


Empowering church leaders for service in Africa: Situational Holistic Pastoral Ministry paradigm



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Empowering church leaders globally is a contested terrain, particularly in Africa. This article explores the challenges and pitfalls of church leadership on the continent. It not only examines the complexities of contemporary African church leadership but also proposes strategies for modelling its transformative development. The focus is on critically assessing how church leaders can be empowered to transform both the church and communities in Africa through the Situational Holistic Pastoral Ministry (SHPM) paradigm. The article argues that numerous challenges in Africa can be mitigated by equipping church leaders for transformative roles. A key issue identified is the tendency to idolise clergy, placing them at the centre of ministry, rather than fostering their role as models who empower others. Drawing on insights from SHPM theory, this article evaluates the empowerment of church leaders for transformative action within the African context. It concludes by emphasising the need to empower church leaders to facilitate the transformation of both the church and its surrounding communities.

Contribution: This article contributes to the discourse on ethical Christian leadership by advocating role-modelling servant leadership as opposed to idolisation. It posits that empowering church leaders is essential for addressing the myriad challenges confronting churches and communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: church leadership; empowerment; idol; role model; pastoral ministry.

Introduction

The church is one of the most prominent and influential institutions in Africa. In this article, Africa refers specifically to the region south of the Sahara. By 2020, nearly 60% of the population identified as Christian (Galal 2024). Consequently, Christianity has become one of the largest religions in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The existence of various strands of Christianity has led to diverse styles of Church leadership, shaped by African cultural backgrounds, political contexts, and the emergence of contemporary African Christian movements. Given the socio-economic and political challenges faced by the region, church leadership must be contextually relevant to foster abundant life within the church and the wider community. Empowerment for service is essential across denominational boundaries, as the church plays a vital role in the lives of many Africans. Accordingly, this article aims to explore the issues surrounding the empowerment of church leadership in Africa. It begins by addressing the challenges facing the continent and the factors that influence church leadership, before focusing on strategies for developing model leaders rather than idolised figures.

The article posits that empowering church leaders is likely to produce servant and transformational leaders equipped to help the church address contemporary challenges as part of its mission. This discussion is primarily based on literature study and utilises secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and reports.

Situational Holistic Pastoral Ministry paradigm

Church life and ministry are deeply rooted in pastoral leadership. Herbert Moyo's Situational Holistic Pastoral Ministry (SHPM) offers valuable insights into church leadership and ministry, emphasising the importance of empowering church leadership to serve both the church and the wider community in Africa. Both clergy and lay leaders need to be empowered to guide the church effectively in addressing the spiritual, social, economic, and political challenges faced by people daily, particularly in Africa. The church's role extends beyond providing spiritual

nourishment and growth; it also contributes to human development and addresses the situational needs of its members (Moyo 2023). The context in which the church operates significantly shapes its life and pastoral ministry.

According to Buffel (2007):

Pastoral care must cease to only concentrate on “the ambulance ministry” with the sick and the troubled, while ignoring the social, economic and political causes of poverty and all that make them sick and troubled. (p. 17)

Thus, pastoral care should adopt a holistic approach to human needs. Jesus exemplified this by addressing spiritual, social, and economic needs – preaching the gospel, healing the sick, and feeding the hungry.

The SHPM approach prioritises addressing the real-life situations of the people (Moyo 2023:22). Sub-Saharan Africa faces numerous challenges, including political instability, violence, unemployment, and poverty (Mago 2018). These crises necessitate a situationally responsive ministry. As Moyo (2023:22) asserts, ‘[e]very situation needs to be addressed pastorally by the Church from an informed position’. To achieve this, church leaders and those engaged in pastoral ministry must be equipped to respond to these human conditions effectively. Empowered leadership is crucial for ‘bringing’ God and the gospel into socio-economic and political contexts (Moyo 2023:23). There is no human situation outside God’s care; thus, the church must engage in holistic care. Moyo (2023) notes that:

The silence of the Church in socio-economic and political situations can imply the absence of God in those spheres of life, hence the importance of the vigilance of the pastoral ministry of the Church in responding timeously to social developments. (p. 23)

Well-trained and empowered church leadership is essential for effective service delivery in preaching, Christian education, diaconal ministry, and maintaining critical solidarity with the state on socio-economic development issues (Moyo 2023:30). Using the SHPM paradigm, this article explores ways to empower church leaders in Africa, equipping them to remain relevant and responsive to the challenges faced by the church and society. The SHPM paradigm stands out for its holistic approach to pastoral care, which addresses not only spiritual needs but also the socio-economic and political issues that are of paramount concern in Africa.

