

Charismatic Leadership and the Socio-Economic Transformation of the Church

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Abstract

Some of the contemporary religious movements in Zimbabwe are led or were founded by people who hold considerable charismatic authority and who are believed to have special powers, knowledge and revelations. This paper will define charismatic leadership and transformational leadership closely looking at their theories and characteristics and further go onto explain how charismatic leadership in contemporary churches has influenced the transformation of the church to prosperity. Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa will be used as an example of charismatic leaders in the church today. The paper will also unveil the positive and negative sides of the charismatic leadership.

Introduction

There are many ways to lead people as they are leaders but however one has to choose the right leadership style for the situation. The economic, political and social situations in most African countries has seen the rise of many contemporary churches under the leadership that has adopted charismatic and transformational leadership styles in an attempt to transform the face of the church to prosperity and make it appealing to many especially the young and women. Lewin (1939) argues that any type of organisation or institution runs successfully when it is piloted by a skilful and influential leader, who represents the culture of the organisation and possesses a capacity to increase the productivity of the organisation. Many religious leaders nowadays use a charismatic style as they need to gather a large followership just like the political leaders, business team or cult leaders.

Moyo (2012) attributes the fast growth of contemporary Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe largely to the charismatic nature of their leaders. It is necessary therefore to explore why some prophets, pastors and priests are hailed as charismatic, visionary leaders, with consequences for their congregations' attitudes and actions towards them. A well-known example of the phenomena in Zimbabwe is Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa, whose reputation as a visionary leader has been earned through his presentation of sermons characterised by use of storytelling, including the use of symbolism and metaphors. He has managed to establish credibility with his audience because he speaks with enthusiasm and competence and is able to grab and hold the attention of his followers. He is very persuasive and effectively uses body language as well as verbal language in his sermons.

What is Charismatic Leadership?

Certain leaders are attributed to be charismatic leaders through possession of some human personalities which are unusual. Levine (2011) noted that the term charisma refers to a rare trait found in certain human personalities usually including extreme charm and magnetic quality of personality or appearance along with innate and powerfully complex personal communication skills and persuasiveness. Therefore charisma has to do with the ability to charm, convince and influence people. A charismatic leader is out to win the people's hearts and minds and change the way they think, feel, believe and do their things. Followers of the charismatic leader are sometimes blinded by the charisma to such an extent that they might even do some things that they would not do in normal circumstances, (Levine, Muenchen and Brooks, 2010). This has become common with members of most contemporary churches.

Charismatic leadership is one of the three leadership styles coined by Max Weber in 1947. Personal charisma plays an important role in charismatic leadership and for one to be perceived as charismatic there is need to portray attributes such as empathy, good listening skills, unusual calmness, self-confidence, assertiveness, dominance, authenticity and focus, superb communication skills and oratorical skills. Max Weber envisaged religious leaders like Jesus as charismatic leaders. The sociologist (Weber) pointed out that charismatic authority is premised on commitment to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual and of the normative patterns or order revealed by him. Later studies identified and considered many other social and political leaders like Martin Luther King jnr, Albert Einstein and Mussolini as having some charismatic traits because they had exceptional leadership qualities which made them almost god-like for their followers.

A charismatic leader is one who is able to move people and cause change in disposition with respect to a wide range of ideologies. They establish credibility through charm and grace and they are able to pull large crowds towards them. People develop trusts for these leaders because they demonstrate self-belief and create an unchallenged position for themselves. Musser (1987) notes that charismatic leaders seek to instil commitment and ideological goals as well as devotion to themselves. They easily draw the attention and admiration of others due to a magnetic quality of personality. Religious leaders like Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa of UFI in Zimbabwe use charisma to attract a large followership. According to Straker (2013) charismatic leaders who are building a group whether it is a political party, a cult or a business team will often focus strongly on making the group very distinct and clear, separating it from others. This is true of UFI under the charismatic leadership of Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa. He has managed to build the image of the group in particular in the minds of his followers as being far more superior to all other churches especially the ones they are breaking off from. Through use of charisma, character and competence he has managed to win a large followership and has established a new brand of Christianity in Zimbabwe.

