


Servant leadership: An urgent style for the current political leadership in South Africa

**Author:**Mookgo S. Kgatle¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, University of South Africa, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Mookgo Kgatle,
kgatles@yahoo.com

Dates:

Received: 17 Oct. 2017

Accepted: 01 Feb. 2018

Published: 15 May 2018

How to cite this article:

Kgatle, M.S., 2018, 'Servant leadership: An urgent style for the current political leadership in South Africa', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39(1), a1815. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v39i1.1815>

Copyright:

© 2018. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

The aspects of the political leadership in South Africa discussed in this article include, among others, abuse of power, corruption and lack of public accountability. In response to these aspects, the article demonstrates that servant leadership is an urgent style for the current state of political leadership in South Africa. The article discusses key aspects of the current political leadership in South Africa as a point of departure. The article also discusses the theological foundation and key principles of servant leadership in order to apply them to the current state of political leadership in South Africa

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: Servant leadership principles as outlined from a theological point of view are applied to the aspects of political leadership in South Africa.

Introduction

When one follows the current affairs in the politics of South Africa, one can observe that there is fear among many South Africans that South Africa may become another failed African state. Another fear among those in the liberation movement, African National Congress (ANC), is that ANC might become another failed African liberation movement. These fears are caused by the current abuse of power, corruption and lack of accountability by the executive in the South African government.

There has been an attempt through, for example, the doctrine of separation of powers to limit the abuse of power by the executive in the South African government. However, power continues to be abused at all government levels. State institutions are being used to favour one faction of the ANC over the other. Equally so there have been so many attempts to try and deal with corruption at government level, but corruption remains enemy number one to service delivery in government. Corruption manifests itself in different forms at different spheres of government. In all these predicaments, most government officials fail to account to the public. This happens when corruption and abuse of power is in the limelight for everyone to see. It is amazing that officials still have the courage to deny the truth even when that truth has already been proven in the court of law. At the end, the main problem becomes lack of accountability and responsibility for the executive's actions.

The abuse of power, corruption and lack of public accountability call for a unique approach to public governance, management and leadership. They call for a different system that can turn governance around to make it more trustworthy and accountable. In response to these aspects, the article demonstrates that servant leadership is an urgent style for the current state of political leadership in South Africa. The article discusses key aspects of the current political leadership in South Africa as a point of departure. The article also discusses the theology and principles of servant leadership in order to apply them to the current state of political leadership in South Africa.

The aspects of the current political leadership

Abuse of power

When the interim constitution¹ came into force in 1994, it reversed decades of colonial and apartheid policies of racial fragmentation and marked the beginning of a new legal order in

1.The constitution protects and promotes the system of separation of powers although it does not refer to it explicitly. In *South African Association of Personal Injury Lawyers v Heath*, the Constitutional Court held that there 'can be no doubt that our Constitution provides for such a separation [of powers] and that laws inconsistent with what the Constitution requires in that regard, are invalid' (Langa 2006:4).

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

South Africa. Whereas previously the combination of the executive and parliament had exercised a virtual monopoly of power, this was replaced with a system where the constitution became the supreme law of the land and any law or conduct inconsistent with it was invalid. The separation of powers doctrine was employed to ensure that the new system of government contained within it the necessary 'checks and balances' to uphold the values which must now be part of our lives (Langa 2006:4).

The government uses the doctrine of separation of powers to prevent the abuse of power by the executive. The main objective of the doctrine of separation of powers² is to prevent the abuse of power within different spheres of government. In our constitutional democracy, public power is subject to constitutional control. Different spheres of government should act within their boundaries. The courts are the ultimate guardian of our constitution, and they are duty bound to protect it whenever it is violated (Mojapelo 2013:37). However, the political leadership under President Jacob Zuma³ did not believe in that separation of power and did not act within their boundaries but continued to overlap into other institutions.

The other problem is that the mechanisms put in place to prevent abuse of power are sometimes inadequate. As a result, this offers fertile ground for misconduct and abuse of power. Irrespective of the legal requirements, many South African government officials abuse their power. The present government's democratisation and restructuring processes that took place without adequate control mechanisms have opened new avenues for abuse of power, mainly in the regional administrations that embody a legacy from the 'homeland' civil services (Habtemichael 2009:3).

The abuse of power in the current political leadership, for example, is seen by lack of consultation when making key decisions like cabinet reshuffles. The South African Communist Party's⁴ (SACP) General Secretary, Blade Nzimande,⁵ said that the fact that the recent cabinet reshuffles

happened outside the alliance and ANC is a problem and an abuse of power. The prerogative does not belong to the president as an individual, but it belongs to the movement. Nzimande continued to say that '[w]e are serving our government because we are serving our people, not because we're serving individuals' (EWN 2017:1).

Corruption

The second aspect of the current political leadership is corruption⁶ and the failure to combat it. One of the reasons the government is failing to fight corruption is that corruption is partly a symptom of weak management and operations systems, which create the space for corruption to thrive. Corruption is evolutionary. Habtemichael (2009:3) suggests that new forms of mechanisms need to emerge in response to various anti-corruption programmes. Corruption is a complex problem in which its agents are like viruses that mutate and adapt to new environments. Given its changing meanings, manifestations, proliferations and perceived causes and impacts, corruption is seen as a dynamic and complex social phenomenon.

