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# EXPLORING CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN PARACHURCH ORGANISATIONS IN LESOTHO

## ABSTRACT

*The article explores authentic Christian leadership, as it applies to workplaces of parachurch organisations in Lesotho. The leadership of parachurch organisations have a responsibility to transform society through the influence they can exert on their employees. A qualitative methodology was used that involved interviews with ten chief executive officers and ten focus-group interviews from ten parachurch institutions based in the Maseru district, Lesotho. The theoretical framework and empirical analysis propose a leadership strategy that pays attention to servant leadership and team leadership that peruse an open and inclusive communication strategy. The empirical analysis indicates that leadership, through a competent and ethical example, is an essential dimension of authentic leadership in the workplace. Christians holding leadership positions in parachurch organisations must have strong intentions if they hope to influence and impact on the workplace for God and become the answer to the problems facing Lesotho.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**Everywhere people talk about leadership – whether positively or negatively.**

The remarkable expansion of Christianity in Africa in the context of massive social challenges has created unprecedented opportunities for leadership by Christians (Priest 2017:1).

This suggests that leadership is important in both human circles and society. In a way, we cannot make any meaningful and constructive progress in life without leadership. Without leadership in all spheres of life, there is a loss of direction. We need leadership in politics, the church, business organisations, companies, schools, industries, war, sports and, of course, in parachurch organisations as a workplace. God is also seeking leaders:

> I sought for a man among them who would make a wall and stand in the gap before me on behalf of the land, that, I should not destroy it, but found no one (Ezek. 22:30).

Leadership, and especially good leadership, is an important component of social life.

The aim of this article is to focus on and explore the role of authentic Christian leadership in parachurch organisations as specific workplaces in Lesotho. It starts with a description of leadership and then discusses the dimensions and challenges of Christian leadership. The second section of the article refers to the empirical research done in parachurch organisations as workplaces in Lesotho. The article concludes with a few critical remarks on Christian leadership in Lesotho.

## 2.  A DESCRIPTION OF LEADERSHIP AND CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

> Leadership is social influence. It means leaving a mark. It is initiating and guiding, and the result is change. The product is a new character or direction that otherwise would never be. By their ideas and deeds, leaders show the way and influence the behaviour of others (Manning & Curtis 2009:2).

There is an ongoing debate on whether leaders are born or made. For Khoza (2012:3),

> leaders are not just born to the role. They are born, then made and sometimes unmade by their own actions.

Khoza (2012:3-4) warns that leaders must lead with their eyes open, ears alert and brains fully functioning. Leaders must always strive for relevance in a given context. Leaders who are not in tune with the followership will become leaders in limbo and not leading.

What is the difference between leadership and "Christian leadership" as a specific type of leadership?[1] Regarding the definition of Christian leadership, D'Souza (1999:13) comments: "Leadership focuses on purpose." For Christian leaders, our purpose means pursuing the same goal that Jesus pursued; helping people to become all that they can become under God. The major difference between general leadership and Christian leadership is that the latter is centred on God and seeks to glorify him in all its formats. While general leadership may be concerned with doing the right things, Christian leadership seeks to promote godly values among people (see Resane 2014). Over and above all, Christian leadership is a call and appointment from God, not from men (Sanders 2005:19). It is all about serving others rather than the self (Ikenye 2010; Wheeler 2012). The next section discusses the qualities or marks of Christian leaders in more detail.

# 3. DIMENSIONS OF AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

In the preceding section, Christian leaders were described as servants of God and human beings in their rightful context, in this instance the parachurch organisations. This quality calls for humility and no one can serve, unless s/he submits her-/himself to the ones they serve (see Mk 10).

> Servant leadership through service brings order and meaning to employees and when they feel order and meaning that they are part of a team, their energy explodes and great things happen in their advantage and in their employers' advantage too (Mulongo 2016:247).

Leaders should treat their employees as though they were fellow leaders or members of the leadership team. The employees are not inferior to the leaders and the leaders should view themselves as enablers, people who empower their followers and equip them so that they too may become servant leaders (see Van Zyl 2016; Hendriks 2017:163-167). What would be the marks or qualities of Christian leaders?

Leadership has various dimensions (see Ngaruiya 2017:33-38). As theoretical framework for this article, we focus on three dimensions of leadership: strategic leadership (strategies and direction associated with leadership); leadership through example (the way in which a leader sets an example for his/her followers), and a caring style of leadership.

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1     The term "Christian leadership" can refer not only to pastors, Christian workers or church workers, but also to other Christians who hold leadership positions and work in secular settings.

## 3.1    Strategic leadership

Strategic leadership focuses on *vision*. Ekman (2003:17) views vision as so important that he writes, "consequently, all spiritual work needs to start with a vision. Having a vision is the alpha and omega of everything we do". It is said that, if you do not know where you are going, every road will take you there. Or, as Rosset (1999:vii) puts it: "If you do not know where you are going, any place will do." This further emphasises the importance of having a vision as a Christian leader, or any leader for that matter. According to Ekman, a vision represents our ultimate destiny, a place of hope and comfort. For a true and authentic leader with a passion and clear purpose of ministry, this cannot be more fitting. In the words of Haggai (2009:30): "Leadership begins when a vision emerges … A company unhitched from a clear vision is a company doomed to fail." Vision, therefore, ranks high as one of the marks of authentic Christian leadership in a workplace. A good leader must know where s/he is taking the organisation. As with a dream, not much happens without a vision (Maxwell 1999). Vision inspires hope and obedience and awakens courage (Stiles 2004). Engstrom (1976:20) adds: "Christian leadership demands vision. The Christian leader must have both foresight and insight." He further claims that vision includes optimism and hope and that it imparts venturesomeness.

