

# **The Goal of Servant Leadership in African Churches: A Swot Analysis.**

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## **Abstract**

*Gehman (2008:x) quotes John Stott as saying, "Our model of leadership is often shaped more by culture than by Christ. Yet many cultural models of leadership are incompatible with the servant imagery taught and exhibited by the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, these alien cultural models are often transplanted uncritically into the church and its hierarchy. In Africa it is the tribal chief, in Latin America the machismo (exaggerated masculinity) of the Spanish male, in South Asia the religious guru fawned on by his disciples, in East Asia the Confucian legacy of the teacher's unchallengeable authority, and in Britain the British raj mentality – the overbearing pride associated with the period of British rule until Indian independence in 1947. It is easy for Christian leaders to assimilate one or other of these models without realizing it". Consequently, servant leadership remains a challenge among black African Christians which needs to be addressed. Although much has been written about servant leadership, more attention is required to bring about the change in the lives of Black Christians.*

## **1. Introduction**

We are all born in a culture and that culture either influences the way we interpret scripture or is incorporated in the way we practice Christianity. The practice of biblical leadership, more so servant leadership, has been a great challenge for the church in general. Simfukwe (2010:17) wrote that "in the African context the chief is a good and natural picture of a leader. Whether we like it or not this picture has infiltrated the idea of leadership in every sphere of life". To try and ignore the influence of culture on leadership can only result in the church remaining in its current status quo. Hence, this article will use a SWOT Analysis, a management tool, to analyse the extent to which the African churches can effectively practice servant leadership in view of its current traditional practices.

### **1.1 S.W.O.T Analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats)**

The SWOT Analysis approach is a strategic planning tool used by decision-makers in organisations to evaluate the favourable and unfavourable factors that affect the achieving of desired goals. According to *www.managementstudyguide.com*, the usefulness of SWOT analysis is not limited to profit-seeking organisations. It can be used by non-profit organisations, government units and individu-

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als. SWOT analysis may be used in any decision-making situation when a desired end or state (objective) has been defined. SWOT can be used in pre-crisis planning and preventative crisis management.

The intention of this article is to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of Black Christians and the practice of biblical Servant Leadership in order to come up with suggestions that could be helpful in engaging a dialogue towards a search for an effective leadership model for Africa. The SWOT analysis can be a useful tool for Black churches to use in conducting self-evaluation of their churches, staff and effectiveness of their ministries and practices.

## **2. What is Servant Leadership?**

The term servant leadership was coined by Robert K Greenleaf who didn't clearly describe the word "Servant Leadership". However, from his writings, The Centre for Servant Leadership at the Pastoral Institute in Georgia defined servant leadership as "a lifelong journey that includes discovery of one's self, a desire to serve others and a commitment to lead" ([www.managementstudyguide.org](http://www.managementstudyguide.org)). Agee (2001:9) defines a servant Leader as one who "seeks to embody the spirit, attitude, and disposition of the greatest leader of all Jesus Christ. A servant leader is marked by the impact of the Holy Spirit in his or her life with a spirit characterized by "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gl 5:22-23)". Both the Old and New Testaments, have shown that those who are called by God ought to be known as "servants of the Lord" (Is 49:3; Jn 12:26).

### **2.1 Servant in the Old Testament**

The word 'Servant' is not a word that many would like to be called. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1990:1107) defines a servant as "a person who has undertaken to carry out the orders of an individual or corporate employer (usually for payment) or a devoted follower, a person willing to serve another (a servant of Christ)". According to Richards (1980:103) when the word "servant" was mentioned in the Old Testament it referred to Israel, in relationship to her God chosen purpose for the nation and also to the promised deliverer, the Messiah (Is 42:1-4). The meaning of the term servant was "one whom God has shaped with special care and to whom He is personally committed (Is 44:1-2)". The dominant servant figure was not Israel but the promised messiah who would carry out the will of God, which Israel failed to obey. Hamlin lists characteristics of "Servant" prophesied by Isaiah (Is 52:13-53:12) as:

- Ostracized (Is 53:2-3), outwardly, these verses suggest that the mission would be a complete failure. The servant would not have any influence on those who met him.
- Servant's pain, our healing (53:3-4), according to 52:15, however, the nations would gain a new understanding or insight: "they shall see... shall understand". In Isaiah 53:1 the prophet said that this would be a new revelation of God's way of ruling. And he describes



the new revelation; Innocent victim: (53:7-9), the final and most extreme form of suffering for the nations would be death itself (v.9), the result of an unjust sentence by a corrupt court of justice (v.8). The servant's innocence was not a reference to Israel's past sinful history, but to Israel's future mission as a forgiven sinner and redeemed rebel (43:25;44:22;48:9).