Africa’s political and economic challenges: Failure of democracy in Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa endured prolonged periods of colonialism and apartheid under imperialist forces. Post-colonial regimes heralded the dawn of independence but also introduced new forms of suffering due to the recolonisation by elected African leaders who failed to uphold democratic principles. Instead, they perpetuated a model of Western dictatorship, benefiting a privileged elite while the majority endured hardship. Omar

Bongo, the former president of the Republic of Gabon, exemplified this, remaining in office for 42 years until his death in 2009 (Mpotsiah 2018:38). According to Meredith (2006:374), during his lengthy tenure, Bongo engaged in the misappropriation and sale of government assets to enrich his family, friends, and political allies. He monopolised business in Gabon, amassing immense wealth from oil, minerals, and property (Mpotsiah 2018:38).

Other infamous dictators in Africa included Idi Amin of Uganda and Mobutu Sese Seko of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who used violence and repression to suppress opposition and extend their regimes (Masango 2002). Their dictatorial governance ‘inflicted terrible abuses to human freedom and dignity; and the essence of true leadership laden with virtue’ (Udani & Lorenzo-Molo 2013:372). Similar tendencies were evident during the rule of Robert Mugabe and Emmerson Mnangagwa in Zimbabwe. Their leadership was characterised by (Emmanue & Muzurura 2024):

[T]he failure to address national governance, observance and enforcement of the country’s laws, systemic vested interests between the military and political elites, increasing military-ruling party conflation and endemic public corruption. (p. 171)

Besides political repressive behaviour, Mugabe remained in power until being ousted by a coup in 2017, while Mnangagwa appears to have continued in the same vein, promoting the mantra *2030 nde ndichipo* [2030, I will still be reigning]. Proponents of this slogan, including some churches, argue that he should remain in office to complete the national programmes and projects he initiated as part of his Vision 2030 (Chenyedzai 2022). ‘Since assuming power in 2017, the Second Republic (SR) has continued to intensify political repressions, violating human rights, shrinking democratic space hence presenting an image of a rogue country’ (Emmanue & Muzurura 2024:171). Mnangagwa is infamous for his violent rhetoric, such as the statement *Tinosvasvanga vanovumhesvavukono* [we beat or punish the undisciplined]. His regime is marked by dictatorship, looting of state resources, undermining the rule of law, and violation of human rights by the employment of political repression (Emmanue & Muzurura 2024:171). ‘Thus, violence against opponents is engraved in the party (Zanu-PF) and, with every election in Zimbabwe, violence is on the menu as a serving for dissenting voices’ (Dube 2023a:6). This environment has turned some citizens into passive supporters who praise the president even for alleged development that remains unseen in the country. Questioning injustice, oppression, and corruption is labelled as rebellion. Africa is plagued by political idolisation, where ‘leaders who always want to feel “big” and to be recognised as “messiahs”’ dominate (Mpotsiah 2018:40). Such leaders demand adulation for their prolonged tenure in office, even as the populace continues to suffer.

Corruption

Corruption entails the abuse of power and the pursuit of personal interests at the expense of the majority. It is an ‘act of

perversion of public office to serve self-interest' (Igboin 2016:145). Political leaders who exploit state resources to enrich themselves, their families, friends, and cronies are considered corrupt (Manala 2014). According to Mpotsiah (2018):

Several years down the line, the rate of corruption in Africa has become very inimical to our political leaders. It has become a social canker and a phenomenon that has come to stay in Africa soil forever, since the leaders who have been elected to serve are criminally and continuously mismanaging the scarce resources that have been entrusted into their care. This happened because, the leaders who took over from the reigns of colonial authority had become addicted to the abyss of the corrupt morass, and hence they could not resist the temptation to continue this act. (p. 36)

