

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP APPROACH AMONG LEADERS IN BETHEL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, OYO

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Abstract

This study investigates the transformational leadership approach among leaders in Bethel Baptist Association, Oyo, with a focus on how this leadership style influences ministry effectiveness and organizational growth. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, motivation, and positive change, enabling leaders to inspire followers toward higher levels of commitment and spiritual maturity. The research explores key components of transformational leadership-including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration and assesses how these elements are practiced within the association. The study further examines how leaders in Bethel Baptist Association apply transformational strategies to address contemporary challenges such as declining participation, leadership fatigue, and the need for effective discipleship. Findings indicate that transformational leadership encourages innovation, strengthens relationships within the church community, and enhances the overall mission of the association. The research concludes that when leaders model Christlike character and actively empower their members, they create an environment that supports sustainable growth, increased engagement, and impactful ministry outcomes.

Introduction

There is probably no doubt that transformational leadership has become one of the most effective and influential leadership approaches in contemporary Christian ministry. Among leaders in Bethel Baptist Association, Oyo, this style of leadership plays a significant role in shaping the direction, unity and spiritual growth of the churches within the association¹. Evidently, transformational leadership focuses on inspiring followers, enhancing positive change, and assisting

individuals attain their full potential. It emphasizes the leader's ability to influence others through vision, motivation and personal example, rather than through authority alone. In the context of Bethel Baptist Association, this approach is essential because church leaders are expected to guide their members, not only administratively, but also spiritually, morally, and socially².

We should note that a central feature of transformational leadership is idealised influence, where leaders demonstrate strong character, integrity, and christlike behaviour. Leaders in the Association are seen as role models whose lives reflect the teachings they promote. This creates trust, strengthens relationships, and indeed encourages members to commit to the mission of the Church³.

Brief Historical Background of Bethel Baptist Association, Oyo

The historical background of the body named "Bethel Association" in Oyo, Nigeria, is most commonly associated with Baptist Associations under the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC)⁴. According to Adebayo, the Baptist work in Nigeria began with the appointment by the Southern Baptist Convention of America of the first missionary to the country, Rev. Thomas Jefferson Bowen in 1849. Rev. T. J. Bowen was born on 2nd January 1814 in Jackson Coventry, Georgia, United States of America. He was a brilliant student⁵. As a 22years old boy, he had experience in the quelling of America uprising in Georgian and participated in the second Seminole war. Therefore, he volunteered to join Texas in their independence fight against Mexico. It was during his stay in Texas that Bowen found Christ in 1840. Upon his return to Georgian, he began to preach, and was soon ordained a minister. Bowen's Church was affiliated with the America Baptist Mission, but after a split in 1845, his allegiance shifted to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)⁶. Afterwards, he was called by God to be enrolled in his army to participate with him in the evangelization of Central Sudan (later known as Nigerian). Before 1849, God had impressed in his mind to take the gospel to Nigeria through his reading of explorer books on Africa. This was at the time when not many were willing to go to Africa because of its prevalent hostile climate and attendant health hazards. By the divine providence, Bowen was appointed as a missionary to Nigeria by the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1849⁷.

It should be noted that Bowen, together with Harvey Goodale and Robert F. Hill were commissioned as missionaries to Nigeria. They embarked on their journey on 17th December, 1849. Unfortunately, only Bowen got to Nigeria. Goodale died in Liberia apparently because of ill-health. Hill was withdrawn because of his unwillingness to accompany Bowen to Nigeria. Bowen landed in Badagry, South west Nigeria on 5th August 1850⁸. It was the assiduity of Bowen in Nigeria that brought about many Baptist Conferences, not excluding, that of Oyo.

Features of Leadership in Bethel Baptist Association, Oyo

Leadership of Associations are usually characterized by certain features. Some of these characteristics are peculiar to the said Association. Notice that leadership in the Bethel Baptist Association may not be said to be outrightly autocratic, however, arguably, it is not adequately liberal or democratic as the acolytes would have expected. Democracy from which democratic is derived is defined by the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* edited by Hornby as fair and equal treatment of everyone in an organisation, etc and their right to take part in making decisions⁹. It is observed that some elements of opaqueness is often noticed within the echelon of leadership which the followers are not particularly comfortable with. Quite mindful of this, the leadership is working assiduously to carry out a radical transformation in its leadership style, which would guarantee the joy of every Tom, Dick and Harry. To transform is to renew, to rebrand, to change, to reform, to transmutate, perhaps radically. Lightner defines *transform* as “to change the outward appearance of that which itself remains the same”, “to assume the appearance of another” ... it is used ... of the change of moral character for the better through the renewal of the innermost nature, but always of a transformation that is visible¹⁰.