- God's will entrusted to His Servant (53:10-12), these verses show us, not the passive lamb of 53:7, but the active struggling Servant working with God to achieve the fulfilment of His will. Firstly, the servant's 'travail of soul', meaning his inner suffering with and for the nations, and his bearing of their punishment, will give him an intimate 'knowledge' of God. Second, the Servant's intercessory prayer for God's enemies (v.12) is another way of sharing in God. Third, the Servant is willing to devote his whole life ('pour out his soul') and to die as an offering for sin (v.10), in order to free the nations from the consequences of their sin, and allow them to begin again in wholeness and peace (v.12) is another way of sharing in God's own struggle, and of belonging to God's kingdom of priests (Ex 19:6). Fourth, the effect of the servant's life and death would be to 'make many to be accounted righteous'. Lastly, the continuing mission of those among the nations who are accepted as a part of God's people will become 'offspring' (v.10), or the next 'generations' (v.8) of the Servant. The prophet was telling the exiles to prepare a future community of 'Servants of the Lord' (54:7) in every place to continue the work (1979:154-7).

## **2.2 Servant in the New Testament**

Hamlin (1979:159) comments "many passages in the New Testament show the great influence this poem (Is 52:13-53:12) had on the early Christian community. Some scholars believe that Jesus himself must have known it well, and in some way used it as a pattern for His own life". This was apparent in some words Jesus said; 'The Son of Man came to serve and give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:45). 'He makes Himself an offering for sin... shall make many to be accounted righteous' (Is 53:10,11); The Son of Man must suffer many things (Mk 8:31); 'It was the will of the Lord to bruise Him' (Is 53:10). Hamlin further writes that "these and other New Testament verses show us how Is 52:13-53:12 helped the early church and the early Christians to understand Jesus' life of service and suffering, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection, as part of God's plan for the salvation of the nations. For them, the servant was none other than Jesus Christ. Christians today reading this passage find both a prophecy of Jesus, and a description of the continuing mission of suffering to which we are called" (1979:160).

Jesus in Matthew 20:25-28 and Luke 22:25-26, revealed to his disciples the concept of a godly leader which they did not understand. The prevailing leadership culture during Jesus time was no different to the current leadership culture in Af-

rica today. Barrett (1998:192) provides background of the period and states that "slaves were common and numerous in the kingdom. They were at the bottom of the social circle and Roman masters were known to be 'thoughtless and cruel in the treatment of their slave'. Unlike the Jews, Romans made slaves of their own ethnic people". Today, those who are oppressed are not called slaves but the exploitation of women, children and the poor has the same effects on them. Kretzschmar (2009:217) defines exploitation as "abuse or misuse of women and children such that their human dignity, as beings created in God's image, is ignored or denied. They are not valued in and of themselves (as subjects) their identity is linked to that of a male person".

Jesus is our role model and our greatest example of servanthood. Richard & Hoeldtke (1980:105) point out that Jesus dealt with the attitude of servanthood in various ways; In relationships with others (Mk 10:45), "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"; with regards to status (Mt 23:8-12) "But you are not to be called Rabbi... you have only one master and you are all brothers"; and lastly, in private, when Jesus knelt before his disciples and washed their feet (Jn 13:4).

## **2.3 Leadership**

Leadership is the process of leading others towards a goal. There are many leadership definitions out there but for this article, Blackaby's (2001:20) definition will be used which says that "Spiritual Leadership is moving people on to God's agenda". Therefore, a spiritual leader is identified by his/her ability to advance God's purposes with godly character and manner. "Leadership is ultimately measured not according to the leader's skills but on the leader's result" (2001:19). Skills and competencies are very important to a leader but these together with a servant leader attitude plus the help of the Holy Spirit, God's will and purposes will be advanced in the lives of people in communities.