An important aspect of strategic leadership is the focus on *solutions*. According to Hybels (1987:37), visionary people are solution oriented, not problem oriented and they are very hard to get. One good character trait of effective leadership is the ability to find solutions to problems. Life is full of problems or, to use the language currently in fashion, life is full of challenges. People naturally view their leaders as agents of change who should improve their lives, whether in business, politics, the church, or family. True leaders help their people overcome and not necessarily solve their problems for them (Flanagan & Finger 2003:447). Effective Christian leaders must not necessarily solve problems for their people, but rather equip them with skills to confront their life challenges. Eikenberry (2007:98) emphasises the fact that leaders are supposed to be problem solvers, and he remarks, "Problems are one of the reasons leaders have jobs". This was also expressed explicitly in the survey we undertook as part of this piece of work. Both focus groups and individual institutional leaders made reference to the fact that leadership is generally understood to be there to solve problems. Eims (1984:95-99) argues that problem-solving is all about making the right decisions in the process of leading people. For him, problem-solving takes understanding the problem itself, listening before answering, and then involving advisors to share in suggesting an answer to an issue at hand. This would be followed by waiting on God and then

making the necessary decision. Eims admits that problem-solving is not an easy thing at all. The same sentiment is shared by Engstrom (1976:22), who emphasises that problem-solving is a process. Gibbs (2005:168, 122-123) encourages leaders never to try to solve problems on their own or make huge decisions without involving other people: "Leaders who insist on making decisions in isolation make themselves overly vulnerable and end up shouldering unnecessary burdens."

## 3.2  Leadership through example

Personal integrity, self-discipline and commitment are important aspects of the example that a leader sets. Honesty is an important part of the *integrity* of Christian leadership. According to Hybels (1987:8), integrity is not the same as reputation, which merely tells us what other people think of us. It is not the same as success or achievement. According to *TouchPoints for Leaders* (Stiles 2004:142), integrity means living a life that is consistent in belief and behaviour, in words and deeds. Any leader who wants to impact lives had better start by living a life of integrity. Character is not what we have done, but who we are in private and in public. We are told that integrity is the world's most pressing need. In the context of a workplace, personal integrity will earn respect and followership for a leader. This is how Hutchcraft (1996:78) relates the subject to Christian youth leaders:

> In a sense, the character of an adult who can shepherd young people is summed up in one shining word – *integrity*. When I hear it, I think of one of the few concepts I remember from Math class – an integer … one whole number. When you are a leader with integrity, there is only *one you*.

Scazzero (2015:220) talks of integrity as something that helps people lead honest and transparent lives in their relationships with those with whom they are in conflict. Talking about the utmost importance of integrity, Billy Graham was once quoted as saying: "When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost." We cannot emphasise the need for personal integrity enough for any leader. According to Flanagan and Finger (2003:10), personal integrity is all about practising what one preaches and walking the talk:

> If you tell your staff to do as you tell them to do, they won't listen if your own actions are different from your words. They'll do as you do or they will do as they want.

*Self-discipline* is self-control, the ability to manage oneself. All leaders must have this quality at the beginning of their career. Before we can

conquer the world, we must conquer the self. Sanders (2005:65) claims that, without discipline, all other gifts remain dwarfs and cannot grow:

> A leader is a person who has learned to obey a discipline imposed from without, and has taken on a more rigorous discipline from within … Many who aspire leadership fail because they have never learned to follow.

In the workplace, where a leader is in charge of people from different backgrounds, including those who know nothing about God or Christianity, only self-discipline will help the leader lead effectively. To show how critical self-discipline or self-control is in a workplace, Haggai (2009:104) adds:

> Self-control matters to leaders. Without it, the leader diminishes his effectiveness and loses the respect of his followers. With it, people view him as one who has admirable determination and strength.

Self-discipline, therefore, is one of the key qualities for any person to lead authentically. Self-mastering before taking charge of others is crucial in workplace spirituality. Hybels (1987:24) claims that discipline is a key role in developing every area of life. For him, self-discipline to a leader is nothing but deliberate delayed gratification. This should not be understood as bondage, however. As Engstrom (1976:202) puts it:

> Self-discipline does not box us in. Rather, it frees us to accomplish more with what God has given us. It also provides us with a better feeling about ourselves because of our accomplishments.

For a leader, *commitment* is self-giving. It is about accepting to willingly go the extra mile by doing something good, which could sometimes even be costly. In this context, commitment means continuing without being forced. Engstrom (1976:199) introduces a chapter on Marks of a Christian Leader with these words: "The Christian leader never equates mediocrity with the things of God but is always committed to pursuit of excellence". No one can lead without commitment, because there are always new challenges and temptations on the way. From most of the interviews and focus-group discussions, in a workplace setting, true commitment inspires and attracts people. When employees notice the commitment of their leader, they too automatically become committed to the tasks they are doing. According to Maxwell (1999:18-19), however, commitment means different things in different contexts and to different people:

> to the marathoner, it is running another ten miles when your strength is gone, to the missionary, it is saying good-bye to your own comfort

> to make life better for others, to the leader, it is all that and more
> because everyone you lead is depending on you.

