

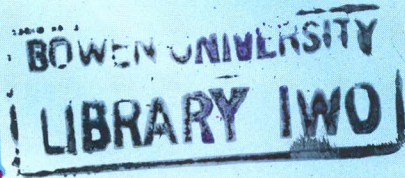


BOWEN UNIVERSITY

(of the Nigerian Baptist Convention)

Iwo, Nigeria

Fifth



Convocation Lecture

Leadership: Crisis and Opportunity

delivered by

REV. DR. NEVILLE CALLAM

General Secretary, Baptist World Alliance

Friday, 5th November, 2010

Leadership: Crisis and Opportunity

CONVOCATION LECTURE

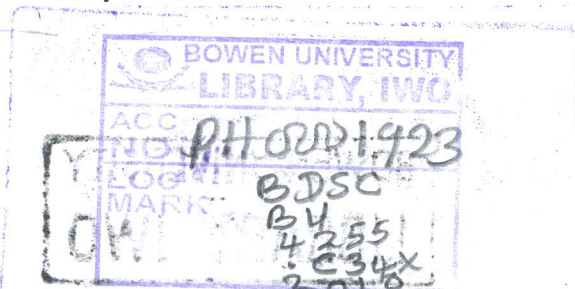
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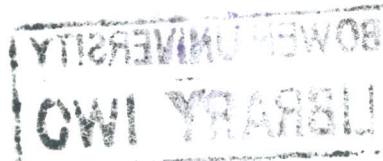


May I begin by acknowledging with gratitude your kind invitation to this important event in the life of Bowen University? I am pleased to be able to share with you all in this Commencement Exercise.

I greet you in the name of the worldwide Baptist family numbering 110 million members. Of this number, thirty-eight million are currently associated in the global movement called the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), which I am privileged to serve as General Secretary. Permit me to pay tribute to the distinguished Baptist scholars and leaders from Nigeria who have made an outstanding contribution to the life of the worldwide Baptist family. Such persons as J. T. Ayorinde, Bamijoko Atinuke, Osadolor Imasogie, Samuel Ola Akande, Ademola Solomon Ishola, Yemi Ladokun, among others, are household names in many Baptist homes across the world. We thank God for their admirable stewardship as representatives of the Baptist family in Nigeria.

I have read, with interest, about the life and contribution of the Reverend Thomas Jefferson Bowen, whose name this university bears. By naming the university in Bowen's honor, you have focused attention on the pioneer Southern Baptist missionary whose contribution to the development of Nigeria is indeed laudable. As a gifted language scholar of considerable standing, Bowen's work that led to the publication of a dictionary and grammar of the Yoruba language remains invaluable.

I have noticed, with pleasure, the motto of your university: "Excellence and Godliness". I commend all of you here at Bowen University for attaching godliness to the attainment of excellence in all the programs offered here. I interpret this as a sign of the



understanding you have of the sort of persons a university needs to produce if the Nigeria is to be the productive, harmonious and prosperous country you want it to be.

I am pleased that, as a university founded on Christian values, you are seeking to preserve a profound concern for the holistic development of your student population. You are not concerned only with the external aspects of people's lives. You care about their internal life as well. You are not aiming only to produce persons with adequate information and technique to carry out particular tasks. You value internal transformation which, when it accompanies well honed analytical skills and technical competence, forms a positive and lasting partnership that can contribute to the well-being of people in community.

May I commend those concerned for the focus in your university's mission statement on "high quality, morally sound and socially relevant education ... [for] all [your] students, irrespective of gender, race, color, ethnicity or religion"? By doing this, you have shown appreciable respect for the celebrated Baptist heritage which has been marked, from the very beginning, by a commitment to the defense of religious liberty for all human beings.

That you have intentionally kept the twin focus on excellence and godliness for all of your students, whatever their background, is worthy of approbation. For this, I congratulate you wholeheartedly. Considering the conjunction of human development and religious values associated together in the purpose of this Bowen University, I desire to address you today on the subject of leadership.