In the South African context, a number of mechanisms have been put in place to limit the scope for conflicts of interest since 1994. Among these mechanisms is the compulsion for all senior managers, as well as officials working in procurement, to declare any financial and business interests. Recently, there has been an improvement in timeous submission of disclosure forms by senior managers to the Public Service Commission (PSC), from 47% in 2009/2010 to 84% in 2013/2014 (PSC report 2014). The way that South Africa has responded to the issue of corruption is evidence that the country exists as a functioning democracy. South Africa has successfully developed laws and institutions that have formulated a response to instances of corruption at the national level. It is not a fundamentally corrupt state, nor does it use heavy-handed means to fight corruption. The rule of law generally prevails (Van Vuuren 2014:3).

However, corruption continues to thrive even in the midst of these mechanisms. Global Financial Integrity said in a report that South Africa had suffered an illegal outflow of R185 billion owing to corruption in the public sector between 1994 and 2008 (News24 2012). It has been estimated that R30 billion per year, which is 20% of the overall government procurement budget of R150 billion, is being lost or is disappearing because of corruption (Africa check 2015). This means that South Africa could have lost more than R700 billion in the last 23 years. Money lost because of government corruption could have been used to better the lives of all South African citizens, especially the poor (Kgatle 2017:4).

2.The idea behind the doctrine of separation of powers is that a concentration of too much power in a single entity will lead to the abuse of power. The doctrine embodies a number of principles, the first of which is the formal distinction between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. The second is of the separation of functions which entails that each branch of government exercises distinct powers and functions. The third is that of separation of personnel, which requires that each of the different branches be staffed with different officials. Lastly, the separation of powers doctrine importantly entails the principle of checks and balances where each branch of government is entrusted with special powers designed to keep a check on the exercise of the functions of others (Sang 2013:95).

3.Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma (born 12 April 1942) is a South African politician. He has served as the President of South Africa since 2009. Zuma was the President of the African National Congress (ANC) from 2007 to 2017, the governing political party, and was Deputy President of South Africa from 1999–2005. He was first elected by parliament following his party's victory in the 2009 general election. He was re-elected in the 2014 election (Wikipedia).

4.The South African Communist Party was founded in 1921 and has always been in the forefront of the struggle against imperialism and racist domination. The SACP is a partner in the Tripartite Alliance consisting of the ANC and the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU). The Youth Wing of the SACP is the Young Communist League (YCL).

5.Dr Bonginkosi Emmanuel 'Blade' Nzimande (born 14 April 1958) is a South African politician who has been Minister for Higher Education and Training since 2009. He has been the SACP since 1998. He has a doctorate degree in philosophy, specialising in sociology. He came out strongly against proposals for nationalisation at the COSATU conference in June 2011, stating that it is not 'inherently progressive' as it depended on which class interests were being advanced (Wikipedia).

6.Corruption is an abuse of public resources and public power for private gain. However, this does not mean that it does not exist in the private sector. A lot of corruption involves a collusive relationship between the private sector and the public sector and indeed between private citizens and public officials, particularly in the area of petty corruption – traffic-cop bribery, bribery to get into housing allocation queues, et cetera. The truth remains, however, that it is not very often possible to abuse public resources and public power without the participation of members of the public sector (Lewis 2017:8).

There is evidence of corruption in the current political leadership as contained in the state capture report. The report confirms South Africa's worst fears about corruption: that the state has been captured. In 355 pages, former public protector Thuli Madonsela and her team of investigators outline in detail just how much control the Gupta family, a wealthy Indian immigrant family, has over South Africa's resources. President Jacob Zuma, the Guptas' close friend, and his son Duduzane as well as two ministers are implicated in the report (Quartz media 2016).

The same former public protector issued the report on an investigation into allegations of impropriety and unethical conduct relating to the installation and implementation of security measures by the Department of Public Works at and in respect of the private residence of President Jacob Zuma at Nkandla in KwaZulu-Natal. She found that Zuma had unduly benefited from the upgrades. She therefore recommended that Zuma must pay for the non-security upgrades at his home, which include a visitors' centre, an amphitheatre, a swimming pool, a cattle kraal, a culvert, a chicken run and extensive paving (The citizen 2014).

Lack of public accountability

The bigger problem of the current political leadership is that there is no public accountability. Public accountability pertains to the obligations of persons or entities entrusted with public resources to be answerable for the fiscal, managerial and programme responsibilities that have been conferred on them, and to report to those that have conferred these responsibilities. From this definition of public accountability, it is clear that the public entities that utilise public resources have an obligation to account for the way these resources are allocated, used and the outcomes this spending has achieved. In other words, the main objectives of all public accountability initiatives are to ensure that public money is spent most economically and efficiently, that there is a minimum of wastage or theft and finally that public actually benefits from public finance (Khan & Chowdhury 2007:1).

