



East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion

ejtr.eanso.org

Volume 6, Issue 1, 2023

Print ISSN: 2707-5362 | Online ISSN: 2707-5370

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-5370>

ENSO

EAST AFRICAN
NATURE &
SCIENCE
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

Biblical Foundation of Servant Leadership: An Inner-Textural Analysis of Mark 10:41-45

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtr.6.1.1212>

Date Published: **ABSTRACT**

15 May 2023

Keywords:

Servant Leadership,
Relational,
Ethical,
Toxic Leadership,
Egocentric,
Abusive.

Servant leadership is a holistic style of leadership where the leader engages with followers in a relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual manner. The leader empowers the followers and allows them to grow into what they can become. The leader develops the followers because of his or her altruistic and ethical orientation. The aim of the study was to understand the biblical foundation of servant leadership by analyzing Mark 10:41-45. Through the study of the text, it is reported that Jesus urged his disciples to be servants and to provide for the needs and well-being of their followers. The Gospel of Mark was set in a time when the Jews were under tremendous political and social upheaval. Like any people in the same predicaments, they began to yearn for a strong, political leader to save them from the tyranny of the Roman Empire, and the scripture had foretold of his coming. Instead, Jesus, a humble leader, came as a servant and a shepherd for all. The disciples did not understand the Messianic mission of Jesus. Mark used James and John to show how the struggle for earthly power is dominant in the world. In contrast, Jesus rejected the type of leadership because it is toxic. He rebuked the Pharisees and the Scribes for having seated themselves on the throne of Moses but failed to care for their people.

APA CITATION

Yengkopiong, J. P. (2023). Biblical Foundation of Servant Leadership: An Inner-Textural Analysis of Mark 10:41-45 *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion*, 6(1), 40-55. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtr.6.1.1212>

CHICAGO CITATION

Yengkopiong, Jada Pasquale. "Biblical Foundation of Servant Leadership: An Inner-Textural Analysis of Mark 10:41-45". *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion* 6 (1), 40-55. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajtr.6.1.1212>.

HARVARD CITATION

Yengkopiong, J. P. (2023) "Biblical Foundation of Servant Leadership: An Inner-Textural Analysis of Mark 10:41-45", *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion*, 6(1), pp. 40-55. doi: 10.37284/eajtr.6.1.1212.

IEEE CITATION

J. P. Yengkopiong, "Biblical Foundation of Servant Leadership: An Inner-Textural Analysis of Mark 10:41-45", *EAJTCR*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 40-55, May. 2023.

MLA CITATION

Yengkopiong, Jada Pasquale. "Biblical Foundation of Servant Leadership: An Inner-Textual Analysis of Mark 10:41-45". *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion*, Vol. 6, no. 1, May. 2023, pp. 40-55, doi:10.37284/eajtr.6.1.1212.

INTRODUCTION

The view of servant leadership has been around for some time, and its origin may be traced to Robert Greenleaf who proposed that a great leader is a servant to others (Greenleaf, 2002). Despite the considerable amount of work carried out to understand the effect of servant leaders in organizations and society, questions continue to arise as to *how* and *when* servant leaders can truly make positive contributions to their organizations and promote the effectiveness of their employees. Is there an example of such a leader in society? A recent study on servant leadership shows that leaders are characterized by their desire to serve and to care for the well-being of the followers whom they honestly serve (Mizzell & Huizinga, 2018). Other studies also show that servant leaders increase the effectiveness of their organizations by facilitating the work performance of employees, fostering their creativity, and encouraging organizational citizenship behaviours (Stollberger, Heras, Rofcanin, & Bosch, 2019).

It has been demonstrated that the central premise of servant leaders is their ability to foster the growth and well-being of their followers by satisfying their needs, and in doing so, they influence organizational outcomes (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018). And when the leaders provide this central premise, they turn the followers into servants, a process of trickling down servanthood (Stollberger, Heras, Rofcanin, & Bosch, 2019). The view of trickling-down leadership means that servant leaders are both servants and leaders at the same time, and they view serving the followers and being attentive to their needs as the main priority (Lythreath et al., 2021). In the process, the followers become servants, leading to a ripple effect of servanthood. Although serving and providing for the needs of the followers are ideal points of reference for the followers to emulate and learn

from, the question of *how* and *when* servant leaders make a positive contribution and increase the effectiveness of organizations in society appears to remain less clear.