## **2.4 S.W.O.T Analysis of African Churches**

The idea of "servant leadership" is foreign in Black cultures and hence has proved to be a challenge among African Christians. The challenge is faced by both Bible scholars who are knowledgeable and of servant leadership principles and those who are ignorant about it. The question then is can African Christians transition from the current "Chieftainship" style of leadership to "Servant" leadership?

# **3. Strengths**

## **3.1 Gospel in Culture**

Africans are extremely religious people and according to Mbiti (1975:45) "all Africans believe in God". Cantrell (2005:270) estimates "that at least 4000 new professions of faith are made every day in Africa, and this is now the most 'Christian' continent in the world". This means that the church has the potential to influence many towards servant leadership if it is taught and applied in the church. The African culture which is very similar to the Old Testament culture makes it



easy for the church to contextualise the gospel. The task of transforming leadership practices in society lies with theologians deconstructing cultural norms embedded in the lives of believers and construct a “new” approach (which is not really new) by systematic teaching programmes and practicing what they preach and teach. “The Christian both hears the word from his spiritual leader and sees the word expressed in his person. The open life of leaders among not over the brothers and sisters is a revelation of the very face of Jesus” said Richards & Hoeldtke (1980:115). The advancement of the gospel is a strength which the church should capitalised.

### **3.2 Power of the Gospel**

The Word of God is powerful to transform cultures and mind-sets of any tribe and nation. The great commission commands the church to make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded (Mt 28:18-20). A cultural change is very possible if cultural practices are explained in relation to God’s Word. Krafts (2005:63) agrees that cultural change is possible if “there is some kind of in-culture guide to which people look to understand what their supra cultural point of reference (God) wants them to do and understand”. The Gospel has the power only if leaders guide the saints by example and teachings on biblical leadership principles.

### **3.3 Family**

The family amongst Africans plays a very important role, providing the basis for learning cultural values of the community. From the beginning of creation, God made “families”, Adam, Eve and their offsprings. Berkley (2007:179) says that “leadership was birthed at the start of the family with Adam and Eve. Thereafter, leadership developed from family setting to military-leadership”. Louw (1997:499) also wrote that “the family environment is a place where skills, values and cultural practices are copied by observing and imitating important figures within the society especially within the home”. The strength of the African church lies in the influence of Christian families as role models of servant leadership beginning in their own homes, extended families, neighbours and the clan. When Christian families apply servant leadership in their own homes, unbelievers will begin to copy. Christian life is not a private matter but a book for all to read. Society will learn about servant leadership through Christ’s followers.

## **4. Weaknesses**

These are factors that adversely affect the practice of servant leadership. Weaknesses may be defined as “the qualities that prevent us from accomplishing our mission and achieving our full potential”. ([www.managementstudyguide.com](http://www.managementstudyguide.com)) Weaknesses can be highlighted by asking the question; why isn’t servant leadership practical among African Christians?

### **4.1 Traditional Leadership Style**

Leadership in Africa follows the pattern of “chiefs” who were the highest form

of leadership in a tribe. Colonization brought many tribes together under one rule and chiefs lost their status to national leaders. Kohls (1998:107) wrote that in spite of chiefs losing their prestige, the “chief” style of leadership still impacts the continent of Africa in every sector including the church. The impact of chieftainship style of leadership should be expounded if the church is to understand its influence on the practice of servant leadership. It may be suggested that the history of the Bantu Africans can be linked to Egypt where the Bantu Africans originated from and spread to other parts of Africa. Chigwedere (1998:209), an African historian sheds light on the fact that “categorically every significant African cultural trait is easily traceable to Egypt”. It’s this Egyptian link that today influences leadership style in Africa.

#### **4.1.1 Characteristics of a Chief**

According to Chigwedere, the king was to them (the Egyptians) the representative of deity; his name Phrah (Pharaoh) signifies the Sun, pronounced him the emblem of the god of light and his royal authority was directly derived from the gods. He was the head of religion and of state; he was the judge and lawgiver; he commanded the army and led it to war. It was his right and his office to preside over sacrifices and pour out libations to gods; and whenever he was present, he had the privilege of being the officiating high priest (1998:253).