Securing accountability⁷ in South Africa is made more difficult by the fact that we have a very powerful governing party which controls almost two-thirds of national power, and all but one of the provinces. Such excessive power always breeds contempt for the public, impunity, and lack of accountability. It also breeds a culture of doling out patronage: in order to get anywhere your path is through the ANC branch, and the ANC branch becomes a corrupt enterprise in the hands of various people (Makhanya 2017:7). Service difficulties are exacerbated by the weak

7. Accountability is a concept in ethics and governance with several meanings. It is often used synonymously with such concepts as responsibility, answerability, blameworthiness, liability and other terms associated with the expectation of account-giving. As an aspect of governance, it has been central to discussions related to problems in the public sector, the non-profit sector and the private (corporate) world. In leadership roles, accountability is the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for actions, products, decisions and policies, including administration, governance and implementation within the scope of the role or employment position and encompassing the obligation to report, explain and be answerable for the resulting consequences (Maloba 2015:55).

accountability of municipal politicians, service providers, and citizens (PSC 2006:17).

When the former president, Jacob Zuma, was summoned to the parliament of the republic to account to the public on urgent matters like the Nkandla and state capture reports, he did not give precise answers that demonstrate accountability. These relate to Zuma's alleged role in awarding contracts and jobs to his family members and close associates. The president has become a master at evading questions, specifically ones that cause any sense of discomfort. All he would say on these matters is that he was taking legal advice about setting up a commission of inquiry into allegations of state capture to 'see how far it goes' (EWN 2016).

The theology of servant leadership

The primary biblical texts that talk about servant leadership are Matthew 20:20–28 and Mark 10:35–45, both of which include comments by Jesus regarding leadership and servanthood. There are various other scriptures that illustrate the quintessential servant leadership of Jesus. Among the important supplementary scriptures are the Servant Songs of Isaiah, Luke 22:25–30 (additional comments by Jesus about leadership), and John 13:1–17 (the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet). All these scriptures provide a meaningful theological foundation from which to substantiate and advance the servant leadership concept (Russell 2003:1).

Gene Wilkes' book on servant leadership also developed the seven principles of servant leadership by using the text in Mark 10:45, Luke 22:25–30, Matthew 20:20–28 and John 13:1–17. Jesus humbled himself and allowed God to exalt him. Jesus followed his father's will rather than seeking a position. Jesus defined greatness as being a servant first. Jesus risked serving others because he trusted that he was God's son. Jesus left his place at the head of the table to serve the needs of others. Jesus shared responsibility and authority with those he called to lead. Jesus built a team to carry out a worldwide vision (Wilkes 1998:12).

Philippians 2:5–11, also known as the hymn of Christ, has according to Collange (1979:19) a theological foundation for servant leadership. The incarnation, the birth, the death and the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ are the main features of the passage. Jesus' incarnation signifies humility and suffering, resulting in his exaltation. Yarbro (2003:367) sees the hymn as consisting of a recital of the saving work of God in Christ (self-humiliation followed by exaltation). Vincent (1985:78) points out that the supreme illustration of humility in the 'hymn' is Jesus Christ in his voluntary renunciation of his pre-incarnate majesty, and his identification with the conditions of humanity.

Geisler (2007:205) says that Philippians 2:5–11 paints a picture of humility. Christ did not just humble himself; he takes both the form of a slave and Lord. The hymn thus alludes to one

particular aspect, the imperial economic structures of slavery. Grieb (2007:263) refers to the hymn as a creed that describes the pattern of the Messiah, Jesus 'generous self-donation for the sake of others'. In a more recent study, Powell (2009:348) singles out the doxology on self-abasement and the ensuing exaltation of Christ as the head in interpreting Philippians 2:6–11.

Nebreda (2008:322) supports the opinion of several scholars that the text presents a double movement in three stages: upwards–downwards–upwards. Jesus as the Christ is presented sharing in God's glory in his pre-existence as he was already equal to God. He abases himself to the lowest possible level when he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even the death on the cross to be then lifted up to the highest position by God-the-Father. This was illustrated when God-the-Father raised him up from the dead and gave Him a name which is above every name, a name before which every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Moessner (2009:124) sees Philippians 2:6–11 as a hymn that redefines status and power by re-conceiving the power and status of 'the death of the cross' of Christ Jesus (Phlp 2:5, 8c); it is the most sublime public disclosure of the character of 'God'. Lastly, Hellerman (2010:91) is of the opinion that the passage shows us a Christ who is in control through his public humiliation. This means that the humility of Christ was not something hidden; it was a public spectacle that everybody saw and appreciated. New Testament translations give this passage the same heading which includes humility and submission. They also speak of the ascension and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Key principles of servant leadership

Servant leadership is service

The rationale behind this teaching on service is that 'the authoritative one is the one who serves, and the proof of that authority is in the service rendered on behalf of others'. Thus, the 'greatness' of a disciple is directly proportional to the degree of service he or she renders unto others. That is the heart of the paradox, which the disciples fail to comprehend. It is the reason that they find it difficult to accept this paradoxical nature to discipleship. They cannot conceive that true greatness is measured according to one's servility. They must undergo a change of mindset to understand discipleship as service and not in positions of ruling power (Cox 2009:93).

Jesus is asking his disciples to be different from the worldly system of leadership. 'It shall not be so among you', in other words, the disciples should not lead like Gentile rulers. They should not lead by exercising authority or by exercising lordship over others. Jesus introduces a style different from what the disciples already know as the norm. In contrast, to exercising authority and exercising lordship, they should minister and serve others.