Warren (2002:260) takes leaders to be dedicated servants who do everything wholeheartedly for the sake of their followers. Commitment is a hallmark of authentic leadership.

# 3.3    A caring leadership style

Encouragement and caring are important aspects of an influential leadership style. We have never heard of any person who does not need encouragement in life. All people want to be loved and cared for. According to *Touchpoints for Leaders* (Stiles 2004:48), leaders are to bear people in mind, not simply their productivity. All people have a deep desire to be told that they are good or that they have done something well. In Christian leadership, encouragement is not optional. This is how Blanchard and Hodges (2003:102) express it:

> We do the best we can – we plan, we strategize, we act – but still we
> all need some outside information to help us see how we're doing.

This is how important encouragement is in life. The interviews and focus-group discussions we had with some institutions made it very clear that "employees follow leaders or employers who encourage them, who tell them that they can be better". In the workplace, it is the duty and responsibility of the Christian leader to strengthen all staff through words and acts of affirmation. This results in confident and motivated workers. Saer's (2010:108) perspective is that, as the leader cares for his people, they will, in turn, care for him. Encouragement should be coupled with caring for other people and a concern for them. Manning and Curtis (2009:31) admonish:

> The leader must be sincerely and deeply concerned about the
> welfare of people … The caring leader never tears down, belittles, or
> diminishes people.

Donahue (1996:148) adds that

> real encouragement requires active listening … as you listen
> carefully, you will be able to bring words of encouragement and
> comfort and hope.

In the same breath, Donahue reminds us that "caring is part of the role of being a shepherd". He claims that "God expects us to give the kind of care that He Himself would give to His flock".

The above dimensions of Christian leadership are important, but the claim is not that these selected dimensions are the only or even the best. There is no doubt that applying these dimensions to leaders' life will make a difference wherever such leaders are. They will be respected by both their employees and their colleagues. In the next section, the discussion focuses on some of the challenges faced by Christian leaders, be it in the workplace, the church, the family, or in society as a whole.

## 4. CHALLENGES FACING AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN LEADERS

Commenting on the challenges of Christian leadership, Sanders (2005:199) voices the following opinion:

> The perils of spiritual leadership are especially subtle, more so than for other callings. The leader is not immune from temptations of the flesh. But the greater dangers are in the realm of spirit, for the enemy Satan never fails to exploit the advantage in any area of weakness.

Needless to say, leadership is a position of honour and high status in society, or even in the church for that matter. Revered as it may be, a leadership position is full of its own challenges, perils and pitfalls. People have weaknesses, which they must keep fighting. They have even greater temptations, which they must overcome. Life is not always easy, especially for Christian leaders. It is said that the higher you go, the cooler it becomes. It is indeed lonely at the top. Leaders need to be aware of this fact and prepare for it (Sanders 2005:118). Listed below are some of the most common perils facing Christian leaders of our time.[2]

## 4.1    Pride

Pride is defined as the belief that one is superior to others, even to the extent of regarding others with contempt, as if they were unworthy of any relation or interaction. Pride involves the basic thought, "I am better than you are". Sanders (2005:155) tells us that this attitude usually grips leaders when they rise in positions. Stiles (2004:185) further indicates that pride can blind a Christian leader to his/her vulnerability to temptation and lead him/her to repeat the sins of the past. Other biblical synonyms for pride are arrogance, insolence, boastfulness, being stiff-necked, and haughtiness. These aspects of pride completely fill us and lead us away from our loving

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2    Some of these challenges were explicitly confirmed by the survey which was conducted among ten institutions in Lesotho, where employees and CEOs were interviewed.

God, because they restrict the flow of his character in our lives and inhibit goodness from going through us to others. More often than not, the evil one has used pride to overthrow leaders from their positions of leadership and honour. While they may still occupy leadership positions, they are no longer accepted or respected, nor are they effective as Christian leaders. Pride has toppled them and brought them to an end. The Bible is unequivocally clear in Proverbs 16:18 that "pride goes before destruction and haughtiness before a fall". Engstrom (1976:100) puts it plainly:

> [P]ride turns to egotism when we magnify ourselves to the point at which we have no place for the other person.

In a workplace setting, leaders' pride takes them away from their colleagues. It separates friends (see Proverbs 16:18) and pride may be a hindrance in the path of present-day Christian leaders in workplaces; when leaders experience success in ministry, they may develop pride.

## 4.2    Power

In the context of this study, power refers to the influence over people and circumstances that individuals encounter. These individuals are, as a rule, in leadership positions. They have authority over a group of people through organisations and companies. In the workplace, they could be line managers, company directors, or section leaders with scores of people under them. In its neutral state, power is not bad. It is there to ensure co-ordination, and harmony, as well as smooth communication and operation. In our survey leading to the writing of this article, the majority of the focus-group discussions pointed to the abuse of power as one of the perils of workplace leaders in Lesotho. It was clear from the interviews with company leaders that workplace leaders have to guard against the wrong use of power in order to be successful. According to Ekman (2003:77), power corrupts if it is mishandled.