All over the world, people are crying out against oppression, discrimination and injustice. They are raising their voices against



selfishness, nepotism and violent disregard for their human rights. They are placing the blame for all sorts of maladies in the society at large, and in the institutions of society at the feet of those who are given positions of leadership. And they are calling for change. The present levels of dissatisfaction with leadership can lead to the frustration that expresses itself in social unrest and the disruption of day-to-day living. It can also lead to the sort of protest that asks, "What is at the root of the leadership problem? How might the problem be tackled? And how can we change the current situation so that the sort of leadership that is needed may be exercised?"

What is Leadership?

Before discussing the attributes of leadership, let us clarify what we understand leadership to be.

The treatment of the subject of leadership in a context which is marked by respect for religious truth is fraught with many challenges. There are at least two fundamental reasons for this.

First, since the late 1970s, thanks to pioneering work undertaken at the Harvard Business School, what lies at the very heart of the subject of leadership has become a controversial issue. Different views exist concerning the precise relation of leadership and management.

The gravamen of concern by some contributors to the discussion has been to identify leadership as being primarily about vision-casting, coping with complexity, motivating and inspiring people, and management of change. Meanwhile, management is said to be about such matters as developing plans, selecting people, organizing resources, and problem solving.



One may assert that, as systems of action, leadership and management are marked both by distinctiveness and complementarity. Furthermore, we believe that, in the providence of God, some persons have received the two gifts – leadership and management. This provides them with the potential to be real assets to any organization.

Another controversial issue related to the subject of leadership is the matter of how to judge effectiveness. By what criteria shall judgment be made on the value of someone’s leadership? Put differently, is effectiveness a proper yardstick against which to judge the performance of a leader and if so, how does one measure effectiveness?

More often than not, notions of efficiency and effectiveness find a home in contexts marked by the values associated with pragmatism and utilitarianism. The pragmatist hails the leader whose vision drives the “success” of an organization – however that success is understood. It is said that the effective leader is expected to develop a compelling vision for the organization he or she leads, and to conceive excellent strategies to ensure that that vision bear rich fruit.

Meanwhile, the manager is expected to ensure the provision of both the design for the project or projects to be undertaken and the resources and operational modalities required. These are believed to contribute to ensuring successful operation and they attract the praise of the pragmatist who regards the leader and manager as performing effectively.

Like the pragmatist, the utilitarian argues that the way to measure effectiveness is with reference to the desirable outcome of



visions, dreams and projects undertaken. Utilitarians urge that it is on the basis of results – and results only – that the effectiveness of leadership and management must be judged. Consequences are all that matters when it comes to assessing the operation of an enterprise. Utilitarians are prepared to pass judgment on those in leadership or management on the sole basis of the results they achieve.

Unfortunately, in our age, when considering how to evaluate the performance of a leader, many people assign little or no importance to motives, means, and the sort of person that one is or becomes in the process of exercising leadership. The truth is that, while outcomes must be borne in mind when evaluating the performance of a leader, these need not be assigned the exclusive position sometimes attached to them. Societies are not made up only of goods and services; they also include people whose attitudes and values do actually matter.

In this presentation, based on theological convictions regarding the divine origin of creation, which assigns an inviolable dignity and worth to each and every human being, I will focus on some of the qualities that need to be fostered in a leader if we are to overcome the leadership crisis that exists. Odunayo Oke, one of your religious leaders here in Nigeria, has helpfully indicated in his book, *Contemporary Issues in Christian Leadership* [Lagos: Charis Ventures Publications, 2008] that leadership is about influence and service, vision and hope, character and trust, relationships and power, dependency and accountability. In this presentation, you will notice that the lines between leadership and management will remain blurred. However, I will proceed with an understanding of leadership



as being primarily about vision-casting, coping with complexity, motivating and inspiring people, and management of change. If in our groups, communities, institutions, and nations, we are to benefit from the exercise of leadership, there are certain values that must characterize leadership itself. For this reason, I will discuss the subject of leadership under the following four rubrics: leadership and vocation; leadership and vision; leadership and integrity; and leadership and servanthood.

Leadership and Vocation

Those who lead with an understanding of the need for excellence and godliness should carry out their work with vocational commitment. Put differently, leaders need to approach their work with the conviction that God has called, gifted and equipped them for the service they offer.