A servant leader does not simply serve but makes followers independent and capable and desirous of serving other people. They embrace the spirit of servant leadership, the spirit of moral authority (Covey 2002:31). A servant leader serves from a base of love – the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Zohar 2002:111). Servant leadership is an integrated way of serving all people involved within an organisation (Ruschman 2002:123). The power of the concept of servant leadership remains embedded in one's ability to combine the best of being a leader with the best of being a servant (De graaf, Tilley & Neal 2004:133). Servant leadership is about a rediscovery of an individual and to connect with the highest aspirations of the organisation (Kim 2004:201).

There are four roles of servant leadership. The leader must first be a model of credibility, diligence, and the spirit of servant leadership. The second role of leadership is path finding, wherein a vision is discerned. The third role is that of alignment; unless you institutionalise your values, they will not happen. The fourth role is to empower people; the fruit of the three other roles (Walls 2004:113). The idea of a leader as a servant is rooted in the far-reaching ideal that people have inherent worth, a dignity not only to be strived for, but beneath this striving a dignity irrevocably connected to the reality of being human (Ferch 2004:226).

Servant leadership has the potential for maximising empowerment participation because it supremely values the importance of each individual. Servant leadership is the antithesis of marginalisation (Echols 2009:85). Greatness therefore is not the goal. Service is the goal, and greatness is defined by Christ in his lifelong exercise of service. For the life of Christ to be reproduced in the disciples, it must be through serving others (Elmer 2006:24). Service is not weakness and it is not to make everyone happy. It is not a mindless assent to compromise in order to keep peace. It is not artificial harmony and people-pleasing (Ortberg 2009:131; cf. Kgatle 2016b:121). Service is willing, working and living the life of purpose (Augsburger 2009:99).

Servant leader does not avoid leadership. Instead, it is a different kind of leadership, one committed to meeting the needs of others. Similar to the 1st century slaves, true servant leaders give up their rights for the sake of others. True greatness and true leadership is achieved not by reducing men to one's service, but in giving oneself in selfless service to them (Hutchison 2009:69). True servants with a servant's heart make themselves available to serve and pay attention to the needs of others. They do their best with what they have and with equal dedication. True servants are faithful to their ministry and maintain a low profile (Tan 2009:78).

Furthermore, they think more about others than themselves; they think like stewards, not owners; and they think about their work, not what others are doing. True servants base their identity on Christ, and they think of ministry as an opportunity, not an obligation. The true spiritual leader is concerned infinitely more with the service to God and fellow

men than with the benefits and pleasures of life. A servant leader aims to put more into life than taking out of it. A true servant leader is a spirit-led leader.

The servant leader is tough in love and in spirit. The servant leader is willing to walk that extra mile, give and engage fully in the well-being of the organisation and followers. This will sometimes mean having to face the idea of loving the unlovable, and yet, for the servant leader, this concept is a misnomer in that all people are worthy human beings, deserving of love and respect (Tan 2009:78). Contentment, grace and ease, gratitude and humour, love, wisdom, inspiration, forgiveness and appropriate power, all of these are the hallmarks of true personhood, true consciousness and true leadership (Ferch 2004:88).

Servant leaders demand to serve and acquire a position later. They seek to minister first and become great because of hearts to serve. Take, for example, a waiter in a restaurant; he or she directs the customers to the table first (e.g. table for two or three), serves the customer and gets 'benefits' later. Another good example is that of a petrol station attendant who normally asks the motorists what type of fuel they use, performs other duties like checking oil levels and pouring water into the engine, washes the windscreen and asks for the payment later. This is putting service first and position and money later.

Servant leadership is humility

It is a challenge and a warning to all that the path that leads to true discipleship is a path that leads to servility. For only when one has enough faith and love to humbly serve others is one truly following the example set by Christ himself (Cox 2009:89). Humility has been defined by looking at the outward actions of the person other than the heart. Therefore, people will normally perceive a 'quiet or meek person' as humble or someone with 'holy' apparel. In black (African) culture, for example, a person cannot claim to be humble until there is an act of humility. If a person observes the rules and regulations of that culture, they are seen as humble. Any violation of such an act can be seen as 'pride'. On the contrary, it is possible for a person to perform and act on all the rules, but only to find out that they are rebellious, stubborn and prideful in the heart.

Humility is when people humble themselves towards God and his purpose. Humility, like slavery, is to take the lowest place in the Kingdom of God. Humility is not thinking less of oneself. It is more than about thinking less of oneself. It is about stimulating conversations that allow people to confront the truth rather than skirting diplomatically around it. Humility is a modest view of one's own importance. Humble leaders take a very low social rank. They are very low in dignity or importance. Humility is to obey the instruction of God at a given time or place. Humility is a positive attitude towards the life of other people.

Humble servants give up to go up. Leaders who normally take themselves up end up coming down, and when they are

down they blame everybody around them. Humility requires that a leader affords followers an opportunity to express themselves. A good example in this context is 'marriage' – which is not an institution where one partner should feel intimidated by the other. Both partners should humble themselves and submit to one another. The correct method is not 50/50 or 100/0 but humility towards one another (see Eph 5:21–33). Both husband and wife must remain humble towards each other regardless of who is right or wrong.