Currently, especially in African politics, many leaders are accused of corruption and power abuse. Some have even killed many innocent people, due to this negative thirst for power. Many presidents and government ministers have left their countries extremely poor and have enriched themselves out of greed and the incorrect use of power. Church leaders have not been exceptions in this plight. Engstrom (1976:75) argues that unchecked power is dangerous, as it corrupts absolutely, and those who are naturally weak leaders use it to oppress their followers. Many are accused of misusing power for self-enrichment. Power has driven many Christian leaders out of their ministries. In the workplace, stories are published from time to time about the abuse of power by leaders, even

Christian leaders. The misuse of power has led many Christian leaders in workplaces to other forms of sin such as sexual immorality, theft, bribery, and favouritism. These unfortunate stories appear in the newspapers from time to time, internationally and especially in Africa.

## 4.3    Popularity and fame

Sanders (2005) opens the discussion on this subject with the following rhetorical question:

> What leader or preacher does not desire to be liked by his people? …
> Being disliked is no virtue, but popularity can have too high a price.

Nowadays, popularity and fame are two of the most common enemies of Christian leaders in both the church and the marketplace. The world has infected God's people with a deep desire to be better than others. Engstrom (1976:100) argues that popularity can affect a leader's performance. According to him, the leader's feelings of infallibility and indispensability can reduce his effectiveness. In this instance, we realise that popularity and fame, like power, can corrupt a person. Many in the church would do everything possible to ensure that they are liked more than their fellow pastors. Yet the Bible is clear about being liked and praised by people: "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you," Jesus warned (Luke 6:23). Our survey in the ten parachurch organisations in Lesotho indicated that the desire for recognition and popularity among Christian leaders has caused unhealthy competition. It has reduced their desire to support and help one another as leaders. It has moved many pastors from the right focus, ministry, to the wrong focus, pursuing mega churches and congregations. Talking of travelling ministers, Yoder (2000:220) warns that some of them are in the ministry simply to get fame and honour, which they would not get otherwise.

## 4.4    Infidelity

Infidelity is currently a serious problem in Christian circles. Our survey conducted among workplace leaders and their employees quotes infidelity as one of the biggest temptations facing Christian leaders in both the church and the workplace. Increasingly, great men and women of God fall into the snare of sexual immorality. It seems that it has become the sharpest weapon in Satan's hands. Pastors and preachers fall into the sin of adultery, and their ministries lose credibility. Addressing travelling ministers, Yoder (2000:218) strongly cautions Christian leaders and urges them to be careful about their interactions with members of the opposite sex. He advises that,

as a traveling minister, taking precautions in dealing with members of the opposite sex can help you avoid potential embarrassment and help safeguard your marriage and ministry.

Yoder suggests some policies as guidelines for Christian workers' conduct, including the following:

do not indulge in off-color stories, be careful what you watch on television in the hotel room, avoid any form of pornography, do not get in compromising situations with people of the opposite sex, do not emotionally [get] involved with people of the opposite sex.

While these may seem too dogmatic and restrictive, at the end of the day they are a great help to Christian leaders.

The world behaves as if life is all about sex and, unfortunately, this becomes a serious trap for many Christian leaders. The mass media aim to glorify sex, even beyond the boundaries. According to Ekman (2003:91),

[e]verything is sold with the help of naked skin. You can hardly go anywhere, look or read anything without soon coming into contact with naked thighs and breasts. Men especially find it difficult, because they are faced with so many sexual attractions wherever they go. The world has become sexually unsafe for those who fear God and are determined to live holy and pure lives.

In his book entitled *Seven snares of the enemy: Breaking free from the devil's grip*, Lutzer (2002:5-8) lists greed, gambling, alcoholism, pornography, sexual affair, the search for pleasure, and occultism as great enemies of servants of God. He calls them the most common snares that every believer needs to guard against.

## 4.5    Money

Jesus once said that with money we can do everything. This means that, on its own, money is neutral or even a good thing which everyone needs. Unfortunately, money has currently become one of the strongest temptations for workplace Christian leaders. Our survey conducted in the ten organisations and government ministries indicated that money has become a focus in many churches and Christian ministries. Christian leaders are often tempted by money and the possession of, or desire for worldly goods. From time to time, we hear of Christian leaders who have stolen funds from their churches. Money or riches are a trap of which leaders need to be aware throughout their lives and ministry. Addressing travelling ministers, Yoder (2000:217) openly mentions that "the temptation for some traveling ministers is to do certain unethical things that will bring

more money to them". This is so true at present. Many tele-evangelists present fake miracles, in order to attract people who give them money. Money is such a snare to Christian leaders and many are trapped by it and fall into all forms of sin. Lutzer (2002) spent two entire chapters on issues of money and ministry in his book entitled *Seven snares of the enemy: Breaking free from the devil's grip*. He took his time to write about greed and gambling as snares involving money and as snares that the devil uses to grip many Christian leaders.