Robert Greenleaf conceived the idea of servant leadership after reading *The Journey to the East*, a book by Hermann Hesse, which described a story of a group of men who were on a mythical journey. The central figure in the story, who accompanied the party as a servant, was Leo. On the journey, Leo did the menial chores, but he also sustained the group with his spirit and his song. The journey went on well until Leo mysteriously disappeared. Then the group fell into disarray, and the journey was abandoned. The group could not continue without Leo, the servant. The narrator, one in the party, after some years of wandering, found Leo and took him into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There, he discovered that Leo, whom he had known as a servant, was in fact, the head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble leader (Greenleaf, 2002). In this study, the aim was to examine the theology of the biblical text of Mark 10:41-45, which echoes the idea of servanthood. The text appears to answer the question of *how* and *when* servant leaders can influence the employees in their organizations, especially those leaders who manage Christian organizations. The text was supplemented with narratives from Matthew 20:20-28, Luke 22:24-27, John 13:3-10 and Isaiah 49:3, 5-6 because these texts have the common theme of servanthood.

THE METHOD OF THE STUDY

In this study, the biblical text of Mark 10:41-45 was examined to understand what Jesus Christ, two thousand years ago, intended his disciples to do and what the teaching means to leaders in Christian and secular organizations today. To validate the relevance of the text, a review of the current trends and understanding of servant leadership was made

(Ben-Hur & Jonsen, 2012; Lythreathise et al., 2021). Because Jesus told his disciples not to be like the Pharisees, who are considered models of toxic leaders, a review of toxic leadership (Cushman, 2020; Ortega, 2017) was also made so that it is easy to identify the type of leaders that Christian and secular organizations need to possess. Jesus commented on leadership and servanthood, and in Isaiah, God told the Jews that they were His servants, and through them, He would manifest His glory. The text of Mark 10:41-45 reads:

⁴¹When the other ten heard this, they began to feel indignant with James and John. ⁴²So Jesus called them all together and said, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority. ⁴³This, however, is not the way it is among you. If one of you wants to be great, you must be the servant of the rest; ⁴⁴and if one of you wants to be first, you must be the slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people”.

Analysis Procedures of The Text

The text of Mark 10:41-45 is examined to understand what it means in the context of Christian leadership in organizations. To do so, the text is examined in the context of the Jewish culture, religion, and socio-politics during Jesus’s time. The analysis is extrapolated to the present cultural, religious, and political aspects that the Universal Church finds itself in. Argumentative, social, and cultural textures are followed in the analysis as demonstrated in the work of Bell (2019) and Cushman (2020). And as Bell (2019) noted, the social and cultural texture analysis is a particularly hermeneutical approach because it calls for special attention to the dynamics of the world of the author and the original readers.

Mark 10:41-42 The Disciples Began to Feel Indignant with James and John

In Mark 10: 35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Jesus and asked him for his favour. They wanted to sit one at his right hand and the other at the left in his glory. In this conversation, socially and politically, the disciples expected Jesus to be a worldly king who would drive the Romans out of Israel (Ben-Hur & Jonsen, 2012), and therefore, they wanted to be elevated to a high political position. The ambition of James and John was in contrast to Jesus’s servant leadership, where the leaders are called to action in a flexible way (Bell, 2019). The other disciples were unhappy with the ambition of James and John, as they too wanted to be in the right and left hands of Jesus. This ambition must not be admitted into the Church.

Mark 10:43-44 Anyone who Wants to Be Great Must Be Your Servant and A Slave to All

In the context of this pericope, Jesus reminded the disciples of wanting to be leaders without providing for their followers. This was seen with the Pharisees and the Scribes, and the leaders of the Roman empire, who had given themselves titles and positions of leadership, but failed to provide for the welfare of the people.

Mark 10:45 The Son of Man Came Not to Be Served but To Serve

This verse reaffirms Jesus’s Messianic mission. Yet, the disciples did not understand it. Like the Pharisees, they wanted to be placed in a high authority when Jesus became the earthly king. The implication is that the Pharisees and the Scribes had a lot of coercive power, which elevated their social status, but they did not care for the welfare of the poor and the weak (Bell, 2019). Jesus rejected this type of leadership and showed himself as an example of how his followers should live. Jesus wanted the disciples and those who would come after them to not be like the Pharisees who

misunderstood organizational mission and therefore, misused their power.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of servant leadership suggests that the main goal of leaders is to serve the needs of their subordinates and that is viewed as a servant is a possible explanation for the leader's greatness (Adiguzel, Ozcinar, & Karadal, 2020; Greenleaf, 2002). In this context, the leader is seen to serve with the intent that those being served can grow as individuals and reach their highest potential. This is what Jesus Christ, two thousand years ago, wanted his disciples to perform, and today, it is a demand that leaders in Christian organizations become servants too. By being servants to others, the goals of the organizations are achieved, and in the long-term, through the development and well-being of the followers who, eventually mimic the leader's behaviour, they would prioritize the needs of others above their own (Ben-Hur & Jonsen, 2012; Chiniara & Bentein, 2018).