Development in many African countries has been unnecessarily stifled by corrupt predators in the form of political leaders, who have been entrusted with the people's mandate to manage national resources responsibly (Mpotsiah 2018:37). Some African leaders have assumed office 'to harness the vast human and natural resources available in the continent for their personal good and comfort' (Ebegbulem 2012:226). For instance, Nigeria's Sani Abacha, who served as president for 5 years, allegedly embezzled US\$1.13 billion and £413 million, in addition to receiving kickbacks from foreign companies operating in Nigeria at the time (Fagbadebo 2007). 'DRC's Mobutu Sese Seko allegedly managed to embezzle a whopping sum of US\$4 billion to US\$5 billion to a private bank account in Switzerland' (Mpotsiah 2018:38).

Other African nations, such as Burundi, Cameroon, Gabon, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, continue to suffer from poverty and corruption, which significantly hinder their development (Uneke 2010). Systemic corruption results in 'economic degrowth and underdevelopment' (Emmanue & Muzurura 2024:165). Manala (2014:251) further observes that '[c]orruption interferes with and distorts good human character and blunts human values'. In Zimbabwe, for example, corruption has devastated the economy, causing widespread unemployment, poor service delivery, and poverty. These factors have driven many Zimbabweans to migrate and become economic refugees in neighbouring countries and beyond (Nyoni 2020:210).

Corruption exacerbates poor service delivery and perpetuates poverty, with the most vulnerable members of society bearing the brunt as political leaders divert resources for personal gain. The consequences include compromised service delivery. Although corruption is a global challenge, Africa has endured its effects for an extended period. This unfair behaviour has persisted and evolved over time, with those responsible transforming into idols who cling to power to protect and expand their wealth.

Unemployment

It is often believed that, while most of Africa's political leaders claim to care about the welfare of their citizens, they

simultaneously deprive them of their socio-economic and political rights (Meredith 2006). As Gboyega (1996:5) aptly puts it, 'government existed, so that corruption might thrive'. According to Mpotsiah (2018:38), corruption enables African politicians to plunder limited resources for personal gain, stimulating foreign economies at the expense of their increasingly frustrated populace. Corruption is also a significant contributor to the high rates of unemployment across Africa. Due to systemic corruption, many African countries face numerous challenges, including high inflation rates, deteriorating terms of trade, increasing price instability, frequent exchange rate volatility, and pervasive unemployment (World Bank 2020).

The political systems in many African nations marginalise the poor, excluding them from the core of economic activities. Corruption and poor governance have exacerbated the crisis of underemployment and unemployment among the youth in SSA. O'Neill (2024) observes, 'In 2023, Eswatini had the highest unemployment rate in the world, at 37.6%. Of the 10 countries with the highest unemployment rates, nine were in Sub-Saharan Africa'. Economies with high levels of dysfunction are often characterised by low GDP and minimal job opportunities, driving significant migration of the workforce.

According to Woode (2024):

Various studies have identified that a large proportion of the workforce is either unemployed or under-employed. A case in point is the report by the World Bank which stated that Ghana is faced with 12% youth unemployment and more than 50% underemployment, which are both higher than overall unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan African countries. (p. 2)

The case of Ghana exemplifies the unemployment crisis in SSA. Woode (2024:17) further highlights the severity of the situation in southern African countries, where unemployment rates are particularly alarming: Eswatini 56%; Botswana 36%, Namibia 46%; and South Africa 54%. Statistics reveal an appalling youth unemployment rate for those aged 15–24, which stood at 11.86% in 2017, rising to 12.06% in 2018, and 12.44% in 2019 (Woode 2024:17). Rather than declining, youth unemployment continues to escalate year on year. This trend reflects a widespread issue across SSA, where brain drain has reached unprecedented levels, with young professionals increasingly leaving Africa in search of better opportunities overseas.

Poverty

In Africa, poverty is a consequence of historical colonialism and apartheid. This situation is further exacerbated by poor governance, corruption, social injustices, and economic mismanagement, which collectively contribute to economic decline across the continent. The church and its leadership are not immune to the effects of poverty. In fact, the church's economy and mission are severely impacted as its membership increasingly sinks into poverty. Church leadership that understands the dynamics of poverty is often

compelled to serve the poor and marginalised, actively engaging in efforts to alleviate poverty within African communities (Hendriks 2004:52). It is estimated that 'more than two-thirds of Africans live in extreme poverty' (Mpotsiah 2018:40). Those living in such conditions face significant challenges in accessing food and other basic necessities, making it difficult to educate their children and secure a better future. The cycle of poverty is therefore arduous and often seemingly impossible to break.