## 4.6    The challenges – In conclusion

In conclusion, it must be noted that leadership is a call from God and, as such, those who are in leadership positions must rely on him for everything they do. They must involve him in all their plans, if they hope to be men and women of influence who will make a difference in their workplaces and communities. Demanding as it is, leadership gives such joy when those who journeyed with you are doing well in life, and those who, through your own exemplary lifestyle, have become better citizens. As reflected in several places in this section, the best way to lead is to serve, a real challenging task for modern-day Christian leaders. Adeyemo (1993) warns that Africa is often thrown into dire poverty by its own leaders who fail to be servants but focus on themselves and their relations at the expense of everyone else. These political and church leaders are only interested in themselves and their own families. In Mark 10, Jesus mentions that it must be different with Christian leaders. They are called to be servants of their people wherever they are and at all times.

## 5.  PARACHURCH ORGANISATIONS IN LESOTHO

It this section, we define and discuss the concept of "parachurch movements", in order to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon. According to Stiles (2004), parachurch organisations are religious organisations that do not operate under the auspices of a particular faith tradition. In the context of the broader Christian church, a parachurch organisation (also called faith-based organisation) can allow Christians from different denominations to come together in pursuit of a common objective. The organisation is not accountable to any one denomination, is free to function within the parameters of its own constitution and has to report only to the members of the organisation for any actions taken.

A number of churches have produced very strong members for different parachurch organisations, and these members are now witnessing in their workplaces such as schools, colleges, universities, government

departments, and NGOs. All Christians working in the marketplace or in the secular world have opportunities to share their faith with those around them. According to McCann (2001:1-6), this can be done strategically through conversational interactions with colleagues and friends. He maintains that relationships and communication play a critical role in influencing others around you at work, whether you are the manager or an employee.

In the context of Lesotho,[3] parachurch organisations such as Scripture Union, Youth for Christ, Youth with a Mission, and Jesus Generation Movement consider themselves specialised arms of the local church. They carry out the church mission in specific and strategic areas where the church does not have full access. Schools and campuses are good examples of these areas. Table 1 lists the parachurch organisations that were purposefully selected for this research. It also mentions the focus and target ministry of each parachurch organisation.

**Table 1:**　　Missions and Christian parachurch organisations/ministries in Lesotho

| Parachurch organisation | Year started | Main mission focus | Target group |
|---|---|---|---|
| Scripture Union (SUL) | 1981 | Evangelising and discipling in schools and colleges | Children, the youth, and adults |
| Youth For Christ (YFC) | 1985 | Reaching out to young people in communities and churches | The youth |
| Youth with a Mission (YWAM) | 1987 | Developing discipleship and young adults | The youth |
| Life Ministry Lesotho (LML) (Campus Crusade for Christ) | 1979 | Lay training and seminars, outreach to tertiary institutions, and films about Jesus | Students and the youth |
| Africa Inland Mission (AIM) | 1986 | Supporting various Christian ministries and churches | Churches and shepherds |
| World Vision Lesotho | 1987 | Supporting and empowering communities for self-sustenance and supporting children with educational needs | Poor and vulnerable children |

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3　　The Kingdom of Lesotho is a landlocked country (surrounded by South Africa), with an estimated population of 1,876,633 people (51% women and 49% men); 77% live in rural areas, 58% of the population is under 19 years of age, and roughly 90% of the population is Christian (Roman Catholics 45%; Lesotho Evangelicals, 27%; Anglicans, 9%). Members of indigenous religious groups make up approximately 10% of the population (Information from Government of Lesotho National Strategic Plan 2016).

## 6. EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research as a methodology is concerned with understanding the processes and contexts that underlie social behaviour, focusing on meaning and interpretations, with the emphasis on the quality and depth of the information that is obtained (Nieuwenhuis 2009b:51). Individual interviews and focus-group interviews are used as data-gathering techniques. The study involved interviews with ten chief executive officers and ten focus-group interviews from ten institutions based in the Maseru district.[4] These areas of public service in the Kingdom of Lesotho are among the busiest, and thousands of people pass through them on a continuous basis. As such, the leaders and other employees of these parachurch organisations have strategic opportunities to exert their influence on their employees and the community.

An *interview* is a conversation with a participant, with the aim of obtaining descriptive data (Nieuwenhuis 2009c:87). The following semi-structured questions were used in the interviews:

- What is your definition of a leader?

- What is a Christian leader?

- To what extent do Christians holding leadership positions influence their workers with the gospel?

- To what extent would you say ordinary Christians as a whole (not leaders) have an impact in workplaces or even in society?

- How would workplaces be different if Christians holding leadership positions behaved as Christians?

- What can be done to increase the Christian influence of those in leadership in the workplace?

The ten leaders were interviewed because of their previous or current active relationship or involvement with selected parachurch Christian organisations. All of the leaders in the study hold tertiary education degrees and have an adequate amount of experience of Christian work.

The *focus-group interviews* provide space for group interaction and give a broader spectrum of responses,

> participants are able to build on each other's ideas and comments to provide an in-depth view not attainable from individual interviews (Nieuwenhuis 2009c:90).

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4    For the purposes of the research, the leaders, together with their institutions, were divided into five major categories: Christian organisations; Ministry of Education and Training; Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; Private sector, and non-governmental organisations.