A powerful and extroverted leader is very effective as they are able to induce strong emotions to their subordinates. Barker (1995) asserts that almost by definition, charismatic leaders are unpredictable, for they are not bound by tradition or rules. They may even be accorded by their followers the right to pronounce on all aspects of their lives. This is so because their followers believe that they have special powers or revelation and wisdom. Barker goes on to warn that in most cases the charismatic religious leader may lack any accountability, require unquestioning obedience and encourage a dependency upon the followers for material, spiritual and social resources. This is also echoed by Maxwell (1998) in his study on Pentecostalism's relations with modernity which revealed how Zimbabwean Pentecostals have fashioned their own version of the prosperity gospel to help them make the best out of the rapid social and economic change. Charismatic leaders in the religious circles have taken advantage of economic, social and political challenges faced by most African countries and have used these situations as their stepping stones to gain good reputation.

Charismatic leaders have a sense of self awareness and are often introspective in evaluating their own beliefs. They are characterised by self-monitoring as they watch themselves and are aware that they are being watched, (Jung and Sosik, 2006). Their goal is to occupy people's hearts and want to identify with their followers' needs, values and beliefs. This enables them to persuade and convince the masses and appeal for them to their hearts. It is therefore, this persuasive power that enables them to win many followers and keeps them going for larger periods. DeCeller and Pfarrer (2004) assert that charismatic leaders raise their followers to the highest level, at the same time making sure that they have gone a step further in order to remain superior, leaders and different from their followers. They are open to change and bring about change just as has been done by Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa in the church in Zimbabwe. He has managed to shape his followers and society in general the way they would have dreamt. He is indicative of someone who understands and supports wishes and goals of his followers.

Charismatic and Transformational Leadership Theories

The sociologist, Max Weber categorised leadership styles into three, one of the categories being charismatic leadership. Since then a number of studies have been carried out on types of leadership. In 1978 Burns came up with yet another category of Transactional leaders and Transformational leaders. Transformational leadership style resembles charismatic leadership. Max Weber envisaged religious leaders like Jesus as charismatic leaders and later studies identified and put to light such other political leaders as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King jnr, Bill Clinton and others as charismatic leaders.

Transformational leadership and charismatic leadership styles are alike in that these leaders use enthusiastic measures to keep their followers motivated and are energetic in inspiring their followers to move forward.

Transformational leaders have integrity because they inspire people with a shared vision of the future and clear set goals. They expect the best from everyone on their team including themselves. The difference with the charismatic leaders lies in that charismatic leaders can believe in themselves than in their team and in the eyes of the followers, success is directly attributed to the presence of the charismatic leader. Conger and Kanungo (1998) point out that the charismatic leader has a god-like character which makes followers believe that they are credited to the leader. This creates a sense of belongingness and unity in the sub-ordinates towards the institution. The followers feel they cannot achieve without the leader which can create a risk of that the institution may collapse if the leader leaves or dies (Musser, 1987). This shows that charismatic leadership carries great responsibility and needs commitment and personal risk taking.

Charismatic leadership is characterised by the ability to lead others based on personal charisma of the leader and other skills that generate devotion among the followers or sub-ordinates. Most religious contemporary church movements today owe their existence to charismatic leaders who also take up positions in political issues. Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa of UFI in Zimbabwe is a good example. He took advantage of the crisis within AFM and emerged as the leader of a newly formed contemporary church now popularly known as UFI. He led lunch hour interdenominational prayers and used them as a stepping stone towards starting his own church. As charismatic leadership theories reveal, crisis are conducive for the emergence of charismatic leaders. Beyer (1999) argues that crisis or a turbulent environment is not a motivating variable as it is viewed in other leadership theories but rather a casual factor in the emergency of charismatic leaders. The misunderstandings between the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) leaders and Emmanuel Makandiwa created an opportunity for him to rise as the leader of UFI.

