without our respective parts the puzzle is not complete. It is only in committing to this challenge and each contributing their quota that we begin to heal the world and restore community. We must find

the strength to push this communal project through in our shared humanity not our differences.

Let us pull down our walls that keep others out; let us pull down our barns that hoard communal resources; let us build bridges to reconnect those we have alienated; let us build bigger tables to feast and share our fortune with those of lower means. This is how the new community we desire is realized! This is the kind of leadership and living that heals relationships and changes the world. Let us starve our fears and prejudice, and focus on our shared humanity. We all live in this world, we all must commit to making it work.

It is our collective responsibility to put pressure on those we elect to lead us to do what is right. The church must be objective in her critique of leadership and not allow herself be swayed by unguided sentiments. A new community is possible only when all hands are on deck.

### **Part III**

#### **PRACTICAL MANUAL**

#### **How to Respond During Campaigns and Elections**

As we have mentioned previously, the purpose of this book is not just to add to our head knowledge, but to equip us with the right mindset that bring about peace and true community. The goal of leadership should be to build community and to create a harmonious environment where people of all backgrounds work together in unity to achieve their collective aspirations. This has not always been the case in our nation, people entrusted with leadership have abused that trust and used leadership to divide and impoverish the people.

For us to see positive transformation as a nation, we must change our attitude towards leadership and our approach towards choosing

leaders. We must seek to behave differently during periods of election from how we have behaved in the past. Our new way of acting during elections will improve our choice of leaders; it will deprive false and selfish candidates the chance to take public office; it will guarantee us an environment of peace within which to conduct our elections; it will set us on the path to enjoying the true dividends of our democracy.

The concluding section of this handbook is devoted to providing practical guidelines for the reader to follow when exercising our rights to vote leaders into office who will represent us. The simple steps outlined will help us expose falsehood and stop the destructive powers that seek to undermine our national unity and peace.

## **BUILDING COMMUNITY**

*“Build bridges not walls”*

We are one nation regardless of our ethnic, religious and political differences. This is a truth we must never allow ourselves to forget easily.

### **Challenging Our Thought**

Q. Will my choice of candidate enhance or undermine national unity?

### **Transformation Exercise**

Implement the following suggestions:

- consciously decide to pay little attention to candidates who try to campaign along lines of religion and ethnicity.
- do not vote for candidates who promise to represent only our group's interest and not that of the entire community.
- engage politicians (through questions and interaction) to know their plan for the community, and not be blinded by their promise to help just our group.

## **DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES**

*“Build communal tables not bigger private barns”*

True community is achieved when we all realize that the wealth of the land is for everyone to benefit, not just for a few entitled folks.

### **Challenging Our Thought**

Q. Am I thinking about the community or about myself?

### **Transformation Exercise**

Implement the following suggestions:

- Look back on the track record of aspiring political candidates to confirm a history of indiscriminate service and care.

→ Refuse to be fooled by the gifts given during campaign rallies. If they have not served the poor with previous opportunities, they will most likely not do so when elected.

→ Remember! Empty gongs make the loudest sound. Stand for candidates who have demonstrated over a sustained period commitment to humanitarian service and community development.

→ Reject incumbent aspiring politicians who use state funds to execute campaigns. Such is corruption; those funds are meant to build community not serve the individual's interest.

→ Challenge politicians to point to what they have achieved for community previously, not just how successful they have made themselves.

## **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

*"I am my brother's keeper"*

Community grows only when people decide to work together to eradicate hate, suspicion and segregation. Nationhood is hampered by ethnic and group interest.

### **Challenging Our Thought**

Q. Do I truly seek to treat the other as I desire to be treated?

### **Transformation Exercise**

Implement the following suggestions:

→ make a commitment to speaking about and treating the opposition with mercy and respect. Then politicians will not find in us sentiments of hate to exploit.

→ be merciful to someone who behaves in a wrong way regardless of what political group he/she belongs to. This is how the seed of healing is sown.

→ intentionally talk to others about the dangers of hate speech and deviant behavior. Listen to them with openness not judging them, and be willing to patiently guide them into the light.

→ deliberately open up channels of interaction with those of differing political persuasion, being willing to see also from their perspective so as to better understand their actions and further enhance peace building.