An element of humility is the willingness to stand back, putting the interest of others first and facilitating their performance. It is also about modesty. The servant leader retreats into the background when a task has been successfully accomplished (Dierendonck & Patterson 2010:159). Selflessness is inherent to humility. It reflects a willingness to put the interests of the organisation and of its people ahead of the leader's own interests. It involves the ability to recognise the worth of others and reinforce and strengthen that worth which is the essence of servant leadership. At the very best, the great leaders' success does not come at the expense of their people's success (Bell 2006:74).

Humble servants do not see themselves as experts and leaders who cannot be substituted. They are not afraid to give glory to others, even when they have done the work themselves. Servant leaders always believe in the ability of their followers. They never want to do everything but always create an opportunity for others to serve. The followers feel that they are needed and participate without fear of failure or prejudice. Humble servants believe in the team and they do not personalise victory. Thus, humble servants take responsibility for failures but never take the glory of the victory. They are not self-centred but team-oriented.

Personal humility is characterised by a compelling modesty, shunning of public adulation and never being boastful. It enables to act with quiet, calm determination, and relies principally on inspired standards than charisma (Collins 2005:115). It is the ability to put one's own accomplishments and talents into proper perspective. Servant leaders dare to admit that they can benefit from the expertise of others. An element of humility is the willingness to stand back, putting the interest of others first and facilitating their performance (Dierendonck & Rook 2010:155).

In action movies, most of the time when a fight arises, one hears words of warning like 'get down'. When the fighters hear this word and ignore it or play smart by remaining standing, a person gets shot. The one that takes advice and stays low will be saved together with other people's lives. It is also practical in a real-life situation, and those in the defence or police force can tell the story in a better way. Thus, the way for a servant leader to go up is to go down.

Characteristics of humble leaders are:

- when they know they are not right, they concede;
- they are open about their faults to others;

- they are ready to 'roll up their sleeves' with the rest;
- they do not let their opinion take precedence over others' opinions;
- they are gracious when others are praised over them;
- they do not equate possessions with worth. (Heath 2010:42)

Servant leadership is stewardship

The steward is an overseer, a manager, a trustee, a caretaker; the steward is not the owner; Stewards are entrusted with money, vineyards, goods, property, which they are to manage for another; Stewards are called upon to be faithful, that is, to be responsible to manage in a way that the money, talents or pounds generate interest (Fransen 2005:29; cf. Kgatle 2016a:143). Stewardship is the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care (Saner & Wilson 2003:5). Stewardship theory defines situations in which managers are not motivated by individual goals but rather are stewards whose motives are aligned with the objectives of their principals.

A steward understands that God is the owner of everything. As a result, a steward acts as an administrator of God's property. A steward is the one who takes care of that which belongs to God because in the Kingdom of God there are no owners. The main function of the steward is to be a caretaker so that when the owner arrives everything else will be in order. Furthermore, a steward has responsibility to not only take care of the property but also to make sure that it increases in value.

Stewardship is about holding something in trust for another (Wilkes 1998:108). It is 'giving order to the dispersion of power'. Stewards, as a result, choose partnership over patriarchy, empowerment over dependency and service over self-interest. Service is when a person commits to something outside themselves and it becomes an essential ingredient in the leading process. Stewards are also expected to be trustworthy and faithful (Hian 2010:32). For example, no house owner would leave a family and estate in the hands of a manager for a long period of time if the man's trustworthiness is questionable.

Stewards are intrinsically motivated by higher level needs to act for the collective good of their organisation. They identify with the organisation and embrace its objectives; they are committed to make it succeed, even at the cost of personal sacrifice (Miller & Breton-Miller 2006:73). Stewardship means that organisational leaders' primary motivations are to serve the organisation's best interests and mission, as opposed to more self-serving, opportunistic motivations proposed by agency theory (Pearson & Marler 2010:1117).

Servant leaders are faithful in exercising stewardship. A faithful leader is one who has no credibility gap. When a servant leader is a steward in an organisation, they will make sure that everything is taken care of before leaving. A steward is the first person to arrive and the last to leave

in an organisation. Traditional leadership sees a leader as a boss and commander who functions as an instructor and leaves afterwards. On the contrary, a servant leader is always present with the followers. The work of a steward is to make sure that everyone has been taken care of before the leader.

There are three women in the gospels who were stewards for Jesus (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Jesus and the mother of Zebedee's children). These women were the last to leave during Christ's crucifixion and were the first to arrive at the empty grave after his resurrection (see Mk 16:1). They wanted to make sure that the grave of their Master is taken care of before they departed to their houses. On the day of the resurrection they came to inspect only to find that he resurrected.

Servant leadership is to lead by example

Throughout our lives, we have been and continue to be influenced by the behaviour of others, whether it is the example set by parents, teachers, colleagues, friends, sport stars, celebrities, politicians or any other person. So, whether they like it or not, leaders lead by example. Leaders are role models; of course, people can and should make independent choices and they should not just be blind followers doing whatever the leader does but the leader's behaviour is a reference point. A leader's behaviour, good or bad, will affect the behaviour of others, and so clearly leaders need to focus on setting a good example to encourage positive behaviour in the people that they lead (Thatcher 2012:7).