When leadership is understood in this way, the true motive for leadership is the conviction that service in any particular sphere is not merely about finding a way to earn a living. Nor is it merely about accessing the means to make a contribution to society – important as these considerations are. Service must also be regarded as a way to serve a purpose higher than self-interest or even the interest of society. Service is regarded as a way to live in accordance with the divine will. It is a way of fulfilling one's calling and so pleasing God. Seen in this perspective, leaders cannot escape certain implications of the way they work. Let's note three of these.

First, leaders are not people whose service has, as its distinct aim, the development of a great reputation. They are not seekers after mere fame. They do not lead in order to assert what they believe

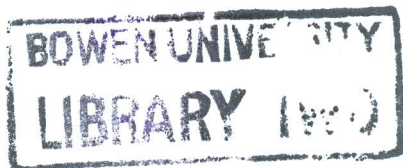


to be their superior giftedness. Instead, their aim is to please their creator by giving themselves in a disciplined, diligent, and selfless way to the calling to be a leader.

Second, true leaders do not desperately need to be given credit for the good things God accomplishes through them. Too many people need constantly to be praised if they are to serve diligently. They are hungry for affirmation, and they can hardly perform well without the constant stroking of their egos. While people need encouragement and we should encourage one another, the focus of leaders must be on serving a high cause, working for a higher power than ourselves, not on receiving acclaim for what we do.

Third, those who serve as leaders must expect to be on the receiving end of both fair and unfair criticism. When they exercise their initiative, when they initiate change, they should expect that some people will agree with them and some will not. That is the way it is and leaders should not expect that everyone will agree with them. Nor must leaders be unduly perturbed by unfair or unfavorable criticism. They will not be comfortable with criticism that proceeds from ill will or malicious intent. However, while they will give due consideration to all criticism, favorable and unfavorable, they do not allow negative criticism to become a weight around their necks, crippling their initiative and driving them into depression. They must seek to benefit from all criticisms leveled at them and they endeavor to be obedient to the heavenly vision.

Good leaders will need to be aware that their calling originates in God who gifts them for the work they have to do. They will seek to develop and refine their gifts through education and training. Then, they will apply them to the best possible use as opportunities allow.



Needless to say, we are speaking of godly leaders, persons who experience a vibrant relationship with God. Such persons have been formed in the faith and they keep on having transformative encounters with God as they seek to grow daily in faithful living. For this reason, they have a close bond with God and with a worshipping community and, through their work, people see the rich evidence of the ways in which religious faith and commitment positively affect harmonious life in productive communities.

Religious persons who do not have a sense of a divine call to be leaders are likely to find it hard to experience the enthusiasm and motivation they need to carry out their duties with courage and zeal. Instead, they are likely to frequently experience stressful days and nights with frustration as their constant companion.

The conviction that your service as a leader is in keeping with God's will for your life is an invaluable ally of all who exercise effective leadership in challenging contexts. One reason for this is that those who serve with religious conviction may enjoy the confident conviction that God is with them in all that they face. As they serve, they sense that they are accompanied in an unfailing way by the divine presence and enabling of the omnipotent one.

Leadership and Vision

If true leaders are seen as workers together with, and for, God, the horizons of effective leadership are not limited to the dimensions of life that are bordered by the senses. The leader is an inspired person – listening to God and hearing from God, seeing what God is making known and experiencing the willingness to work toward its realization. The leader also listens keenly to those whom he or she



leads and exercises a deep and abiding respect for their hopes, dreams and aspirations.

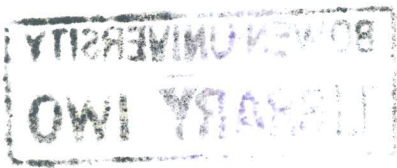
The vision of the effective leader is not tied merely to the narrow local setting. The leader is capable of seeing the wider context and the big picture. The leader is alert to what God is doing in the world and is constantly in search of the effective ways of exercise the sort of leadership that will contribute to human welfare.

Capable of discerning the signs of the times, wise leaders are people who are given to continuous education. As a result, they are conversant with relevant trends, aware of the methods being employed by people engaged in similar work, and ready to creatively apply themselves to developing overall dreams and goals which reflect a deep and abiding respect for the specific peculiarities of their context.