According to a World Bank research report (2018), '415 million people live in extreme poverty on the African continent (57% of the global total), with 60% of people living in unstable countries' (Woode 2024:14). Unemployment serves as a benchmark for poverty. As Addison et al. (2020:97) note, '[t]wo out of every three Africans are presently living on less than US\$3 per day; and inequality has remained stubbornly high in SSA'. Ndungane (2003:20) observes that 'the deprivations around poverty are not just about low incomes; they include loss of human dignity; this is about human suffering'. Poverty in Africa is not a result of individual laziness but stems from historical and structural factors (Buffel 2023:125). Ndungane (2003) succinctly articulates that:

We live in a society where there are great disparities between the rich and the poor. This is due to hundreds of years of racially structured economic, political and social policies that were designed to benefit the white minority of the rest of the population. (p. 21)

While millions of people live in poverty, a small group of political elites enjoy extreme wealth, often through exclusive access to national resources, while depriving the poor. Political violence and instability have led to negative economic growth, stagnation, and increased poverty in some African nations (Arndt, McKay & Tarp 2016:20). The significance of political stability and the avoidance of conflict for economic and social development is well documented, as evidenced by the more recent experiences of Côte d'Ivoire and Madagascar (Arndt et al. 2016:20). Alleviating poverty and reducing its prevalence will depend on African leaders prioritising the welfare of their people above personal gain (Mpotsiah 2018:41).

New forms of Christianity

The 'new wave' of Christianity has seen the rise of charismatic movements and mega-church prophets, emerging from former missionary churches and Pentecostal movements in Africa. Mega-church prophets and apostolic movements, characterised by clergy-centred churches, have become prevalent today. Leaders adopt titles such as 'apostle', 'bishop', 'founder' and 'prophet' to signify their missions. The titles 'apostle', 'prophet', and 'founder' are particularly common, as these leaders are typically the founders of their churches, emphasising healing, miracles, and prophetic ministry. Some leaders are referred to as 'Papa' or 'Major' (Anon 2015). Frequently, the focus on wealth and prosperity, prosperity gospel, and alternative solutions to

socio-economic problems dominates their ministries, often aligning them with ruling elites (Mpofu & Ncube 2023). Certain apostles and prophets maintain close ties with political figures, enabling them to engage in illicit activities without facing legal repercussions.

One notable example is Uebert Angel, the founder of Spirit Embassy Church, who cultivated a close relationship with President Emmerson Mnangagwa to such an extent that Angel was appointed as one of Mnangagwa's advisers and served as the ambassador-at-large, overseeing Zimbabwe's international missions in America and Europe to explore business opportunities for the country (Murwira 2021). However, he was implicated in the 'Gold mafia' saga of 2023, accused of profiting from dubious deals and gold smuggling (Staff Reporter 2023). Despite these allegations, Angel remains 'untouchable' due to his close ties with the president.

Prophet Angel has been described as follows (Anon 2015):

Flamboyant and sharp tongued, Prophet Angel made his way into the public glare in 2011, championing the gospel of prosperity. The tall and lanky prophet, who dressed with a flourish, quickly became one of the most sought after prophets locally and regionally. Fondly referred to as 'Papa' or 'Major' by his congregants at Spirit Embassy, the youthful prophet – whose collection of flashy cars endeared him to the youthful group in his church – was unapologetic about his boastful tirades. He reached an all-time high with his miracle money sermons which almost got him into trouble with the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe officials, but [he] wriggled his way out of it and became even more popular. (n.p.)

Such prophets seek power in both religious and political spheres. Among them are T.D. Jakes, Chris Oyakhilome, Bishop David Oyedepo, Paseka Mboro, Shepherd Bushiri, Walter Magaya, and Emmanuel Makandiwa (Mahohoma 2017). Many of these leaders rank among the wealthiest individuals in their respective countries, often rivalling Africa's and the world's richest, while the majority of Africans languish in poverty. Their wealth and flamboyance attract admiration beyond their congregations. However, as Jeremiah (Jr 23:16) warned about such pseudoprophets:

Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds not from the mouth of the Lord.