A popular approach to servant leadership (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008) proclaims the following dimensions of a servant leader: emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically (*Table 1*). These dimensions distinguish servant leaders from toxic leaders. For instance, even though servant leaders share some characteristics with toxic leaders such as communication, listening, and delegation, most characteristics of servant leaders are not necessarily present in toxic leaders (*Table 2*). The factors that are prevalent across toxic leaders (*Table 3*) are displayed when teams stop collaborating, communication breaks down, unreasonable goals are set, or excessive internal competition is encouraged (Ortega, 2017). At the individual level, toxic leadership occurs when people stop speaking up, encounter cultures of blame and passive

hostility, spread misinformation, lose trust in leadership, shift to individual agenda, and when average performance is rewarded through low levels of accountability (Singh, Dev, & Sengupt, 2017; Yavas, 2016).

The Characteristics of Servant Leaders and What These Mean to Organizations

The text in Mark 10: 41-45 means a lot to leaders in organizations and society, especially those leaders who lead Christian organizations such as universities, schools, parishes, hospitals, aged care centres, childcare centres, etcetera. In the text, Jesus urged his disciples to be servants first and leaders later. As Hall (2019) argued, the servant nature of the leaders must be real, not bestowed, not assumed, and not to be taken away. The implication of this argument is that leadership is bestowed upon a person who is by nature a servant, and that is what he or she is, deep within. The idea of servanthood by nature is an ideal proposition of servant leadership, but it appears to be less reflected in most Christian organizations, and it seems to be missing in most secular establishments (Mizzell & Huizing, 2018).

Today, most Christian organizations are managed by lay leaders than by the clergy. The management of these organizations by lay leaders is vital because the Church is the people. However, it also comes with some setbacks, as most of the lay leaders lack the theological knowledge that underpins the teaching of Christ and of the Church (Mizzell & Huizing, 2018). Moreover, this knowledge, if present, should be led by the *spirit*, as written in Luke 4:18: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, restore sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free". Yet, there are times when lay leaders in the Christian missions and most leaders in secular settings misunderstand or fail to buy into the ideals of servanthood (Worley, Harenberg, & Vosloo, 2020). But it is the servant nature of leaders

that Prophet Isaiah talked about (Isaiah 49:3, 5-6), and it is through servanthood that God's glory is manifested in the world. Therefore, in this context, God destines a man to an end which surpasses the capacities of his reason, and it is necessary that this end be known to him in order that he might direct his intention and his actions towards it (Torrell, 2006).

Jesus cautioned the disciples of the worldly, toxic leaders who exploit the people they serve (Mark 10:42). In places of work, toxic leaders are characterized by abusive behaviours, which include humiliation, bullying, ridiculing, belittling, telling employees publicly or privately that they are not part of the organization, ignoring, shunning, overworking, among many other forms of emotional and psychological abuse (Hall, 2019). Together, all these experiences may cause a loss of self-esteem, lack of pride in one's work, poorer quality of life, and loss of morale in the workplace (Ortega, 2017). Jesus came to teach, to heal, to perform signs of God's presence and power among people, to show the people how to live (Mark 10:45), and most of all, to die and be raised to life for the good of humanity (Fryer, 2007). Therefore, the work of Jesus is unique, but it is also a seamless part of the work of God's people, which is to cooperate with God in restoring the world to the way He intended it from the beginning. With God's intention, the theme of the image of God is revealed. And as stated elsewhere, this image of God is both an intrinsic locus of leadership as well as the goal toward which true, godly leadership must be directed (Okesson, 2004). Although the work of Christians is not the same as the work of Christ, it has the same end as his. Therefore, the text of Mark 10:43 informs and defines the goal of the work of servant leaders, not toxic leaders, and it is to serve mankind.

The encounter between Jesus, James, and John was a revelation for the disciples to think of suffering with Christ rather than reigning with him. But James and John did not understand this revelation and

instead requested that Jesus places them, one on the right and the other on the left hand, when he assumes his kingdom. When Jesus made his remarks, the other disciples became indignant with what James and John said (Mark 10:41). They were angry at them for affecting precedence because each of them also wanted to be on the right hand when Jesus became king. In the interaction, the disciples discovered their own ambition in their displeasure at the ambition of James and John.

Jesus took this occasion to warn them against their ambitions and all their successors in the ministry of the gospel. This is the ambition that most worldly leaders desire, to be elevated to the highest level of leadership, and in some cases, without serving the common good of the people entrusted to them. For Jesus, however, being a servant meant that the main goal of the leader ought to be serving the needs of others and that being viewed as a servant was the leader's greatness (Gunter, 2016). A servant chooses to serve with the intent that those being served can grow as individuals and reach their highest potential. This means that the goals of an organization can be achieved in the long term through the development and safeguarding of the well-being of the followers who would eventually mimic the leader's behaviour and prioritize the needs of others above their own (Lythreathis et al., 2021).