One of the challenges facing leaders is how to get followers to do something they otherwise would not do. One mechanism by which a leader may influence his or her followers is through leading by example. Recent research has shown that followers respond strongly to the example set by a leader (Gächter et al. 2008:2). True leadership, unlike management, is not just a set of skills and learnt behaviour. Regardless of the leader's own perceptions, and those around the leader in the workplace, namely, colleagues, employees can determine the leader's personality by observing what the leader does on a daily basis. They cannot see inside the head of the leader, they cannot know what the leader thinks or feels and they cannot subliminally detect the compassion or pain or goodwill of the leader. In other words, the only way that one can manifest character, personhood and spirit in the workplace is thorough behaviour (Autry 2007:24).

Leading by example is what the leader needs to do to get moral authority. Even when the leader has formal authority – the power to coerce (directly or indirectly) – such authority is rarely absolute. Moreover, the people in an organisation with authority are not always, or solely, the leaders. Consider, for instance, that in many academic departments, the true leaders are often not the department chairs. Leadership is, thus, distinct from formal authority; it is, instead, an example of informal authority. The leader does not deduce his or her

authority from codes and statutes, as is the case with the jurisdiction of office, nor does he deduce his authority from traditional customs or feudal vows of faith, as is the case with patrimonial power (Hermalin 1998:1189). The leader deduces his or her moral authority by leading by example.

Corporate examples of servant leadership

There are contemporary examples of servant leadership especially in the corporate world, such as Starbucks. The well-known company, Starbucks, aimed to make sure that they can satisfy every customer's needs, so that its highest priority can be served through every cup of coffee. This is a good application of servant leadership to improve organisational performance. From the mission statement of Starbucks we can know that employees are being called partners. It is not just a job for them. It is their passion and lives because their needs are also being served by Starbucks. They respect each other and work tightly to increase the team's effectiveness. Their employees are encouraged and inspired by servant leaders to contribute to the enhancement of their community. An organisation makes a contribution to its local community. As a return, the community helps that organisation thrive by supporting it (Li 2014:7).

Another example of servant leadership is Southwest Airlines. At Southwest, people are reminded than instructed. The company is in customer service business but just happens to fly aeroplanes. They are a company of people not a company of aeroplanes. When the company started in 1971, they had only three aeroplanes, flying between three cities in Texas, with only 12 daily flights and 198 employees. The style of servant leadership and its principles assisted them to attain 700 aeroplanes, 97 cities (U.S. and international), 3600 daily flights, 46000 employees, number 1 domestic market share (25%), 42 consecutive years of profitability and no involuntary furloughs or layoffs as of 2014 (Southwest Airlines 2017).

Urgent style for the current political leadership in South Africa

Servant leadership is an urgent style for the current political leadership in South Africa because in servant leadership there is no abuse of power but only servanthood. Jesus said to his disciples that:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. (Mk 10:42-43)

Jesus here is calling for a different system of governance that gives service to people than to lord over them and exercise authority over them.

In servant leadership, the leader does not only serve but is also selfless. One thing about corruption as discussed above is that it only benefits the leader and the followers suffer as

a result. Corruption affects the poorest of the poor because they are not able to receive services. Corruption in the public administration and in political decision-making is a major enemy of those who wish to make a genuine effort to tackle the challenge of poverty (Kgatle 2017:3). Servant leadership enables to combat corruption and bring it under control because servant leaders are aware of others than themselves.

In servant leadership, there is public accountability. Servant leaders as stewards are able to account to their followers because they have the knowledge that public money is not their own money. They are only appointed to take care of the public purse. They will be able to account for every cent that comes in and goes out of the treasury. This is an urgently required style in South Africa because South Africa is more likely to become another failed state and the governing party is more likely to become another failed liberation movement. South Africa could face more economic downgrades which can negatively affect the economy.

The current political leadership in South Africa should learn from companies like Starbucks, Southwest Airlines and Google that servant leadership can ensure the success of an organisation. Starbucks Corporation was able to increase its profits by forming partnerships with employees, contributing to the enhancement of their community and leading by example. Similarly, Southwest Airlines was able to increase the volume of its operations, number of employees and profits by prioritising customer service rather than just flying people to different destinations.

The current political leadership in South Africa should also learn from their own former leaders such as Nelson Mandela, who gained honour and prestige through humility and service to the people of South Africa. His exalted status is not limited just to his people, but the whole world salutes him for his strength of character. His life story has attracted the international community and put South Africa on the global map. For the new generation of South Africans today, their harvest is plenty because of the sacrifices of the 'struggle hero'. 'The born free' in our land have never experienced the brutal and inhumane acts of apartheid. It took principles of servant leadership to shun retaliation to the nationalist government and retreat from the armed struggle (Kgatle 2012:111).

The current political leaders should lead by example. The best way to deal with abuse of power, corruption and lack of accountability at a local level is for the executive to lead by example. There is no way that the executive can correct corruption if they themselves are corrupt to the core. In Northern Sotho, they say *Pinyana ge e re Ping e kwele Ping e kgolo*. It simply means that the younger generation take cue from the older generation. Whatever a local councillor does on the ground, he or she would have learnt it from the elders in their network. It is therefore imperative that leaders lead others by example.