Focused on self-interest, wealth, and power, such leaders often fail to embody the qualities of genuine servants and messengers of God.

This is exemplified by Prophet Makandiwa's statement: 'It is never the responsibility of the government to create jobs for you' (Mpofu & Ncube 2023). In the context of political and economic crises, prophets and prosperity preachers have flourished. Dube (2023a:19) notes that certain religious leaders, including Uebert Angel, Emmanuel Makandiwa, Passion Java, Nehemiah Mutendi, and Andrew Wutawunashwe, have joined Zimbabwe's ruling party cartels, perpetuating an oppressive system of leadership. The involvement of Angel

and Makandiwa in gold smuggling has enabled them to accumulate wealth 'in a poverty-stricken country with a high level of unemployment and emigration' (Dube 2023b:142). Consequently, 'the notions of "prophetic" have also become synonymous with "exploitation," "self-enrichment," "abuse," "violence"' (Maponya & Baron 2020:6).

These leaders' wealth and prophecies attract large followings, often obscuring their perpetuation of injustice and political oppression for personal gain. Their followers idolise them, viewing them as sources of deliverance from all forms of suffering and blessings of health and wealth. Such idolisation becomes blasphemous, undermining democracy and leading many to submit blindly to the political elite's whims (Duri 2018:173). When this phenomenon infiltrates the church, it undermines the priesthood of all believers, promotes clericalism, and transforms the church into a pastor-centred institution. Church leaders become more powerful and indispensable, increasing the likelihood of abuse of authority due to their idolisation. In this context, it is imperative to empower church leaders to serve as role models rather than idols.

Empowering church leaders: Situational Holistic Pastoral Ministry approaches

To fulfil its mandate, the church requires leaders who are equipped to interpret the signs of the times and address the situational needs of both the church and society. These leaders must also serve as role models for future generations by equipping the next wave of leaders to undertake holistic pastoral ministry. Church leaders in Africa, drawing on cultural heritage, must return to the foundational principles of servant leadership. An African leader is situated at the intersection of African culture, modernity, church and denominational traditions, and biblical frameworks of leadership. These elements need to be integrated to enrich servant leadership principles (Magezi 2015:8). As Masango (2002) observes:

In Africa, a leader is viewed as someone who is a servant to the clan, tribe, community or group. In other words, African people treat a leader by virtue of being a king, priest or ruler chosen by virtue of the office in order to serve the nation. (p. 708)

Historically, African kings ensured the safety of their people through military provision and secured food and other resources for their communities. The spirit of selflessness, which has been undermined by socio-economic and political crises in Africa, can only be restored through church leaders empowered to address these challenges. Church leaders must recognise their calling to serve the church and community, aiming to empower others for the mission of God in the world. Servant leadership aligns with the African ethic of *ubuntu* or *unhu*, which emphasises humility, unity, respect, and the promotion of human dignity alongside the dignity of all creation.

Amidst Africa's myriad challenges, the church's mission should be 'to empower individuals to fight against injustice

through academic preparation, a strong confidence and belief, and a hope for the future' (Porter 2017:135). The equipping and empowering of leaders should focus on building servant leaders who serve as models across generations. Consequently, the mission of church leaders 'must be to equip and empower all who participate in the mission of the kingdom of God, to follow the example and witness of Jesus Christ' (Porter 2017:112). Magezi (2015:7) asserts that Jesus, through his teachings and actions, both modelled and cautioned against false humility and equality that oppose true servant leadership. The servanthood of Christ is grounded in true humility aimed at the common good. Christ exemplified this by serving and demonstrating the nature of church leadership in every situation. He gave humble service and equipped his disciples as servant leaders, teaching them that whoever wishes to be first must be the servant of all. As Jesus said, 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:44). In his ministry, Christ modelled leadership for his disciples establishing a legacy that continues across generations. As Porter (2017:26) succinctly notes, '[e]mpowering leadership is not to produce followers, but to produce other empowering leaders'. Christ taught, inspired, and equipped his disciples for pastoral ministry, emboldening them to courageously face persecution and even death. To transform the church and society, church leaders must thoroughly understand the principles of biblical servant leadership. This framework of biblical servant leadership applies equally to church leadership and community leadership in general (Magezi 2015:6). Church leaders must reject idolisation and instead become selfless role models of humble servant leadership. Those who adopt servant leadership will contribute to transformation of the church and society, refusing to overlook the conditions that dehumanise African people.