The Background to The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark was set against a background of turbulent economic and political times in Galilee, Judea. This was the time of the Roman Empire, where leadership was highly structured and tightly controlled (Thompson, 2015). At that time, Galilee was undergoing major social and political upheaval, and political and social repression were at its peak (Ekeke, 2012). The land was increasingly owned by a wealthy few, most of whom were foreigners. The society was moving away from small-scale farming to larger-scale, estate-based agriculture. People who were tenant farmers or landowners were forced to

become day labourers because of having lost their own property because of loans taken to pay the Roman taxes (Temin, 2006; Thompson, 2015). Set against this background, the economic and fiscal themes emerged in Mark's gospel and in the teaching of Christ.

The Social and Political Structures in Galilee

Because of the changes in the political, social and leadership structures in Galilee, the Jews resented the Roman oppression, political manipulation, and expropriation of the resources through taxation. It was a common practice then that the Roman leaders rewarded themselves, leaving the people in severe destitution (Ben-Hur & Jonsen, 2012). Like any people who are oppressed, the Jews began to yearn for a Messiah, and the Old Testament scriptures foretold of His coming (Isaiah 19:20). However, the average Jew expected a political Messiah, an earthly, political king, not someone who would appear in a miraculous way. The Jews wanted to gain freedom from Roman oppression. They also wanted to maintain their cultural and religious dogma of Judaism and to re-establish the political and geographic claims of Israel. The Jews expected a triumphant Messiah, who, through God-given power would procure for Israel the preeminent position in world affairs (Russell, 2003).

Because of social and political pressures at the time, there emerged three main religious groups. The dominant group was the Pharisees, who caused many problems in the preaching of Jesus and his disciple. The Pharisees were teachers of the law in the synagogues, and they came into frequent conflict with Jesus. Alas, the Pharisees also gave undue emphasis to minute rules and regulations to govern the people's daily activities. They emphasized the importance of almsgiving, fasting, and public prayers. Jesus called them hypocrites (Matthew 23:23) because much of what they did was for outward show. There were also the Sadducees and the Essenes. The Sadducees controlled the Temple worship, where Jesus drove

out the traders for turning His father's house into a business place (John 2:15). The Essenes preferred to live in seclusion.

The Context of The Passage Within the Gospel Story and Organizations

Jesus called his disciples together to give them an example of being servants and to reprove their ambition. He told them never to bid their followers to keep their distance. He also told them that dominion was abused in the world (Mark 10:42). The leaders ruled over the Gentiles, giving themselves names and titles of rulers. They exercised lordship over the Gentiles and not so much to protect them or provide for their welfare. This was not to be admitted into the Church. It should not be so among the apostles and those who shall be under their charge. The followers are like sheep under the charge of a shepherd, who is to tend them and feed them, and be a servant to them (Gunter, 2016), not like horses under the command of the driver, who works and beats them, and gets his pennyworths out of them.

In the encounter with his disciples, Jesus wanted to teach them how to be models of trickle-down leadership (Stollberger, Heras, Rofcanin, & Bosch, 2019) and when to provide for the well-being of the followers. Jesus, being divine in nature, knew how human weakness could lead his disciples to turn their backs on their followers. And if this were to happen, his mission of salvation would come to a standstill. Jesus wanted the disciples to increase organization citizenship in the future followers, and in so doing, the disciples would facilitate the work performance in the Christian missions. This may lead to fostering creativity in the followers and encourage new followers to behave in the same manner. This is how servant leadership is at work, and it has a monumental effect on the performance of the followers and their Christian missions (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018).

Trickling-down of leadership means that the behaviour of the leader in the organization affects

the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour of individual employees. If the effect of the leader is positive, it is reinforced, and the behaviour is amplified downstream of the hierarchy of leadership. As Stollberger et al. (2019) explained, the effect of servant leadership on employee work performance is entirely dependent on the role of the immediate supervisor. On the same token, the effect of the immediate supervisor depends on the influence of the higher-level managerial leadership. The tone of the top leaders can plausibly and directly influence employee behaviour and indirectly the mid-level supervisors (Cushman, 2020). This is *how* servant leaders help shape the future of organizations, and it is what Jesus Christ wanted his disciples in Christian missions to emulate.

Servant leaders can answer the *when* part of the question in several dimensions. They can emotionally heal any issues that the employees might have by being sensitive to their personal setbacks. The leaders can create value for their communities and organizations by encouraging the employees to volunteer and help their local communities. Leaders need to have problem-solving skills so that they can mitigate any immediate problems that may arise and help their followers to solve these problems (*Table 1*). By doing so, they empower their subordinates and help them to grow and succeed. Therefore, servant leaders put the interests of the subordinates first, a demonstration of ethical behaviour. They go above and beyond their own interests to support and develop their followers (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008).