The employees of each institution came together to form small groups. Ten focus groups were formed and a total of 66 persons participated in the group interviews.[5] Each focus group differed from the others quite significantly. In some companies and organisations, focus-group members were generally professional people who hold either diploma or degree certificates. In some instances, the groups consisted of a mixture of educated and less educated people. Focus-group members also came from different positions within their organisations and institutions. Some occupied managerial positions, while others were ordinary employees. Some came with considerable experience of what they were doing, while others were new in their positions. Some were married, while others were single or widowed. They also differed in terms of age.

The data from the individual interviews and focus-group interviews were transcribed and *coded*. A process of inductive coding was used by reading though the data; letting codes emerge from the data; attaching labels to the data, and identifying themes or categories (see Nieuwenhuis 2009a:107-110). The next step is to interpret and make sense of the data.

# 7. RESEARCH FINDINGS OF THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN PARACHURCH ORGANISATIONS

This section focuses on the results of the empirical work. What can be learned about authentic leadership in Lesotho? Leadership, identified as a theoretical framework, has at least three dimensions: strategic leadership; the exemplary aspect of leadership, and the caring style of leadership. These dimensions are used as framework to discuss the different themes or trends that were identified in conducting the empirical analysis. Appendix 1 provides a summary of the findings and trends that were identified.

## 7.1    Leadership strategy

The empirical analysis indicated that a preferred leadership strategy can be identified, including the following aspects: servant leadership, team leadership, and an inclusive strategy. We now discuss these themes in more detail.

## 7.1.1  Servant leader, not a boss

In Mpho's (a leader of institution 5) interview, it was suggested that a servant attitude by leaders would be the tool to influence employees for the better. According to L5 (Mpho),

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5    These six questions were used in both the focus-group interviews and the individual interviews.

> leadership is influence, ability to take people to a certain point, making a positive difference in a set up. A leader is a servant.

The example of Christ in Mark 10:45 has it all:

> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".

Leadership, especially Christian leadership, is about nothing else but servanthood, being relational. L1 indicated that it also involves sacrificing for those who are led.

The bossy attitude repels employees and constrains relationships. Similarly, as strongly perceived in our study, although many people in society like leadership positions, they do not always regard it as a place of serving, but rather as a place of status. This is a big departure from the Basotho culture, which clearly expresses that, in leading, we actually serve others – *Morena ke khetsi ea masepa* (a chief/leader is like a bag in which every sort of rubbish is thrown) (Lesitsi 1998:31). It is about looking out, not looking in. It is about ensuring that every employee in the workplace knows that his/her leader is there for them and their interest. We learn from the empirical information that authentic leadership is being like a caring shepherd to the sheep. We know that being a shepherd in a hostile world like ours is a dangerous thing. It is the riskiest of places to be in.

# 7.1.2  Team leadership

It was suggested that leaders must remember that leadership is shared, rather than coming from one person in any group of people. Leaders will have much influence on their staff if they involve them as they lead. Focus groups emphasised the need to consult others as one leads the organisation. This increases ownership of the company by all who are in it. Words such as teamwork, team spirit, team leader, team member and team itself are conventional in the present-day workforce. Everyone talks team, especially as it relates to the vision of an organisation and striving to hit targets.

This trend has been fairly obvious in this study. For example, in a heated focus-group discussion, one of the participants spoke with such passion about the importance of leading as a team in his definition of a true and authentic leader:

> A Christian leader … does not just expect his followers to do what he does not do. No, he shows the way. He actually leads with them. This is a man or woman who consults with his or her team. Involving others is second nature.

The truth of the matter is that, when a leader involves his/her employees in leading the organisation, s/he is actually empowering them and building them into responsible future leaders. In focus-group discussions, it became fairly explicit that a Christian leader who wants to have an impact on his team will share the leadership with others around him and, in so doing, empower the followers. The Basotho people have a very rich educational culture, which actually encourages traditional leaders to involve their subordinates in pursuing their visions – *noka e tlatsoa ke linokana* (a river is formed by several streams).

## 7.1.3  An open and inclusive strategy

One of the concepts that ran throughout our research, though not directly expressed, is that of "delegation". It has been expressed alongside mentoring, couching and empowering of employees for better results. Both focus groups and interviews of leaders defined good leadership in terms of delegation. A leader will have a better and effective influence on his/her staff if s/he gives them responsibilities and expects them to account. Delegation is also viewed as an indication of trust of the one to whom work is delegated. Leadership is a journey with people of different characters. To be a successful authentic leader in a workplace, one must develop people skills – delegating, communicating, motivating, influencing, resolving conflict, building teams, setting goals, and leading change. These skills need to be developed early in the leadership journey.

In a workplace situation, where leadership wants to have a positive influence, we are told that delegation is one of the major ways to create more than 24 hours in a day. If one does not delegate, one works oneself into an early grave. But the attributes of delegating include the fact that it forces a leader to stretch him-/herself. It allows him/her to focus on the areas where s/he makes the most difference. It simultaneously gives one an opportunity to use other people's talents.

Delegation alone is not enough in a workplace. It must always be coupled with feedback and encouragement. We learned from the empirical results that people want to know that they are doing something worthwhile, that their contribution is important, and that success is possible. A leader who gives feedback to employees periodically will have a better grip on influencing them, because feedback acts as a motivation to employees. They do not want to know at the end of the year that they have been performing poorly, as that leaves them no room to change.