#### **4.1.2 Implications for Leadership**

Leaders view themselves as “deity” which makes them the supreme and only authority to rule and speak on behalf of others. Mbiti said that “chieftainship is linked by myth and legend with God. The idea is that their office is believed to be chosen and approved by God, and in holding it they are like God’s earthly representatives”. Instead leadership becomes a “sacred” position which is desired by all for usually benefits such as status, wealth, power and authority, more than providing a service. As a result, Plueddemann (2009:87) highlights that leaders are “controlling in order to keep harmony and conformity”. Since leadership is a ‘sacred’ position, it becomes a “position for life”, gods can’t be removed from their positions, whether the leader is effective or not. Richards & Hoeldtke (1980:15) mentions that “Jesus holds the ultimate power over the universe and its personalities. No one can claim an authority or title equal to His”. It becomes a weakness for the church if it exalts itself to Jesus’ level of authority over humanity.

#### **4.1.3 Implications for Servanthood**

The serving role of leadership has been generally lost in the attitude of selfishness, lack of empathy and care for the next person. African leaders usually work less and don’t see themselves as ‘servants’ but as “chiefs”. Kohls (1998:114) wrote that “the servanthood of the traditional African leadership seems to have been lost completely. It is this understanding of a leader that is carried over into church leadership. Instead of the leader-servant of the Bible, we have pastor-chiefs”. Therefore, followers are expected to work much more than their leaders. Servitude becomes a way to impress leaders more than an act of worship to Christ.



Hence, servanthood will be displayed in public gatherings' and not in private. As a result, "servanthood is often seen as subservience. Ministers, whether in church or government, are not associated with service but with big bosses" (Simfukwe 2010:18). Continuation of chieftainship style of leadership will perpetuate the lack of servant leaders in Africa

## **4.2 Influence of Cultural Proverbs and Sayings**

Worldviews "govern people's attitudes and behaviours from the subconscious level even more powerfully than laws and legislature" Munza (2005:6). In many instances, worldviews are not stipulated but can be identified in behavioural patterns in humans. Africa falls in the high-context culture, which according to Plueddemann "what is unsaid but understood carries more weight than what is actually written down or said" (2009:80). Worldviews are engraved in a person's mind over time from childhood, throughout life by observing parents and adult behaviours, by traditional sayings, proverbs and norms within the community. This has major implications for servant leadership.

### **4.2.1 Examples of Influence of Cultural Proverbs and Sayings**

There is a Congolese saying, *Udya ngombe, udya nabobe; utala ngombe waka hwil!* Munza (2005:15) and another saying from Zimbabwe; *ijiga ne hama mutorwa ane haganwa*. The two sayings are spoken in different languages but have the same meaning. They both imply that family members come first before anyone else. Another example, a Shona proverb cited by Chigwedere (1998:242) *mambo asina machinda, hasi mambo* which literally means that "a chief without subjects to assist or serve him is not a chief". This implies that a leader is recognised by the number of people serving him. If he doesn't have 'servants' or 'machinda' to serve him, then, his not a leader.

### **4.2.2 Implication for Leadership**

The African leadership culture is said to be very relational unlike the Western which is more individualistic in nature. However, many have been puzzled by the African "relational culture" where oppression and exploitation is out of hand in a people where relationships should matter. O'Donovan (2000:11) attributes this problem to Africans copying the Western culture of individualism and shying away from *ubuntu*. However, unknown to Western minds, in African cultures are hidden ideas, beliefs, warnings and life lessons found in proverbs and sayings which govern peoples mindsets. It's these hidden understandings of proverbs and sayings, which are never spoken out to outsiders but are understood, that encourage tribalism in Africa. Munza (2005:15) best explains the meaning of the above saying (4.2.1) , "If one is the president, bishop or pastor you must fill all key positions around you with your family members or tribal members". Leaders become the source of controlling and directing churches agenda towards benefiting those who are somehow related to them or influential church members. The Rwanda case is a typical example of how Christians failed to show compassion to other ethnic tribes and participated in the genocide of fellow Christians. Today, many

of these Christians have become Moslems Wood (2011).