Preaching

The SHPM should inform the preaching of the church and demonstrate its consciousness of the African context. The church is the creature of the Word, with its primary focus on preaching the gospel in the world. As Albert Nolan (1988:209) succinctly states, '[t]he Church is defined and constituted by the gospel. Put quite simply, the role of the Church is to preach the gospel'. This raises questions about the content and purpose of the church's preaching.

Buffel (2023) laments that:

The church has not only been apathetic to the socio-economic and political and cultural ills but at other times significant sections of the church actively supported systems and structures responsible for those ills. (p. 129)

When the church is associated with silence or ignores the causes of human suffering, it fails to demonstrate concern for the wellbeing of its members and the broader community (Moyo 2023). Church leaders should therefore be empowered to craft sermons that deliberately address the contemporary issues facing the church in Africa. The gospel message must

address poverty, reconciliation, and social justice to bring healing and should reflect the church's willingness to stand with the wounded, hurt, and marginalised in society (Hendriks 2004:52). According to Nolan (1988):

The gospel can be preached by means of public statements. The Church comments on current events in terms of the good news, denouncing sin and announcing the hope of salvation, protesting about what is wrong and supporting what is right. (p. 209)

The purpose of the gospel of Christ is to transform people within their contextual realities. Christ came to save the poor and the oppressed (Lk 4:18) from all forms of evil, including economic and political oppression. In Romans 12:2 Paul's exhortation is clear:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The renewal and transformation of individuals lead to the transformation of the church and society. Therefore, sermons should focus on themes of individual, church, and community transformation, addressing spiritual, socio-economic, and political issues.

The message of Christ, conveyed through sermons, can be a tool to break the yoke of deception and propaganda employed by political systems to perpetuate injustice. Well-informed church leadership can deliver sermons that condemn all forms of violence and human rights abuses, bringing people to an awareness of their socio-economic and political realities (Moyo 2023). Such leadership responds situationally and holistically to the plight of the people in Africa. When the church remains silent on economic and political issues, it implies 'the absence of God in those spheres' (Moyo 2023:23). Moyo (2023) further asserts that:

Preaching the good news seeks to keep people continuously in touch with the Will of God as they become immersed in the socio-economic and political situation of their daily life. (p. 24)

Unless African church leaders are empowered to connect biblical texts and preaching to African contextual realities in their preaching, their gospel message risks becoming irrelevant and meaningless.

Christian education

Under the SHPM, Christian education is a key pillar for empowering leaders to transform the church and society. Depending on its type, education is a powerful instrument capable of changing political and socio-economic situations and achieving the desired goals in any context (Moyo 2023:26). Christian education, as a special transformative tool, is particularly useful within the context of SHPM, especially given the myriad challenges faced by the church mission in Africa. Taruona, Kumalo and Moyo (2023) observe:

Christian education in the form of theological training to enhance the capacity of a minister is an added advantage for pastoral ministers to increase impact and minimise errors in ministry.

In fact, the pastoral ministry of the church is a vocation with specific functions that require specific skills for optimum functionality. (p. xii)

Theological education aligned with addressing African challenges serves as an upskilling tool for empowering both clergy and laity. It not only provides essential knowledge but also cultivates awareness of contextual realities and the skills needed to address them. Msangaambe (2011:20) defines empowerment as 'a way of establishing an awareness of the potential that is unused or not properly used in a group of individuals that will provoke them into action'. Similarly, Agbiji and Swart (2013:13) highlight that conscientisation in socio-economic and political areas fosters significant societal transformation. Freire (1970) argues that:

[E]ducation is the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the practice of domination – denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from men. (p. 452)

The church's Christian education should be structured to address the current challenges of the African continent. Through Christian education, church leadership is exposed to the socio-political and economic issues affecting society. By empowering both leaders and members, the church can play a pivotal role in societal transformation.