## **UNITY IN DIVERSITY**

*“I am because of you”*

Uniformity may not always imply unity. However, true unity can be achieved in spite of our obvious diversity when we choose to focus on what unites us. Feel free to make a list of the things that unites us as humans.

### **Challenging Our Thought**

Q. Am I quick to criticize those who are different from me?

### **Transformation Exercise**

Implement the following suggestions:

→ sit down and carefully make a list of those things we share in common as humans.

→ deliberately decide to see beyond race, gender, ethnicity, or age, so as to understand who we all are in the eyes of God and for each other.

→ make a constant habit of celebrating together, working together, and playing together with people who are of different groups.

→ do not allow yourself to be put under pressure by your group to vote in a way that brings people into power who will displace others different from us

→ free yourself from group identity when it represents what is detrimental to humanity. Stand for humanity and do what is peaceful, godly, and right for the nation as a whole.

## **SERVING AS AGENT OF RECONCILIATION**

*“Peace is cheaper than war”*

Of all the many ministries we claim to have received from God, the Bible is very specific that we all have received the ministry of reconciliation. The query though is, “Why have we done so little in this regard?” It is never too late to get it right!

### **Challenging Our Thought**

Q. How recently did I reconcile someone others wanted me to ostracize?

### **Transformation Exercise**

Implement the following suggestions:

- take the initiative to restore fellowship with someone you previously disagreed with, even if the fault was entirely theirs.
- challenge your group (ethnic or political) to reach out to other groups to forge understanding and harmony.
- make a commitment to practice tolerance towards those who hold ideologies different from ours.
- move beyond tolerance to serving their needs in what ways you can regardless of your difference of opinion.
- take out time to pray for those you disagree with, and be open to listen to God’s purpose for them and treat them accordingly.
- choose to value others even when you don’t feel very useful to them, or valued by them.

## **FEET WASHING**

*“It’s more blessed to give than to receive”*

Following the example of Jesus compels us to serve, not seek to be served. When leadership is about serving others and not just our needs, we chart the course towards realizing genuine community.

## **Challenging Our Thought**

Q. Am I excited about opportunities to serve others, especially those I disagree with?

## **Transformation Exercise**

Implement the following suggestions:

- see yourself as a servant to all.

- stand for leaders who will serve us and others (even our enemies), not leaders who promise to scapegoat and punish other groups.
- show with your own life an example of giving one's self up so that you can inspire others, and together we create a new climate from which a better breed of leaders emerges.
- refuse to be pumped by celebrity status, and elect leaders who are servants and would not let leadership sway their heads.
- try to love others with no strings attached. Do good to others without desiring appreciation and rewards, or calling in the favor.

## **NO TO VIOLENCE**

*"Repay evil with good"*

The tendency today is to fight fire with fire, but God calls us to fight fire with love. Love is our most effective weapon in the fight against hate and division. We are not disciples until we follow in Christ's steps.

### **Challenging Our Thought**

Q. Do I argue with God when He tells me to love those who have hurt me?

### **Transformation Exercise**

Implement the following suggestions:

- decide in your heart today that, “I will not be any politician’s thug”.
- make it your responsibility to speak up against the politics of thuggery.
- act without hesitation to expose politicians and religious leaders who seek to turn us against each other.
- make yourself a public awareness agent, sensitizing people within your community on the dangers of embracing violence.
- do not fight; do not encourage anyone to fight; do not condone plans to facilitate mayhem.
- commit to being your brother’s keeper not your brother’s killer, knowing that brotherhood is about our common humanity not just biology.

## **Acknowledgements**

The ideas documented in this book have been largely formed and shaped by my interactions with Prof. Kent Hodge and his invaluable literary resources. He has been my mentor, teacher and counsel in the bid to understand community and leadership as God intends both. My exchanges with members of CFM (Christian Faith Ministry) team and happenings around our immediate and distant community have also been an inspiration.

Political Landscape

A Publication of  
Christian Faith Ministries

A Study Guide for  
Transforming our Political Landscape in Peace

Foreword and Teachings by Kent Hodge

Author Ebute Ralph Ebute