Such leaders must find effective ways to communicate to all stakeholders the vision they have for the work in which they are involved. They must also be willing to submit this vision to a process of discernment by partners in the enterprise that they seek to lead so that, on the basis of a common discernment, those charged with the planning process may proceed confidently believing that the course they are taking is the best option for the particular situation in which they serve and that it will inure to the betterment of all concerned.

Leadership and Integrity

One of the treasures of creation is that human beings are given both freedom and obligation. In an amazing display of the mystery of divine sovereignty, God has voluntarily given the gift of free will to



all human beings. In the exercise of this free will, however, human beings are held accountable to their Maker. Integrity is the glue that holds freedom and obligation together. And it is integrity that nourishes and sustains our accountability to God and to those with whom, and for whose sakes, we serve. When integrity is lacking, this accountability is threatened.

Many are the threats to the exercise of integrity by persons chosen to serve as leaders. One is the tendency to believe that, having been placed in a position of leadership, we have arrived at a stage where we are not accountable to those who are responsible for according us the position we hold. Leaders who possess an oversized ego that leads them to believe they are little untouchable gods are likely to cause harm wherever they serve. They are likely to pervert the course of justice because they believe they do not have to follow the rules that apply in the case of those they come to regard as ordinary people - their subjects. They set out to make their time of service a period marked by material acquisitiveness and self-aggrandizement. They surround themselves with persons who have no moral scruples. These are persons who respond to every whim and fancy of their leaders as long as they are assured that, in exchange for their unwavering and unethical loyalty, they will receive financial, honorific, and other benefits. The result is that those who exercise leadership are self-serving, dishonoring of trust, and have a destabilizing influence on the group, institution or nation they lead.

Another challenge to the practice of integrity that leaders face is the consuming attraction of populism. Some leaders are likely to possess an overabundance of concern to curry people's favor. It is praiseworthy that leaders should respect the values and concerns



of those with whom, and in whose service, they live and work. However, crippling enslavement to a desire for human approval and terrifying despair at human approval have deleterious consequences on all who are led by a person with those qualities. Furthermore, these qualities will incline a leader to serve without integrity.

We must never pander to human approval nor focus on avoiding mere human disapproval. The capacity to live with, and to preserve, one's integrity rests on the bedrock of acknowledged accountability to God to whom all human beings are ultimately accountable and to those who place us in positions of leadership. When we keep constantly in mind the fact of God's omniscient and impeccable judgment, we are assured that God is in possession of all the facts related to the situations we encounter. Furthermore, God has the unquestioned ability to interpret properly exactly what is happening. To live and to lead with integrity, one needs to conduct oneself with the knowledge that God is the ultimate judge of all. Divine integrity becomes normative for our way of living and our style of leadership. Excellence with godliness will always require leadership with integrity.

Those who lead with integrity adhere to sound moral principles in the way they conduct themselves. They are fair and honest in their dealings. Their rectitude in matters of personal morality and their probity in matters of public morality not only provide a model for those whom they lead; these also provide inspiration for all who pay attention to what they do.

There is no deceit and duplicity to be found in persons of integrity. There is consistency between their claims, their values, their actions, and their methods. Their character is resplendent with honesty, soundness, and wholeness.



Leadership and Servanthood

Effective leaders who are formed for excellence and godliness are persons who regard themselves as servants – servants of God and servants of the people.

As servants of God, they know who it is that commissions them and they know to whom they are ultimately accountable. Within the Christian religion, did not Jesus make it plain that servants of God are not people who lord it over others? Leaders do not experience the need to always be in a position to exert control over others. They know themselves to be servants. They are at home serving alongside others in the solidarity of loyalty to God.

Effective leaders know that, as servants, they are stewards. They know that they are entrusted with authority and responsibility for a period of time and they understand that they are answerable to others and to God for the way they exercise leadership. In all that they do, in every area of their engagement, they know themselves to be servants on mission, and servants who are accountable. They are not ultimately in charge of the group, the movement or the institution that they lead!