It is clear from the focus groups and the interviews with institutional leaders that the concept of delegation in any work environment is

commendable. In our opinion, this phenomenon is truly lacking in many workplaces in Lesotho. Although there is so much talk about it, its practice is still at a minimum. In delegating responsibilities, one is communicating trust to the other person. Many Christian and non-Christian leaders often experience burnout, depression and stress, due to workloads, which they try to carry out alone, while they have scores of employees under them. It so happens, even in government offices, that there is inefficiency and ineffectiveness, simply because someone wants to do all the work alone at the expense of the public, who desperately needs services. Stories are told in Lesotho of directors who go to every international workshop because of benefits such as *per diem* associated with such trips. Their desire for shortcuts in becoming rich prevents them from delegating.

## 7.2    Leadership through example

The leadership style identified by the respondents should be interpreted against the leadership challenges discussed earlier. The challenges that pride, power and money pose should be answered through the example and lifestyle of the leadership. L10 made several suggestions on how to improve the influence of Christians holding leadership positions in the workplace, including the need to demonstrate the life they want to see in their workers, sharing their faith with the workers, living an exemplary lifestyle at all times, improving the quality of their own Christian lives, and showing patience where staff are slow to grasp things.

Throughout the research, leading by example appeared to be a problem for most of the leaders in the ten institutions at issue. Very few leaders did not have this as a challenge. In response to the question about the possible suggestions to increase the influence of authentic leadership in workplaces in Lesotho, several focus groups suggested that leaders should not only give orders of what needs to be done or how employees need to behave at work, but they must themselves demonstrate the same. Examples of punctuality and abusive language were given, complaining that some leaders are ever late at work and yet they are quick to reprimand staff for the same behaviour. Ironically, during the interviews with Christians holding leadership positions in different institutions, the same issue of exemplary lifestyle emerged. One of the leaders defined a leader as follows: "He treats them with kindness and sets examples for them".

The best way to lead is by example. This is, for example, demonstrated in the definition of leadership as "showing the way", "showing followers how to do something", "being in front", "demonstrating or modelling for others". Based on this definition of leadership, exemplary lifestyle is the best way to guide others. We would, therefore, like to consider this

concern, which both institutional leaders and focus groups raised, to be an authentic and genuine one. Workplace Christian leaders must lead the way by demonstrating the right thing to be followed. Leading through example will bring transformation in the workplace.

## 7.3    Leadership style

The third leadership dimension relates to the style of leadership and, in this regard, relationships, care, and open communication were themes identified by the respondents in the interviews and focus-group discussions.

## 7.3.1  Relationships

This is one of those issues that kept emerging from most of the discussions in the research. Both in the focus-group discussions and in the conversations as leaders were interviewed, it became clear that, without good relationships, it is difficult for a leader to influence the group or employees. In an interview with the researchers, one of the institutional leaders (Busi) mentioned that leaders could improve their influence and impact on their staff,

> [b]y building close and strong personal and friendly relationships with staff. By showing interest to staff welfare and caring for them as persons not only as workers.

Busi added that leaders need to be approachable. They need to wear an inviting face for employees to feel welcomed to come to them. Leaders need to relate with their staff on both work-related matters and personal issues. When this happens, it says to the staff, "I care for you as a person, not just for what you do for the institution". Focus groups 4, 5, 7 and 9 also indicated that there is a need for both formal and informal relationships between the leader and the employees. They emphasised that leaders must be approachable and relational to all employees. Staff would appreciate a friendly kind of relationship with their bosses. They would like their leaders to ask them about their family's welfare as a whole and certain relevant personal information.

There is also another side to relationships, because, even in the institutions led by Christians, the issue of relationships and humility is still a big challenge. In the secular world, it is not so surprising that there is an unfriendly relationship between the boss and the employees – not so with Christian leaders. There is an urgent need, therefore, for churches and parachurch Christian organisations to be aware of and include this fact in their foundational teachings and formation. Christ is to be our model when it comes to this.

## 7.3.2  Caring

Caring for employees in the workplace was one of the themes that ran throughout the whole research. Both the interviews with institutional leaders and the focus groups kept on raising this issue in various ways. All believed that it was the main element in defining an authentic Christian leader in a secular environment. In response to the question of staff care posed to the interviewees and the focus groups, many responded that

> a Christian leader is … a follower of Christ Jesus. He is committed to his staff. He uplifts them. He treats them with kindness and sets examples for them.

In other words, a Christian leader

> listens to his juniors, cares for them as individuals and tries to meet their needs (and) is always ready to sacrifice for his followers.

The challenge is to teach leaders how to show genuine concern for each person they lead.

> At the workplace, they embrace and instil Christian values in their employees. People are more important than work. They care for staff and are interested in their personal lives as well as their loved ones. They expect excellence from everyone (FG6S2).

They emphasise the importance of taking good care of every employee in a work situation if a lasting impact is to be realised. They tell us that effective leadership in the workplace is "putting people first", not the job first, and that employees are indispensable in any workplace. They must be a priority for any leader who wants to have a positive influence on his/her people.