### **4.2.3 Implications for Servanthood**

Church politics comes into play when positions are based on connections to someone within or an influential person outside the organisation who has some connections to the leadership. The Sons of Zebedee had the same notion and asked their mother to say a “good word” for them to Jesus. According to the prevailing culture back then, positions of honour were determined by who you knew. The challenge to servanthood becomes corruption, unfair and unjust treatment of those to be excluded from leadership. Leaders suppress the truth about servant leadership principles and neglect to preach or teach adequately on the subject for people to understand and be transformed. The weakness is that those who are knowledgeable fail to apply the principles in their own lives. A servant leader knows that all people regardless of race or gender matter to God. Therefore the servant leader must be able to “build teamwork between pastor and the people” Agee (2001:13).

### **4.3 Parenting Style**

A larger group of Africans are patriarchal which means that great importance is placed on the male child. According to Atkinson (1995:650) “parenting is accepting the responsibility to provide physical and emotional support to nurture a child. Nurturing includes discipline, training so that children are ‘equipped’ to make their way in the adult world independently, able to look after themselves, to work to sustain good personal relationships and ultimately to prove to be good parents themselves”. The vast majority of children today are being raised by women. The role of fathers in training and leading the family has been lost. Blackaby (2001:34) indicates that “the influence of a leader’s childhood home cannot be underrated as a major factor in leadership development”. The African home environment has contributed negatively to the application of servant leadership among Christians and contributes to some extent the quality, style and competency of a leader.

#### **4.3.1 Implication for Leadership**

Many Christian families do not function according to Biblical leadership principles. Unfortunately, many succumb to traditional practices and use scriptures to support their stance. Patriarchal societies tend to enforce the notion that leadership is reserved for men whether young or old. The belief is that a man does not need to be trained for leadership; he is a natural leader and should be accorded the position not considering his qualifications. Moyo (2011:101) wrote that “the privileges of patriarchy are that respect is gained but not through particular acts, but simply by virtue of being a man”. This creates problems for servanthood as gifts in females are ignored or channelled to ‘positions reserved for women’, even if they are not called to that ministry. Agee (2001:10) says “a servant leader is expected to lead demonstrating that they can be trusted to make good decisions, help people shape an appropriate and compelling vision and a sense of mission”.



Another aspect is character which ought to be shaped in the home from childhood and if not it will be carried on into adult life and influence the quality of their leadership. The Christian leader's character can become his downfall if he fails to exercise integrity; words spoken and promises made are broken without remorse since according to Van der Walt (2003:275) "paternalism rules supreme because the authority of the father-figure may not be doubted or contradicted". Culturally, a leader cannot be openly held accountable for their words. Consequently, the male child grows up knowing that they can say or do as they please without serious repercussions for their actions. Meier (1977:45) asserts that "Many psychiatrists estimate on the basis of their studies that approximately 85% of all adult personality is already formed by the time the individual is six years old. But how the baby's parent trains him/her during those critical first six years will determine how that individual will enjoy and succeed in his life during the other seventy-eight years".

### **4.3.2 Implication for Servanthood**

It is common to hear preaching in African churches inciting woman to treat their husbands as 'chiefs' in their homes or justify divorcement. The sacrificial role of men as leaders of their households has been lost and instead women sacrifice for families. Moyo in her research on *child or Youth-headed households* discovered that over 90% of children in Sub-Saharan African countries lived in homes headed by children as young as 10-12 years old. Her question was where were the leaders? for ([www.managementstudyguide.com](http://www.managementstudyguide.com)) "if patriarchy asserts that grandfathers, fathers, uncles, husbands, brothers and nephews are fundamentally leaders, heads and decision-makers, the death of a woman should not create a phenomenon of such alarm and in such a proportion as we see in the child- or youth-headed households today" (2011:8).

The African male child is destroyed by the same culture he upholds which denies him a role model in terms of a male or father figure to emulate servanthood and grows up in a single parent homes with an absent father or resident father but 'absent' in terms of physical and emotional involvement. The same culture denies the male child a chance to learn servanthood within the home setting as he's discouraged from getting involved in domestic chores which effectively become the sole responsibility of women. Cline (1990:32) emphasises that "it is a known fact that responsibility cannot be taught; it must be caught. To help a child gain responsibility we must offer the child opportunities to be responsible". The same goes for servanthood. A child should be given the chance to serve others if they are to embrace servant leadership as adults.