Charismatic leaders are often born out of the blend of social, economic and political scenario and the follower's need. Bullock (2007) views charismatic leaders as change agents who communicate their vision to others, set their goals, attend to the needs of their followers and behave in unconventional ways. Previous research reveal that charismatic leadership tend to manifest itself in crisis situations, when the people need a saviour and when things are complicated within an organisation or institution and when extrinsic rewards are required as was the case with Mahatma Gadhi. The charismatic leader is motivated by the social scenario without being prompted about it and has the capacity to transform this motivation and self actualisation to his/her followers as well. They are out to attain social power and aim to see their followers respecting them and looking at them as their saviours (Tendulkar).

The transformational leader can as well be charismatic as he/she focuses on transforming the organisation or institution and possibly the subordinates. Conger(1989) notes that the two theories are converging and share the following components: vision, inspiration, role modelling, intellectual stimulation, meaning making, appeals to higher order needs, empowerment, setting of high expectations and fostering collective identity. Followers are usually influenced by charismatic and transformational leaders because they are either filling a psychological need or have a more- collective identification with the leader and his/her mission. Musser(1987) argues that when charismatic leaders talk, it is like being bathed in warm and pleasant glow, as they are very convincing, however they are often intolerant of challengers and their irreplaceability can mean that there are no capable successors when they leave. What Burns classified as transformational leadership in 1978 is similar to what Max Weber coined as charismatic leadership style in 1947.

Discussion: Prosperity Gospel

Transformational leadership is an acknowledgement core competence to steer an organisation or institution to prosperity in the Global village and a charismatic leader is concerned with the ability to persuade and convince people and cause change in disposition with respect to a wide range of issues. The two are both concerned with the transformation of an organisation or institute.

Charismatic churches of today address issues of wealth and inequalities particularly through the so called prosperity gospel. Magaga (2010) is of the view that charismatic Pentecostal churches criticise poverty and high unemployment rate troubling their followers without at the same time proffering solutions on how they expect the same Christians to build their economics. These charismatic churches have turned to become multimillion dollar enterprises, and seem not to have been affected by the harsh economic environment in most African countries. The doctrine and ideology implies that only believers will prosper materially in society.

These charismatic churches adopted a fundamentalist position on the accumulation of wealth and this has paid well in this period of economic challenges in Zimbabwe and other African countries.

The scriptures used by charismatic leaders in today's churches carry an economic message. They refer to such verses as "Jesus came to bring abundant life and prosperity," in their sermons. They place high value on material things. This is why the charismatic churches are associated with the gospel of prosperity. Parsitau and Mwaura (2010) describe the gospel of prosperity as a theology that teaches that the spiritual and material fortunes of a "believer," are dependent on faith and on how much one gives spiritually and material to God or his representatives. Acquiring wealth seems to be the main theme in sermons of the charismatic churches which qualify their churches as economic enterprises who advocate for the prosperity theology.

Tenets of this theory assume that Christianity means wealth in all areas of the Christian's life, health, fertility, success and material goods in the here and now not the hereafter, (Maxwell, 2007). Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa, leader and founder of UFI in Zimbabwe is one of the most influential representatives of this group of charismatic leaders. In his sermons he preaches of a version of Christian gospel that is called gospel of prosperity, also referred to as the law of reciprocity from the belief that donating money and material things as well as tithing to God creates wealth and a place in heaven for a donor or tither. The reproduction of prosperity theology is pronounced in his sermons through use of figurative language. The charismatic leader has taken advantage of the economic downturn which the country witnessed for the past decade to gain popularity at a high rate.

Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa's sermons are characterised by the frequent use of figuration in an attempt to market the gospel of prosperity. Makandiwa uses various methods to manage his image and he is good at picking up the moods and concerns of both individuals and larger audiences. Straker (2013) asserts that deliberate charisma is played out making effective use of storytelling including the use of symbolism and metaphors by the charismatic leaders. This is true of Prophet Makandiwa whose sermons seem to be scenes of reproduction of the prosperity theology through metaphorical constructions. The prosperity gospel has been identified as a force in the accumulation of wealth and power (Geschiere, 1997). Charismatic leaders like Prophet Makandiwa use the prosperity gospel to address issues of wealth and social inequalities. This is why they have managed to transform the socio-economic status of the church as an institution. His sermons are mostly devoted to matters of socio-economic needs of the people.