It is the *how* and *when* of servant leaders that Jesus wanted his disciples to do for their followers. Jesus reminded the disciples that he who wants to be great and chief, who thrusts himself into a secular dignity and dominion, shall be a servant of all (Fryer, 2007). He who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who

humbles himself shall be exalted (Luke 14:11). Or rather, he who would be truly great and chief must lay out himself to do good to all, must stoop to the meanest services, and labour in the hardest services. To convince the disciples, Jesus sets before them his own example (Mark 10:45). The Son of man submits first to the greatest hardships and hazards and then enters his glory. The disciples cannot expect to come to it in any other way. Therefore, Jesus showed his disciples that: He takes upon himself the form of a servant. He comes not to be ministered to and waited upon, but to minister and wait to be gracious; He comes obedient to death and to its dominion, for he gives his life as a ransom for many. He dies for the benefit of all, and so, the disciples must live for the benefit of all (Ben-Hur & Jonsen, 2012).

THE FINDINGS

The review of servant leadership offers an inconsistent set of dimensions that can clearly define it for leaders in Christian missions and secular establishments. In this study, however, several dimensions that define and validate the characteristics of servant leaders have been identified. Based on Mark 10:41-45 and the interpretation in the study, a summary of the dimensions that map to servant leaders is shown in *Table 1*. These dimensions demonstrate that servant leaders significantly contribute to the development and maintenance of strong interpersonal relationships between leaders and employees in organizations. Equally important is that servant leaders are instrumental in helping employees reach their full potential. In contrast to the dimensions of servant leaders, a summary of the actions taken by toxic leaders is shown in *Table 2*. The explanation of the factors that are prevalent across toxic leaders is shown in *Table 3*. Jesus told his disciples (Mark 10:41) not to be like the leaders who lord over their followers. He urged them to be servants and to provide for the welfare of their followers.

Table 1: The summary of dimensions that are mapped to servant leaders.

| Dimension of servant leaders | How the servant leaders act or respond to the well-being of the followers |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Emotional healing | The leader shows sensitivity to others' personal concerns. |
| Creating value for the community | The leader is conscious and shows genuine concern when helping the community. |
| Conceptual skills | The leader possesses the knowledge of the organization and tasks at hand so as to be able to effectively support and assist others, especially immediate followers. |
| Empowering | The leader encourages and facilitates the work of others, especially the immediate followers. He or she identifies and solves the problems that arise. He or she determines when and how to complete work tasks. |
| Helping subordinates grow and succeed | The leader demonstrates genuine concern for others' career growth and development by providing support and mentoring. |
| Putting subordinates first | The leader uses actions and words to make it clear to others, especially immediate followers, and to satisfy their work needs. Supervisors who practice this principle often break from their own work to assist subordinates with problems they face with their assigned duties. |
| Behaving ethically | The leader interacts openly, fairly, and honestly with others. |
| Relationships | The leader demonstrates the act of making a genuine effort to know, understand, and support others in the organization, with an emphasis on building long-term relationships with immediate followers. |
| Servanthood | The leader develops a way of being marked by one's self-categorization and desire to be characterized by others as someone who serves others first, even when self-sacrifice is required. |

Source: (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008)

Table 2: Summary of the actions that are mapped to toxic leaders in organizations.

| Characteristics of toxic leaders | Explanation of characteristics |
|---|---|
| Tyranny | The tendency to lord one's power over others |
| Abusive leadership style | Sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviour without physical contact, the aim of which is to cause stress and distress to the targeted individual so that the person relinquishes his or her duties or position |
| Destructive leadership style | The systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor, or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the employees and the organizational goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness or motivation, well-being, or job satisfaction of the subordinates |
| Workplace bullying | Persistent negative behaviour, harassment perpetrated by one or more individuals on a less powerful target who is often unable to defend himself or herself |

Source: (Yavas, 2016)

Table 3: Explanation of factors that are prevalent across toxic leaders.

| The factors | What these factors mean to the subordinates and employees |
|---|---|
| Egocentrism, rigid & self-promoting attitude | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leader thinks he or she is perfect and the best. • The leader does not listen to ideas provided by employees. • The leader makes decisions without consultation. • The leader thinks he or she is more talented than the other managers. • The leader puts his or her own failures on the shoulders of subordinates |
| Negative mood & unpredictability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The employees cannot come close to the leader when he or she is angry, dispirited, and furious. • The leader is rude and offensive to the subordinates. • The leader has sudden bursts of anger, short temper, and impulsive behaviours. • The actions of the leader are not fair and inconsistent across the organization, favouring some employees |
| Unappreciation & narcissistic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leader does not care about his or her personnel. • The leader is arrogant and demonstrates superiority with his or her actions. • The leader allusively and constantly reminds his or her personnel of previous mistakes and faults. • The leader constantly and disturbingly says that his or her personnel fail in their work |
| Instability, uncertainty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leader does not act as a colleague, manager, or counterpart. He or she acts as the boss. • The leader makes the personnel behave according to his or her mood. • The mood of the leader determines the work climate and aura. If he or she is angry, there is tension in the workplace, if he or she is happy, there is a positive aura in the workplace |
| Autocratical management behaviour & hypocrisy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leader generally talks about subjects that he or she gives importance to. • The leader does not support the subjects that the subordinates suggest. • The words of the leader are inconsistent with deeds. • The leader runs the operation with his own decisions rather than the common decisions that benefit all. • The leader is critical and dislikes when the subordinate makes an opinion which is in contrast to his or her ideas |