Conclusion

The aspects of the current political leadership in South Africa discussed in this article call for a unique approach to public governance, management and leadership. They call for a different system that can turn governance around to make it more trustworthy and accountable. In response to these aspects, the article demonstrated that servant leadership is an urgent style for the current state of political leadership in South Africa. The article discussed key aspects of the current political leadership in South Africa as a point of departure. The article also discussed servant leadership and applied it to the current state of political leadership in South Africa. Servant leadership is proposed in this article as an urgent style for the current state of political leadership in South Africa.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

References

- Augsburger, D., 2009, 'Evaluating servant-hood: From servant leadership to leading as serving', in E.O. Jacobsen (ed.), *The three tasks of leadership: Worldly wisdom for pastoral leaders*, pp. 99–109, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Autry, J.A., 2007, *The servant leader: How to build a creative team, develop Great Morale, and improve bottom-line performance*, Crown Business, New York.
- Bell, A., 2006, *Great leadership: What it is and what it takes in a complex world*, Davies-Black, Mountain View, CA.
- Citizen, 2014, *Statement by Public Protector Adv. Thuli Madonsela during a media briefing to release the report on an investigation into allegations of impropriety and unethical conduct relating to the installation and implementation of security measures by the Department of Public Works at and in respect of the private residence of President Jacob Zuma at Nkanala in KwaZulu-Natal*, viewed 19 March 2014, from <http://www.citizen.co.za>
- Collange, J.F., 1979, *The epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians*, Epworth, London.
- Collins, J., 2005, 'Level 5 leadership: The triumph of humility and fierce resolve', *Harvard business review* 83(7), 136–146.
- Covey, S.R., 2002, 'Servant-leadership and community leadership in the twenty-first century', in L.C. Spears & M. Lawrence (eds.), *Focus on leadership: Servant leadership for the 21st century*, pp. 27–34, Wiley, New York.
- Cox, N.C., 2009, 'Disciples and discipleship in the Gospel of Mark, with particular reference to Mark's contrast between male and female disciples', Doctoral dissertation, New Testament, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- De Graaf, D., Tilley, C. & Neal, L., 2004, 'Servant-leadership characteristics in organizational life', in L.C. Spears & M. Lawrence (eds.), *Practicing servant leadership: Succeeding through trust, bravery, and forgiveness*, pp. 133–166, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Dierendonck, D. & Patterson, K. (eds.), 2010, *Servant leadership: Developments in theory and research*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Dierendonck, D. & Rook, L., 2010, 'Enhancing innovation and creativity through servant leadership', in D. Dierendonck & K. Patterson (eds.), *Servant leadership: Developments in theory and research*, pp. 155–168, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Echols, S., 2009, 'Transformational/servant leadership: A potential synergism for an inclusive leadership style', *Journal of Religious Leadership* 8(2), 85–116.
- Elmer, D.H., 2006, *Cross-cultural Servant-hood*, IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL.
- Eye Witness News, 2016, *National assembly was duty-bound to hold Zuma accountable*, viewed 31 March 2016, from <http://www.ewn.co.za>
- EWN, 2017, *Nzimanze hits out at Zuma over 'abuse of power'*, viewed 29 May 2017, from www.ewn.co.za.
- Ferch, S.R., 2004, 'Servant Leadership, forgiveness, and social justice?', in L.C. Spears & M. Lawrence (eds.), *Practicing servant-leadership*, pp. 225–240, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Fransen, P.S., 2005, Jesus, consummate steward: Encountering the *Via Dolorosa*, *Trinity Seminary Review* 26(1), 29–35.
- Gächter, S., Nosenzo, D., Renner, E. & Sefton, M., 2008, *Who makes a good leader? Social preferences and leading-by-example*, The Centre for Decision Research and Experimental Economics, School of Economics, University of Nottingham, Nottingham.
- Geisler, N.L., 2007, *A popular survey of the New Testament*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Grieb, A.K., 2007, 'Philippians and the politics of God', *Interpretation* 61(3), 270–282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096430706100303>
- Habtemichael, F.S., 2009, 'Anti-corruption strategies in the South African public sector: Perspectives on the contributions of complexity thinking and ICTs', Doctoral dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.
- Heath, M., 2010, *Leadership secrets*, Harper Collins Publishers, London.
- Hellerman, J.H., 2010, 'Vindicating God's servants in Philippi and in Philippians: The influence of Paul's ministry in Philippi upon the composition of Philippians', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20(1), 85–102.
- Hermalin, B.E., 1998, 'Toward an economic theory of leadership: Leading by example', *American Economic Review*, 88(5), 1188–1206.
- Hian, C.W., 2010, *Learning to lead: Biblical leadership then and now*, Authentic, Hyderabad.
- Hutchison, D., 2009, Servant-Hood: Jesus' countercultural call to Christian Leaders, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166(1), 53–69.
- Kgatle, M.S., 2012, 'Servant leadership in Philippians 2: 5-11: Concept and application', Master dissertation, University of Pretoria.
- Kgatle, M.S., 2016a, *Servant leadership: The path to success*, Lulu Press Inc, Morrisville, North Carolina.
- Kgatle, M.S., 2016b, 'Servant leadership in Mark 10: 35-45 applied to African Pentecostal Christianity', Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria.
- Kgatle, M.S., 2017, 'A practical theological approach to the challenge of poverty in post-1994 South Africa: Apostolic Faith Mission as a case study', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), a4549. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4549>
- Khan, M.A. and Chowdhury, N., 2007. Public Accountability, Corruption Control and Service Delivery: Governance Challenges and Options. *Asia Pacific Journal for Public Administration*, 30(1), pp. 1–10.
- Kim, D.H., 2004, 'Foresight as the central ethic of leadership', in L.C. Spears & M. Lawrence (eds.), *Practicing servant leadership: Succeeding through trust, bravery, and forgiveness*, pp. 201–224, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Langa, P.N., 2006, 'The separation of powers in the South African Constitution', *South African Journal on Human Rights* 22(1), 2–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19962126.2006.11864878>
- Lewis, D., 2017, *The aspects of political leadership in South Africa*, Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office, Cape Town, pp. 1–24.
- Li, J., 2014, *Servant leadership: A literature review and reflection*, University of California, Riverside, CA.
- Makhanya, M., 2017, *The aspects of political leadership in South Africa*, Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office, Cape Town, pp. 1–24.
- Maloba, D.M., 2015, 'Monitoring good governance in South African local government and its implications for institutional development and service delivery. A case study of the sub-councils and councillor support department', Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Management and Commerce, University of the Western Cape.
- Miller, D. & Breton-Miller, L., 2006, 'Family governance and firm performance: Agency, stewardship & capabilities', *Family Business Review* 19(1), 73–87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-6248.2006.00063.x>
- Moessner, D.P., 2009, 'Turning status "upside down" in Philippi: Christ Jesus' emptying himself as forfeiting any acknowledgement of his "equality with God" (Phil 2:6–11)', *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31(2), 123–143. <https://doi.org/10.1163/019590809X12553238843069>
- Mojapelo, J.P.M., 2013, 'The doctrine of separation of powers', *Advocate* 26(1), 37–46.
- Nebreda, R.S., 2008, "'Have this mind": A socio-scientific reading of Philippians 2:5–11', Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.
- News24, 2012, *Corruption-SA counting the cost*, viewed 08 May 2012 from <http://www.news24.com>
- Ortberg, N., 2009, 'Ministry implications of service', in Erio Jacobsen (ed.), *The three tasks of leadership: Worldly wisdom for pastoral leaders*, pp. 131–138, William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Pearson, A.W. & Marler, L.E., 2010, 'A leadership perspective of reciprocity stewardship in family firms', *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 34(6), 1117–1124. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00416.x>
- Powell, M.A., 2009, *Introducing the New Testament: A historical literary, and theological survey*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Public Service Commission (PSC), 2006, *Report on the evaluation of performance and compliance with the Batho Pele Principles of Redress*, viewed 01 August 2006, from <http://www.psc.gov.za>
- Public Service Commission (PSC), 2014, *The annual report of the Public Service Commission*, viewed 05 August 2014, from <http://www.psc.gov.za>
- Quartz Media, 2016, *What the 'State Capture' report tells us about Zuma, the Gupta, and corruption in South Africa*, viewed 03 November 2016, from <https://qz.com> on
- Ruschman, N.L., 2002, 'Servant-leadership and the best companies to work for in America', in L.C. Spears & M. Lawrence (eds.), *Focus on leadership: Servant leadership for the 21st century*, pp. 123–139, Wiley, New York.