## 7.3.3  Open communication

The focus groups cited this as one of the critical factors in good Christian leadership. They suggested that all leaders must invite and encourage open communication between themselves and their employees. The focus groups commented on the importance of communication between employees and leadership in the workplace:

> In that same understanding, therefore, we would suggest that the issue of communication between leadership and employees be revisited and ensured that it is good. This breaks any walls that could be there otherwise.

Where communication is poor between the leader and employees, the latter tend to speak behind their leader's back and promote gossips. This is very unhealthy for a workplace.

One would say that, like vision, communication is inseparable from influence. One cannot talk about influence in the field of leadership without highlighting communication, which itself is a vehicle for influence. Communication in a workplace should be more inviting, non-threatening, and open.

# 8.  CONCLUSION

This article explored and discussed authentic Christian leadership, especially as it applies to workplaces in parachurch organisations in Lesotho. It touched on the issues of the kind of influence and impact that people holding leadership positions in different workplaces in society must use in transforming the nation. Specific dimensions of authentic Christian leadership were discussed as well as the challenges that confront Christian leaders at all levels – in the church and in the market place. Parachurch organisations and Christians holding leadership positions in workplaces have a responsibility to transform society through the influence they can exert on their employees. Leaders must embrace the dimensions of authentic Christian leadership discussed in this article:

- The theoretical framework and empirical analysis propose a leadership strategy that pays attention to servant leadership and team leadership that peruse an open and inclusive communication strategy.

- Leadership through a competent and ethical example is an essential dimension of authentic leadership in the workplace. The example should answer the challenges that a leader faces in modern society.

- Leadership style is about having a good relationship, caring for the employees, and having open and transparent communication with them.

In conclusion, the following critical remarks could be made. Christians holding leadership positions may be pre-occupied with their professions and careers. The task of influencing and impacting on the workplace with the gospel as a way of life is not at the top of their list of priorities. Christian employees are not always interested in bringing their faith or their religious life into the workplace, especially through witnessing, even though they are not prohibited to do so. Christians holding leadership positions must have strong intentions, if they hope to influence and impact on the workplace

for God and become the answer to the problems facing Lesotho. Like salt that is useless until it comes out of the saltshaker, Christian leaders need to come out and influence their workplaces through their lifestyle and by proclaiming the gospel.

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# APPENDIX 1

## Summarised findings and trends based on the interview questions

| Interview question | Trends from individual leaders interviews | Trends from focus-group discussions |
|---|---|---|
| 1. What is a leader? | Someone with influence for God<br><br>A servant of people<br><br>One with a vision who leads others to it<br><br>One who spearheads others to a common goal<br><br>A good leader delegates tasks | Leads others to a common goal<br><br>Is exemplary to the group<br><br>Able to influence people<br><br>Has a clear vision and commitment<br><br>A problem-solver<br><br>A servant to those he leads<br><br>Leads with others<br><br>An encourager |
| 2. What is a Christian leader? | A servant for people<br><br>A role model/Example<br><br>S/he leads sacrificially, due to deep love for his/her people<br><br>Uses God's principles – humility, love, kindness, and so on<br><br>Empowers his/her followers | A servant<br><br>One with a Christ-like style of leading<br><br>One with a vision who leads in consultation with those he leads<br><br>S/he is a living and practical example of what s/he teaches – punctuality<br><br>Loves and cares for his/her people<br><br>Able to influence others effectively<br><br>Empowers/enables others<br><br>One with a humble attitude<br><br>Pursues excellence for God's glory<br><br>An encourager<br><br>Upholds Christian principles |
| 3. To what extent do leaders influence their teams with Christian faith? | Some managers do it during their daily morning devotions<br><br>Otherwise it is not popular | Generally, this does not happen, or it is not a priority<br><br>However, in places such as schools and mission centres, there is hardly any attempt to do so<br><br>It could be much better |
| 4. Do ordinary Christians normally influence their workplace with Christian values? | In many workplaces, this is not a popular thing<br><br>Very few | Many Christians are shy to share their faith at the workplace<br><br>Many are not good examples and cannot influence others<br><br>Some are involved in corruption exercises<br><br>Some hide their identity as Christians |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5. What can be expected in the workplace where Christians holding leadership positions have an impact? | Many would aim for excellence<br><br>High quality and quantity production<br><br>Relationships would be good<br><br>Good behaviour/discipline at work<br><br>The economy would grow significantly<br><br>Less corruption and no stealing | High-quality production<br><br>Reduced acts of corruption<br><br>Professional and honest accountability by all<br><br>Workplace would be peaceful and attractive<br><br>No more workplace gossips<br><br>Trust would be built and no nepotism at work |
| 6. How can Christians holding leadership positions improve their influence at the workplace? | Ensure good and clear communication<br><br>Aim for integrity<br><br>Lead by example<br><br>Regular evaluations/ refresher courses<br><br>Let God be the centre of their lives<br><br>Interact more with employees and delegate responsibilities | Care for staff – be supportive to all<br><br>Need to lead by example<br><br>Engage open communication with all staff<br><br>Develop peer review culture<br><br>Be approachable and relational to all staff<br><br>Deepen the relationship with God from time to time<br><br>Be involved in ongoing training |