Source: (Yavas, 2016)

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the text of Mark 10:41-45 to understand the theoretical and practical implications of servant leadership in Christian organizations. Its main contribution is to help answer the question of *how* and *when* servant leaders influence team performance in their organizations. Servant leadership is what Jesus wanted his disciples to emulate and this type of

leadership should resonate across all Christian organizations. The contribution of servant leaders is, therefore, made evident in the study, and it is contrasted with the actions of toxic leaders (Ortega, 2017).

Theoretical and Practical Application of The Quotation

The study has significantly contributed to the biblical understanding of the effect of servant leadership in Christian and secular organizations. It has been confirmed that the central theoretical premise of servant leaders is their distinctive focus to serve individuals in the organizations by placing the good of the employees over self-interest, and therefore improves collective performance (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018). The study goes beyond the text of Mark 10:41-45, and it demonstrates that servant leadership not only predicts team-task performance but also services the greater good of society. The study substantiates the servant leadership theoretical premise which suggests that the essence of servant leaders is to care and serve others, which extends into followers' desire to collectively be helpful and courteous to others and become servant leaders themselves (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). An earlier study on servant leadership showed that frontline employees are positively influenced to act more pro-socially toward their customers when the servant leaders demonstrate a greater serving attitude and altruistic values (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018). Therefore, the study has shed light on the mechanisms triggered by servant leaders to influence team performance.

In recent years, leaders in organizations have restructured their work around teams to enable more rapid, flexible, and adaptive responses to turbulent and complex work environments (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018). The restructuring was made because, contextually, leadership is a complex, influential process that plays a central role in enabling the integration of individual contributions into a cooperative group effort. As a result, the leaders must mobilize not only individuals but each team as an entity. The leaders must enable the integration of individual contributions into a cooperative group effort to respond to the growing interest in ethical, prosocial, and people-centred management (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018).

Therefore, servant leaders are better placed in these roles because they focus on followers' growth and empowerment due to their altruism, empathy, sense of ethics, and community stewardship (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019). Compared to related leadership styles, whose primary focus is the well-being of the organization, servant leadership is unique in that the leader is viewed as a servant attending to the needs of the followers. The central premise of servant leadership is that servant leaders influence organizational outcomes by fostering the growth and well-being of the followers and satisfying their needs (Fryer, 2007).

In his book, Greenleaf proposed that service ought to be the distinguishing characteristic of leaders, and therefore, servant leadership should be an approach that leaders take in the service of others, sharing power, promoting teamwork, and building a sense of community both within the workgroup and outside the walls of the organization (Chiniara & Bentein, 2018; Greenleaf, 2002). Greenleaf also depicted that servant leaders are people who embody ethical principles and show a deep commitment to placing the needs of their followers at the centre of their efforts before their own needs, creating a climate in which each follower feels important, committed, and empowered to do and create more (Greenleaf, 2002). Jesus wanted his disciples to emulate this principle, and it is what Christian leaders ought to do.

Liden et al. (2008) explicitly observed that servant leaders communicate on a one-to-one basis with their employees to understand their abilities, needs, goals, and desires. They use the knowledge to actively bring out the best in the employees and assist them in reaching their potential by helping them to develop greater effectiveness, community stewardship, and servant leadership capabilities. Furthermore, servant leaders build self-confidence in their followers by providing direction and challenging responsibilities while offering empathy, emotional support, feedback, and resources (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). Hence, servant

leaders naturally tend to build strong, positive, and long-term relationships with each follower. The followers in turn would view servant leaders as role models and engage in appropriate behaviours, not by obligation, but by their own will. They then demonstrate the desire to become servant leaders themselves. Through the long-term transformation of followers into servant leaders, a new life and work culture can emerge and grow, building the foundation for a more caring, cohesive, and creative organization (Greenleaf, 2002).

In their work, Liden et al. (2008) distinguished several dimensions that describe the essential characteristics of servant leaders (*Table 1*). These dimensions include emotional healing, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, creating values for the community, having conceptual skills, and behaving ethically. Emotional healing shows how leaders become caring and sensitive to the personal well-being of their followers. Empowering the followers involves encouraging and facilitating the followers to have the ability to take on responsibilities and manage difficult situations in their own way. In this way, servant leaders help their subordinates to grow and succeed. When servant leaders put the needs of the subordinates first, they demonstrate that they place subordinates' best interests and success ahead of their own. Creating values for the community means that servant leaders are involved in contributing to the community outside the organization and that they encourage others to do the same. Servant leaders possess and demonstrate conceptual skills because they are well-informed about the organization, its goals, and the task at hand and can therefore provide effective support, resources, and direction to others. Finally, servant leaders behave ethically by acting and interacting openly, fairly, and honestly with their followers (Ling, Lin, & Wu, 2016).