## **5. Opportunities**

This is where weaknesses are evaluated and steps taken to transform them into opportunities for both the individual and the church as "opportunities are presented by the environment within which our organisation operates" ([www.managementstudyguide.com](http://www.managementstudyguide.com)). The question is can we turn the weaknesses into opportunities? It calls for positive attitudes and serious critical analysis of the weaknesses.

## **5.1 Opportunity To Change Leadership Culture**

The church equipped with the Gospel is a powerful organisation for bringing any transformation to individuals and the world. Though the church has lost its voice in much of the Western world it still commands respect in Africa. Kretzschmar (2009:223) confirms that the church “remains one of the most trusted organisations amongst ordinary people in Africa”. The church ought to be an agent of transforming people’s lives towards serving God. The church has the opportunity to lead the transformation of negative leadership culture. Erickson comments that,

“Jesus stated his purpose in coming not to be served but to serve (Mt 20:28). In becoming incarnate he took upon himself the form of a servant (Phil 2:7) and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross. The church must display a similar willingness to serve. It has been placed in the world to serve its Lord and the world, not to be exalted and have its own desires satisfied. Although the church may attain great size, wealth, and prestige that is not its purpose” (1998:1076).

### **5.1.1 Opportunity for Servant Leadership**

Living and growing up in an environment where leadership is supreme, many of us have lost the meaning of what it means to serve. Simfukwe (2010:18) rightly pointed out that “we seem hardly aware that when we speak of civil servants we are supposed to be referring to government employees who may be neither civil nor committed to serving other...We tend rather to associate the term ‘servant’ with domestic employees whose rank is regarded as low”. It’s not by coincidence that Jesus, who was male, washed the feet of his disciples in the privacy of their room (Jn 13:4-5). Jesus asked his disciples if they understood what he was doing. The task he had performed was reserved for servants who normally would be women. And yet, Jesus chose to perform this act of footwashing and informed his disciples that they would later understand what he had just done. The early church later understood that servants of God were not in a class of their own so that certain tasks were above them or gender related. A Servant-leader should shun the trappings of authority and status Berkley (1998:185).

### **5.1.2 Opportunity to Equip Leaders**

Greenleaf (1972:13) indicates that those leaders who were never previously ‘servants-first’ generally do not have the “natural feeling of wanting to serve” nor do they “make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served”. Children who are brought up uninvolved in domestic chores tend to assume that they should be served. This makes it very difficult for them as adults to serve or sacrifice for another person unless they benefit from it. Charity should begin at home. Christians ought to be concerned about the next generation’s leadership qualities. Joseph and Nehemiah both became great leaders, both with administrative skills learnt whilst in domestic service as servants as did Joseph in Potiphar’s home (Gn 39:4); Nehemiah in King Artaxerxes’s Palace (Neh 2:1). Challenges of



poor administration among African churches can also be attributed to some extent to lack of domestic involvement in its leaders. Domestic involvement provides the basic foundational skills and experience which is later enhanced by education. Maxwell (1993: introduction) believes that “leadership is not an exclusive club for those who were ‘born with it’. The traits that are the raw materials of leadership can be acquired through training. Link them up with the desire and nothing can keep you from becoming a leader”. Many Africans desire to be leaders and the church has an opportunity to provide the training and role models required.

### **5.1.3 Leaders with Skills**

The challenge of leadership in the African church is the lack of skilled leaders. Kretzschmar (2009:229) comments that “in African context, people skills are much more evident, but technical, scientific, financial; management, administrative, and organisational skills are in short supply”. Africa has a lot of professional Christian men and women who should be using their professions as tools of evangelising and equipping the communities. Many Christians struggle to go past tribal mindsets, which are selfish, controlling attitudes and invest their time, knowledge and skills to empower others and extend the kingdom of God. Kristof & Dunn (2010:115) writing on Africa’s challenges noted that the majority of professional’s dream to work and live in developed nations. He lamented that the “purpose of medical training isn’t to fuel emigration but to address health needs at home”. It is only servant leaders who can carry out this task of equipping others at the expense of their wellbeing.