Charismatic leaders are very persuasive and make effective use of body language as well as verbal language. This is true of some religious leaders of today as they use this to gather large followership. Religious leaders such as Prophet Makandiwa works the room as they move from person to person during the sermon. He pays attention to everyone being addressed at any point, making them feel like they are for that time the most important people in the world. Charismatic leaders focus strongly on making the group very distinct and dear, separating it from other groups. They see themselves at a different level of Christianity, higher than other Christians.

Members of the United Family International in Zimbabwe have been made to view themselves at a different perspective from other Pentecostal churches and they even put on bracelets that resemble their church. One can be easily identified with those bracelets and posters of the prophet on their cars. They are always marketing their church. Prophet Makandiwa has managed to build the image of the group in particular in the minds of his followers as being far much superior to all others. He has managed to bring about socio-economic transformation to some of his followers with his sermons centred on the accumulation of wealth and working hard in order to uplift one's self with the help of the super-natural intervention from God. This has been received with open hearts as most Zimbabweans are plagued with problems due to the economic, social and political challenges faced by the country.

Churches have been transformed into multimillion dollar enterprises and it seems the emerging sector has stood against the harsh economic environment. For socio-economic and other motives people are leaving their churches to join charismatic churches. Dete (2011) is of the assertion that some Zimbabweans have a distorted view of what it means to be a Pentecostal Christian and some ill-advised sections of society now believe that Pentecostalism has become a thriving business and the shortest way to wealth and affluence. This is true to a certain extent, for people like Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa became household names as soon as he founded the UFIZ and has made headlines as far as religious, political, economic and social issues are concerned, in local and neighbouring countries news.

He is now transformed and he is counted among the rich and famous in the country, driving latest expensive cars. His socio-economic status has changed he is now a man of high class. His followers are proud to belong to his church and are not ashamed to be identified with him.

Charismatic churches are firmly located in the prosperity gospel as they propound the notion of the individual's combined spiritual and socio-economic success. Van Dijk(2001 e) points out that these charismatic leaders began to proselytise a highly moderate discourse in which notions of individual self-making strongly prevail. This has attracted many members amongst society especially the young and urban middle class in search of success and prosperity in life. Prophet Makandiwa's charismatic sermons focus on people's problems in their earthly lives and how their lives can be transformed depending on the faith of the individuals. Followers of charismatic leaders view these churches as providing answers to their economic, social and cultural forces of modernity and globalisation. In Zimbabwe charismatic churches came as a solace from the harsh realities of the collapse of the economy marauding poverty and softness of the state. A charismatic leader like Prophet Makandiwa brought hope to the hopeless and has become more like a 'god' to those whose lives he transformed from rags to riches. Charismatic churches use ideologies with cultural policy and attitude positive to indigenous world views and culture. This is why most people are attracted to them.

Charismatic church leaders are selling an economic message that is easy to buy using figurative language to persuade people to join their institutions. People are promised that they will be rewarded financially and spiritually in this life as well as after death. Through the gospel of prosperity Christians are made to believe that wealth and earthly success are signs of God's favour than having to wait for happiness in the life after or to inherit the Kingdom of God. Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa has been able to offer certainty to his followers in times of change that is, times of economic and social difficulties through some of his ideologies that focus on the contemporary style of worship and the experimental way of his approach to faith. He has managed to transform his socio-economic status and his followers believe in him and hope to achieve the same.

Conclusion

Religion has been viewed as having neither an economic nor a political objective, but with a human objective meant to create good individuals who make the world a better place to live. However today, religious ideologies are so deceit, so intensive that the term religion is a misnomer. The goals of starting or joining a church are no longer clear. You cannot conclude that one is out to find God or to find wealth in a church. Most churches have been transformed into economic or commercial enterprises by charismatic leaders responding to the people's needs of the times. Charismatic churches and their charismatic leaders are associated with miracles, fast development and fulfilment of wishes through the super natural power of God. This has brought about a new approach to Christianity which has been attributed to other areas such as marketing in business and campaigning in politics.

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