It should be noted that those who would carry out the reform are the leaders. Shashi opines that a leader can rouse the blood of an ordinary man and has the strength enough to mobilise people as unified spirit. A good leader is a notional asset and a precious dynamic force. Leadership is a social phenomenon that is a universal social institution which is seen in one form or another in every form of life. Every person who leads a group of people, a community, a society or a nation is termed a leader. He is obeyed, heard or honoured by his followers. He unifies and embodies the opinion of the people and mobilises it to a dignified goal¹¹. Shashi continues as he postulates that: Generally, speaking, a person who exerts some political influence is called a leader, but in the real sense of the term leader's activities do not get confined to political field alone. People who wield influence in any shape of life are known as leaders. Usually a leader has to present a model behaviour for others. Leadership is to be understood and defined in terms of dominance¹². Shashi is not done as he goes on to pontificate that:

The term dominance may be defined as an act or response which affects the attitude and act of another. The methods of influencing others may tend to range from the use of flattery to the act of aggression including suggestion and persuasion. In the light of this, let us try to define leadership. Leadership is the behaviour of other people more than their behaviour affects that of other leader. Another definition would be “Anyone who acts as model to others is often called a leader” or “A man

whose opinions are likely to be carried out is also called a leader¹³.

Probable factors that Impede Smooth Leadership in Bethel Baptist Association, Oyo

It is probable that apparently because of the burgeoning nature of Bethel Baptist Association, Oyo there is no financial autonomy. Although the Association is obviously fast-growing, however, its relatively nascent nature has probably made it not to have financial system that is autonomous which some at the lower rung of the ladder are desperately yearning for. It is really the desire of these agitators to have a financial system that would grant them autonomy to act fast. This is because there had been instance when financial commitment(s) that required prompt and or urgent attention were deleted unduly, and the repercussion had always not been palatable. Take for instance, a patient in the hospital whose medical condition is somewhat critical, needs urgent attention, however, the fund that is needed is not momentarily or instantaneously made available. There is usually administrative bottleneck in releasing fund. Notice that medical institutions in Nigeria are sometimes notorious when it comes to collection of money before the commandment of treatment of their patients. It is probably not their fault because they used money to procure drugs that would be prescribed and the medical personnel too would have to be paid their emolument. It is also significant to note that some of the patients who had been helped hitherto via their treatment before payment vamoosed, thus engendering indebtedness for the medical institutions.

Besides, this is a country with habitual power outage. Thus, fuel would be needed to power the generator (where it is available). Other things that would need money would include assistant of indigent students. In the same vein, there is absolute need for other relatively negligible things like payment of fares for taxi or bus when an employee is sent on an errand to do certain things outside the vicinity of the office. Nevertheless, the Association is fine-tuning the process that would make members of the body to enjoy financial autonomy. According to Shashi: Etymologically, autonomy means self-rule (Gk. *autostnomos*). Applicable both to persons and institutions, the word suggests the presence of or capacity for self-determination and freedom from coercion. Its opposite is heteronomy: rule by external forces. Autonomy is an important issue in philosophical and theological ethics, in psychology, and in political theory¹⁴. Hornby sees autonomy as the freedom for a country, a region or an organisation to govern itself independently¹⁵. Further still, Shashi goes on to state unequivocally that ... autonomy refers to one's capacity to exercise self-rule. The ethically ideal society, from this perspective, would be one in which all persons are capable of autonomy and exercise it in such a way as to respect and protect the autonomy of all others. Because the capacity for self-rule is not a given in the human person, autonomy becomes an important psychological category¹⁶.

Again, some individuals are not particularly comfortable with the human relation of the leadership. *The World Book Encyclopedia* submits that human relations is the field of study that deals with behaviour and interactions between people. In a broader sense, the term *human relations* can describe any form of personal interaction, and the abilities and skills used for such interaction. In this sense, human relations may also be called *Interpersonal relations*¹⁷. *The World Book Encyclopedia* goes on to enthuse that:

Because people are social beings, individuals live in constant contact with others. Children first learn to interact with their family members and playmates. As children grow, their activities increasingly, centre around their friends, schoolwork, religion, or special interests and hobbies. Students may join clubs and sports teams. Adults may surround themselves with their family or join labour union, political party, or service organisation. In addition, people frequently become parts of temporary groups, such as concert audiences or shopping crowds. In each of these situations, there are possibilities for conflict between various members of the community. The field of human relations seeks to avoid, reduce, or resolve these conflicts in everyday life. All individuals have certain needs, and people differ in what they consider important. Human relations experts try to find the best way of meeting needs and achieving desires with a minimum conflict. They must know why people act as they do, how they react to different situations and what will make them change their minds ...¹⁸

It should be stated without any spirit of immodesty that some leaders are bereft of human relation. Whereas their disciples want them to be friendly with them, they are not, but somewhat bossy. Shashi defines boss as “a dictatorial leader of a local party organisation ... and his arbitrary dispensation of patronage, often not the official chairman but the power behind the throne” ... Under modern conditions, the need for such mediation seems less stringent and the autocratic nature of boss rule is a subversion of democracy ... System of political control centering about a single powerful figure (the boss) ... Bossism depends upon manipulation of the voters and thus always had some aspects of corruption and fraud¹⁹. The *Webster’s Universal Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines boss as the manager or foremen; a powerful local politician, to domineer; to be in control²⁰. This is the apt description of some bosses whose stock in trade is to continually lord it over their acolytes.

Conclusion

Followers of Bethel Baptist Association, Oyo would crave quite ordinally that their leadership be imbued with certain attributes that they would enamour exceedingly, rather than lording it over them. The leaders should endeavour to carry them along in whatever they are doing. Opaqueness in the administration of the Association should be avoided outrightly just as everything should be made open to every Tom, Dick and Harry of the Association. There should be financial autonomy within the rank and file of the Association. This would enable prompt or urgent attention to things that need to be attended to in a jiffy.

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