### **5.1.4 Leaders with Good Work Ethics**

Work ethics in African organisations whether in a secular or church setting are basically the same. Poor time management, lack of integrity, mediocrity and bad organisation prevail. Bad work ethics are usually a result of the general dislike for work which is common to a majority of people regardless of race. Interestingly, some people would rather be paid to do nothing or work less. Work in general is viewed as a curse. Consequently, the desire to prosper and be well off becomes the aspiration of many Christians. De Villiers (1989:57) describes a monk called Benedict of Nursia (c480-547) whose approach to work helped introduce a new and positive attitude towards labour in Europe from the 5th century onwards. Benedicts rule, commonly known today, placed emphasis on *ora et labora*, latin for “pray and work”. Both were seen as valuable in the service of God and neighbour. Labour was regarded as a discipline, a cure for idleness, as a practical way of becoming self-sufficient and of being of service to the needy”. The African church can learn from this rule to pray and work.

### **5.1.5 Equality in Leadership**

Burundians have an expression that says *a hen cannot speak in front of a rooster*. This saying means that women should not speak or be heard in the presence of men Kristof & Dunn (2009:201). This rule unfortunately, operates in some churches where men vow not to listen or allow women to guide men or make

any suggestions. The African church has the opportunity to transform abusive cultural practices targeted towards women, children and vulnerable people to display Christ's compassion and mercy because for such as these, Christ died on the Cross. The African church can't remain silent as women call for equality. It's the church's leadership mandate to bring about healing and equality in the continent and not the task of governments and NGO's. Only the church can understand that all people are equal in God's sight thus making servant leadership the answer to Africa's challenges.

## **5.2 Servanthood**

The lack of a servant attitude in church leadership breeds strife in the body of Christ as members fight, manipulate and buy their way into positions of leadership. Jesus' disciples were indignant with the two brothers when they heard that they had asked Jesus for positions in his kingdom (Mt 20:24). Christians lose virtue when their desire for leadership overtakes them. On the one hand, it is a noble quest to desire a leadership position but that yearning should be pushed by the desire to serve others and do good. Christ is our example who served, suffered, and was humiliated and beaten for the sake of saving humanity. Today those who claim to be his servants have bodyguards to protect them from provocations, refuse to suffer and be humiliated for those they lead. The church is Jesus' servant and shouldn't be treated better than its master.

## **5.3 Evaluation**

In hierarchal societies, evaluation is seen as criticism which is not accepted easily by most leaders. Criticising or evaluating a leader's plan of action or serious brainstorming never takes place as people know better than to speak the truth even if asked to do so. African Christians know that something has to change if the continent is to change for the better but as Lewis (1996:126) says "everyone talks about the necessity of change, but the fact is, very few people want to change. Change is painful". African Christians today, struggle to embrace servant leadership and nonetheless hold the answer to leadership change in African churches, families and governments. Leaders should not be afraid to conduct evaluations of their leadership style hence this SWOT analysis example. Leaders who are able to take criticism become better leaders eventually. There's a serious lack of creative leaders in Africa to engage social-economical challenges and injustice as many leaders are not ready to work hard, suffer and have a ministry that draws attention to criticism and constant evaluations by others. Creative individuals according to Louw (1997:333) are those people who are "self-confident, take risks, and are less likely to conform to the norms of the community or groups they belong". It's up to individual leaders to be secure in the knowledge that they are God's servants and not servants to made-man cultures. Agee (2001:16) lists cultural hostility as an obstacle to servant leadership.

## **6. Threats**

This section takes into account external forces that would threaten the implemen-



tation and practice of servant leadership. "Threats arise when conditions in the external environment jeopardise the reliability and profitability of the organisation's business. They compound to the vulnerability when they relate to the weaknesses" ([www.managementstudyguide.com](http://www.managementstudyguide.com)).