However, worldly honour is a glittering weakness in most establishments. This behaviour set the eyes of the disciples overwhelmed. But to be a follower of

Christ is more about the care for the needs of others and their well-being than seeking greatness or having dominion over other people. Yet, human short-sightedness appears in the failure of leaders because of their selfish ambitions (Thompson, 2015). So, a few themes arise in Mark 10: 41-45: There is a choice between selfish ambitions and sacrifice; there is a choice between power and service; and there is a choice between comfort and suffering. It is the will of God that the followers of Christ should prepare themselves and leave it to Him to reward them. The care for the needs and well-being of others must be so that the followers may have wisdom and grace to know how to suffer with Christ, and then they may trust him to provide for them in the best manner and how they shall reign with him, when, where, and what the degree of their glory shall be.

The Understanding of Leadership in Biblical Context

Generally, leadership is seen as a process of influencing others to achieve common goals. From a Christian perspective, however, it is to influence others from a biblical context and to attain biblically informed goals. Leadership, then, is distinctly Christian when its source of authority is rooted in biblical truth and its purpose is aligned with God's purpose (Hall, 2019). Servant leadership is therefore seen as a holistic approach that engages the followers in Christian or secular organizations in multiple dimensions, that is, relational, ethical, emotional, and spiritual so that they are empowered and grow into what they can become. When the well-being and growth of the followers are prioritized, they become engaged and effective in the duties that they do (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, Dierendonck, & Liden, 2019). As Kouzes and Posner (2017) proposed in their book, there are five practices that exemplary leaders, at their personal best, normally do. The leaders model the way for others to follow; inspire others for a shared vision; challenge the process for others to flourish; enable others to act for the good of all; and encourage the

hearts of others to yearn for good and do service. But there are more toxic leaders in Christian and secular organizations than servant leaders (Singh, Dev, & Sengupt, 2017). Understanding toxic leaders requires the examination of the type of leaders that Jesus condemned.

In today's organizations, one of the greatest challenges of leaders is how to mobilize others to want to get extraordinary things done in an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Some leaders are, however, lucky because they have come at the right time when everyone in the organization is against the status quo and wants things done differently. A leader in this situation will see progress occur in leaps and bounds. But not everything happens at the right time, and leaders have to be innovative and get everyone involved. Leaders are at their personal best if they can influence the followers to be part of and feel part of the organization. Although titles are grunted, a leader's behaviour is the only thing that can earn him or her respect and get things done. This appears to be why Jesus wanted his followers to model the way for other followers.

A leader who can roll up his or her sleeves, remove the jacket, and gets dirty will model the way, mobilize the employees to get the job done and inspire others to be part of the shared vision. Leaders cannot command commitment, but they can inspire others to have the commitment. When the employees see themselves as part of the vision and can contribute to embracing the vision and making it their own, then the leader has the people to lead and rely on. Leaders at their personal best have to step out into the unknown for the good of all (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). In his encounter with the Pharisees and the Scribes, Jesus had to challenge the process that was already established and had become a culture. He wanted his followers not to join the status quo but to be servants and provide for the needs of their followers.

Professional Implications of Servant Leadership in Organizations

The primary goal in servant leadership is the desire to serve and serve all. Servant leaders have to be willing to put Christ's mission of healing and protecting the followers ahead of their own desires for status and achievement. Servant leaders have to be willing to sacrifice themselves for the mission Christ calls them to do. And finally, servant leaders have to be willing to put the good of the team and followers ahead of their own welfare (Thompson, 2015). Jesus knew that there are exalted places of leadership, but God has determined their designees.

However, for a professional implication, it is important to consider what Jesus does not approve of as good leadership qualities. These are the qualities of toxic leaders who are often maladjusted, malcontent, habitually malevolent, or malicious (Bell, 2019). It has been shown that the success of toxic leaders is characterized by extreme tyranny, use of positional power, abusive supervision, aversive leadership style, destruction of the thinking of colleagues, bullying, and control measures (Yavas, 2016). Toxic leaders always feel insecure in many of their basic needs on Maslow's hierarchy (Montag, Sindermann, Lester, & Davis, 2020). Some of them routinely demonstrate detrimental behaviours in the workplace, which is debilitating to workmates. The leaders distort the normal thinking of colleagues and suck their energies. In some cases, toxic leaders engage in numerous destructive behaviours, and they exhibit certain dysfunctional personal characteristics (Yavas, 2016).