- Russell, R., 2003, 'A practical theology of servant leadership', in *Proceedings of the Servant Leadership Research Roundtable*, School of leadership studies, Regent University, Virginia, pp. 1–9
- Saner, M. & Wilson, J., 2003, *Stewardship, good governance and ethics, policy brief number 19*, viewed 01 December 2003, from <http://www.ioig.ca>
- Sang, O., 2013, *The separation of powers and new judicial power: How the South African Constitutional Court plotted its course*, viewed 21 January 2013, from <http://www.elsamaltalawreview.com>
- Southwest Airline, 2017, *Servant leadership at Southwest Airlines: Putting our people first*, viewed 01 September 2014, from <https://greenleaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Ridley-Keynote.pdf>
- Tan, S., 2009, 'The primacy of servant-hood', in Erio Jacobsen (ed.), *The three tasks of leadership: Worldly wisdom for pastoral leaders*, pp. 77–90, William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Thatcher, P., 2012, *Leading by example*, Bookboon, London.
- Van Vuuren, H., 2014, *South Africa: Democracy corruption and conflict management*, Centre for Development and Enterprise, Johannesburg.
- Vincent, M.R., 1985, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Walls, W.J., 2004, 'Anatomy of collaboration: An act of servant-leadership', in L.C. Spears & M. Lawrence (eds.), *Practising servant leadership: Succeeding through trust, bravery, and forgiveness*, pp. 113–132, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
- Wilkes, C.G., 1998, *Jesus on leadership*, Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL.
- Yarbro, A.C., 2003, 'Psalms, Philippians 2:6–11, and the origins of Christology', *Biblical Interpretation* 11(3–4), 361–372.
- Zohar, D., 2002, 'Servant-leadership and rewiring the corporate brain', in L.C. Spears & M. Lawrence (eds.), *Focus on leadership: Servant-leadership for the 21st century*, pp. 111–121, Wiley, New York.