Effective leaders also affirm that they are servants of, and with, one another. They also agree that they are servants who are accountable to one another. They serve alongside other people, many of whom are also leaders in their own right. Although they are chosen to exercise oversight in a particular sphere, there are also other leaders alongside whom one's leadership is exercised. There is a certain collegial dimension to the exercise of leadership. It is very important to affirm this dimension of leadership - the collegial aspect.



Let me make this point another way. A leader must not reckon himself or herself as the only leader in the context of their service. There are other leaders as well. In the way we relate to others among whom we serve, we must never forget that we are often among fellow leaders whose sphere of engagement or focus of activity is different from ours, but whose responsibility to exercise leadership is beyond dispute.

But leaders do not only serve among other leaders. They also serve alongside those who should be able to follow where they lead. When true leadership is practiced, those whom leaders serve are able to recognize and affirm the leadership that is being offered. This is because the leadership that is given comes to be regarded, not merely as a privilege accorded to the person called into service, but really as a gift to the community as a whole.

It is very important to be clear about the relationship between leaders and those whom they lead. They both need each other. The one cannot do without the other. They need each other for the effective performance of the work the community needs to get done. Leaders and followers are to exercise a mutual accountability. This lateral accountability is neither to be minimized nor overlooked; it should be consistent with the vertical accountability that exists.

Good leaders understand themselves to be servants. They are not caught up with their own self-importance; nor are they concerned with self promotion. Instead, they are persons who are totally devoted to the will of God and the welfare of the community.

The leader is no self-serving, applause-seeking enthusiast who energetically attempts to extract self-glory from his or her toil. Nor does the leader work to snatch personal praise for all that



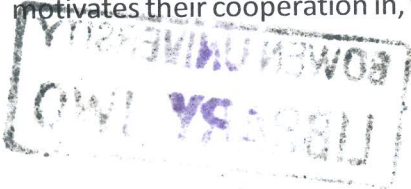
happens in an organization. Instead, the effective leader is a committed team player who values the persons and contributions of all those who have some part in the work to be done.

The leader should be more concerned about cooperating with other team players than in exercising control over them. The leader recognizes and respects other team members and is concerned about partnering, helping to nurture, care for, support, and encourage other team members who share in the mission that God has entrusted to them. Leaders are consumed by a passion for the nurture and fulfillment of those with whom they share in the delivery of service. They are committed to conscientious participation with others in the work they are chosen to do.

Conclusion

As we said before, there is a crisis of leadership in our world today. There are too many leaders who are hungry for power and glory. The current leadership crisis offers an opportunity. Because of this, rather than spending time to lament that the crisis exists, we should reflect on the remarkable opportunity that is now available.

The world desperately needs leaders who are gifted, committed, and responsible. Responsible stewardship requires of a leader a certain set of gifts. The leader needs to be able to envision a desirable future for a group, to mobilize for the adoption of a vision by the group, understanding the vital importance of the specific context and its situational variables. The leader recognizes the contribution of both fellow leaders and followers to the development and realization of the vision on which there is agreement. The leader also values and stimulates the people's convergence on, and motivates their cooperation in, what would constitute an appropriate



modus by which the vision should be pursued, including the empowerment of those who in whose interest the leader serves.

Recently, Kate Coleman wrote a book entitled "**7 Deadly Sins of Women in Leadership: Overcome Self-Defeating Behaviour in Work & Ministry**" (Birmingham, UK: Next Leadership, 2010). The "sins" Coleman identifies are as applicable to women as they are to men in leadership and in this lecture we have referred to some of them. Coleman's full list is as follows: Limiting Self Perceptions; Failure to Establish Appropriate Boundaries; Inadequate Personal Vision; An Unhealthy Work-Life Rhythm; Being Everybody's Friend and Nobody's Leader; Colluding and not Confronting; and Neglect in Family Matters.

Those who are called to positions of leadership are entrusted with an onerous responsibility. In the providence of God, they benefit from divinely-received gifts, the opportunity given them to be formed for leadership, and the cooperation of their collaborators and potential beneficiaries. Yet, they do not have to depend on themselves alone. They can receive divinely-given empowerment to be the visionary, disciplined, honest, humble, courageous leaders that the world needs today.