With toxic leaders in organizations, there is a broad lack of concern for the well-being of the employees, consistent and severely negative interpersonal interaction with others, with the primary motivation that revolves around self-interest (*Table 2*). The leaders are narcissistic, egocentric, and engage in an unpredictable pattern of abusive and authoritarian supervision. Jesus singled out the Pharisees and the Scribes for having seated themselves in the Chair of Moses and abused their authority (Matthew 23:23).

He did not condemn the Pharisees because they held high positions but because of the autocratic and absolutist application of their leadership roles (Russell, 2003). It is easy to identify toxic leaders in organizations because they possess deep-seated inadequacies, selfish values, and deceit, which become more apparent as the toxic environment spreads across the organization. To define toxic leaders adequately and exclusively, a multidimensional framework is needed to address the intentions, behaviour, character, and impact of the consequence of their decisions. A toxic leader is therefore, identifiable by three key elements: an apparent lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates, a personality or interpersonal technique that negatively affects the organizational climate, and a conviction by subordinates that the leader is motivated primarily by self-interest (Ortega, 2017).

In a research conducted to explore the factors that are prevalent in toxic leaders (Yavas, 2016), the following factors were identified: egocentrism, negative mood, unappreciation, instability and uncertainty, and autocratic management behaviour (*Table 3*). To prevent toxic culture from growing and expanding in organizations, unimpeded communication should be encouraged. In this way, a permissive culture, which normally facilitates the expansion of toxic culture, may be prevented. As Cushman (2020) explained, Jesus talked to his disciples about the Pharisees and the Scribes, but the application is relevant in every Christian and secular organization. When Jesus cautioned his disciples about their ambition for leadership and compared it to that of the Pharisees, it can certainly be applied beyond the disciples and the Pharisees.

Although Jesus spoke of servant leaders, several principles of leadership can be applied to the different models, and toxic leadership is glaringly clear. When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, he provided insight into the outcomes of toxic leaders. All that is needed for a situation to be characterized

as toxic is a destructive leader who, with deliberate intention, displays damaging behaviour that hurts the organization and its employees by pushing personal agendas that damage the well-being of the people. The leader may also lead by using hurtful methods of influence with weak justifications to reach his or her preferred ends (Ortega, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The characteristics of servant leadership contrast with the characteristics of toxic leadership. This type of leadership is what Jesus wanted his disciples and Christian organizations to inculcate. In his encounter with the disciples, he made comments about being servants to others. The comments supported his unique Messianic mission. He also warned the disciples of the danger of being leaders without providing for the welfare of the followers. The teaching showed that servant leaders must be ethical and concerned with serving the greater good of all in the organizations and society. Jesus singled out the Pharisees and the Scribes as exemplars of toxic leaders so that his disciples know the type of leaders that are desired in Christian organizations. Therefore, in his Gospel, Mark uses servanthood to help leaders discern God's intentions—to be builders of the Kingdom of God and a just society in the world, a concept that flows from the effusive divine goodness, broadly discussed in *sacra Doctrina* and Grace (Cessario, 2013). From the African perspective, "I am because we are" shows that leaders are divine symbols of the people's health and welfare (Okesson, 2004). As the scripture succinctly puts it, "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8); it means that, professionally, the theology of servant leadership must be liveable in Christian and secular organizations.

The study has, therefore, shown that servant leadership is important in the development of followers, and when it is practised in organizations, it can enhance both job performance and commitment to the organizations, creating a trickle-down ripple effect of servanthood. The study has

also shown that servant leaders can inspire followers to take an active role in serving their community and organization. When leaders embrace servanthood, their organizations may succeed in developing a culture of serving others, both within and outside the organizations. The study recommends that Christian and secular organizations that seek to create a culture of servanthood may need to select managers who are interested in focusing on building long-term relationships with employees. This process involves conscious effort in getting to know the employees for the purpose of providing support that is tailored towards individual needs. The study has, therefore, presented a practical theology of servant leadership that Jesus intended his disciples and followers to inculcate across their organizations. It has also significantly added impetus to the broader understanding of servant leadership, which Christian and secular organizations need to display.

Future Direction

In future studies, documentation of the effect of toxic leaders that Jesus rejected and rebuked will be carried out in a similar way that Cushman (2020) has done. This is particularly necessary because Jesus would have rebuked the toxic leaders who run Christian institutions for being egocentric and almost always hypocritical. These leaders are characterized by abusive supervision, authoritarian leadership style, unpredictability, and self-promoting attitudes. Some of the leaders do not care about the well-being of the employees. Their supervision is subversive, which leads to employees developing mental health issues and being forced to relinquish their professions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Catholic Education Western Australia is acknowledged for the financial support received during the study.

Disclosure

There is no conflict of interest in any form or shape.

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