### **6.1 Fear of Man**

Going against the grain in an African culture requires a person of great boldness. The idea of *Ubuntu* is a Zulu expression *umuntu ngumntu ngabantu* which means that a person is only a person through his interaction with other people Elion (2001:41). The unspoken meaning which is understood by many Africans is that the family has the power to influence a person to conform to the group's way of doing things. Chief leadership practices prevail as Christians fear of being ridiculed or even persecuted by society, supersedes the fear of God. It will take leaders who are bold and are accountable to God and not to human cultures to bring about the change in leadership culture in Africa.

### **6.2 Tendency to Retain Status Quo**

Changing to servant leadership is threatened by the privileges that come with the position of leadership. African leaders, both secular and spiritual, become greedy and build empires for themselves. Changing to "servant leadership" will place too much demand on them. It is easy to remain in the status quo and let "others" do the changing if they dare try. As long as there is resistance to change, it is difficult to attain the servant leadership model. Remaining in the status quo is beneficial to leaders in terms of honour, respect and *machinda* (servants or armour-bearers). Leaders also fear to lose respect by being involved in menial work or tasks. The notion of "respect" which is honour, and recognition is what the chieftainship style of leadership rests on. A leader is acknowledged by the number of subjects who serve and give him respect and not by what he does for them. Jesus said this ought not to be so among His followers

### **6.3 God's Judgement**

Revolutionary behaviour is always seen as rebellion. Ban (1968:23) writes that "it may come as a shock for people to discover that God frequently works through revolutions, both the peaceful variety and the violent kind". Against this backdrop, scripture bears witness to the fact that "both Old and New Testaments are quite clear that revolutionary changes in society and history are often the intention of God". In Acts 5, the persecution of the church leads to its spreading. Kristof & Dunn (2009:159) quote a Harvard historian, David Lands, who noted that "Europe nurtured an industrial revolution, and not Asia or the Middle East because of their openness to new ideas and that one of the best gauges of that openness to new ideas was how the country treated it's women". The lack of social justice saw Israel going into exile (Is 1). Obedience to the word is required of the church. Servant leaders are needed to bring about change in communities and only then can God withhold judging His church.

Balcomb (2011:20) quotes Jesse Mugambi, a Kenyan theologian who posed a

challenging question

“...how (can We) explain the apparent contradictions, that contemporary Africa continues to be perhaps the most religious continent in the world and yet its people remain the most abused of all in history. How could it be that people who continue to call on God most reverently are the ones whom God seems to neglect most vehemently? Could it be that irreligion is the key to success and that religion is the key to backwardness?

The author's question poses another question which is, can it be the lack of servant leadership among Black African Christians that has caused Africa's neglect?

## **7. Conclusion**

Servant leadership practice has been discussed and called for by many spiritual leaders, yet no one practices it totally. In order for the African church to transform its leadership style, its people ought to be transformed in mind. Robert K Greenleaf's idea of a 'servant leadership' was inspired by the story *Journey to the East* by Hermann Hesse.

The story is about a band of men on a mystical journey...The central figure of the story is Leo who accompanies the party as the servant who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They can't make it without Leo. The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wondering finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovered that Leo, whom he had known first as servant, was in fact the titular head of the Order, it's guiding spirit, a great and noble leader (1972:7).

Servant leadership is the key to transformation of the African society. The above story shows that being a servant is not an insignificant position but actually a position of influence. It's time that African Evangelicals view leadership not as a "charismatic" position but a position of meekness, gentleness and silence. Dawson (1989:20) wrote that Christians are not exempt from demonic influences that influence their cities but they can only redeem themselves if they "discern the nature of the enemy's deception and 'bind the strongman' by acting in the opposite spirit". The opposite spirit required among Christians is to cultivate leadership values within the home environment so that servanthood for all regardless of gender becomes a way of life and not merely head knowledge. Domestic chores provide a setting for being "servant-first". Domestic duties are daily tasks which call for patience, endurance, persistence and commitment. This in turn encourages a lifestyle of working, serving, spiritual formation, and character shaping



through interaction with others within and outside the home, in an African value system of *Ubuntu*. The African chieftaincy system has its merits, but is in need of deconstruction and reconstruction. The African church needs serving chiefs, male and female, prepared for the work of ministry to fulfil God's purpose of social transformation. Since the family plays an important role of "influence" in African culture, servanthood in the home has great potential to influence many families - one family at a time.

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