The approach of the church's Christian education should be conscious and intentional in addressing issues that foster the transformation of both church and society. As Moyo (2023) asserts:

The situational holistic educational ministry will have content that is based on the needs of conscientized participants and if well-coordinated this kind of education can lead to social transformation and freedom. Christian education under this model can deal with topics such as human rights, politics, general elections, election monitoring, participation by the Church in political developments and the manifestos of different political parties. (p. 27)

Unlike the propaganda disseminated by government-controlled media, the church's Christian education should adopt a dialogical approach in both content and methodology to respond to the needs of the people (Moyo 2023). Churches' educational programmes should address the political and socio-economic conditions of Africa's poverty-stricken communities (Addison et al. 2020). According to Mwambazambi and Banza (2014:5), '[t]his education can be geared at combating ignorance and providing people and especially leaders with the needed knowledge and skills'.

The SHPM-informed education engages with every topic and issue relevant to the needs and situations of both the church and the community. Christian education conscientises church leaders to actively participate in God's mission in the world, rather than remaining confined within the four walls of the church. The goal is to prepare individuals who will actively address social justice issues and work towards peace in a world wounded by socio-economic and political systems that primarily benefit the political elite.

Diakonia

The church should not limit its diakonia ministry to providing 'ambulance services'; instead, it must proactively and holistically engage with society's daily struggles in Africa (Buffel 2007:178). While attending to the sick and dying is important, it is not the sole form of pastoral care and diakonia; SHPM requires the church to address the plight of people, particularly in Africa's situation, where political violence displacement, unemployment, and poverty are prevalent (Pali 2016):

Christians are the ones who bridge the church and the world, witness the Word through action, and are called to a life of faith, obedience, service, and worship to God in private and public life. (p. 17)

Jørgensen (2015:10) concurs, stating that the diakonia ministry of the church mobilises and distributes resources to meet societal needs, embodying love, justice, kindness, and compassion for the needy and the marginalised of society. Therefore, church leaders must be empowered to practise prophetic diakonia, which not only addresses immediate needs to the victims but also challenges the systemic injustices that cause suffering.

Firstly, church leadership must guide the church in showing love and concern for those in need by providing food, shelter, and other essentials (Moyo 2023). This tangible care allows people to experience God's love and providence, positioning the church as a divine instrument meeting diverse socio-economic and political challenges.

Secondly, with widespread poverty and injustices, African church leaders require empowerment in prophetic diakonia. Leaders must adopt a stance of critical solidarity with governments, resisting systems of oppression that perpetuate suffering of people, and speaking prophetically. They must challenge the 'government to reduce the glaring and immoral chasm between the poor and the rich and mobilised for practical intervention from all parties and stakeholders' (Pali 2016:18). The church, through servant and transformational leadership, should mediate for peace and justice in African communities. 'They must be courageous to be visible in the public square to speak against the African continent's darkest problems of bad governance, corruption, and socio-economic injustice' (Sebahene 2020:382).

Chemorion (2023:52) highlights the church's role in addressing historical injustices such as land disputes, segregation, brutality, killings, religious and political intolerance. It must provide pastoral care to the sick and the weak as well as stewardship of resources, holding leaders accountable. The church can also tackle divisive politics during political campaigns, pre- and post-election tensions or violence, and issues like cattle rustling that lead to suffering and death of people due to intolerance they may be dealt.

For the church to be effective in the public sphere and demonstrate God's presence in all aspects of life, leaders need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to actively

engage with societal issues. 'The ministry can be holistic if the church responds to the totality of the needs of the victims in their situation' (Moyo 2023:29). Empowering church leaders involves addressing mindset, conscientiousness, justice, liberation, resistance and embracement of relational elements of societal transformation (Swart 2003). With adequate empowerment, church leaders can make the church a versatile and transformative agent, addressing human needs comprehensively.

Collaborative pastoral ministry

In SHPM, collaboration is a vital approach for church leadership in addressing societal needs. Collaboration involves forming local and broader partnerships, enabling church leaders to work alongside other stakeholders in mission and service. Firstly, church leaders are empowered to prepare others for collaborative ministry within the body of Christ. This aligns with the principles of servant and transformational leadership. Similarly, an important strategy for Christian leadership is fostering genuine team ministry and cultivating team leaders (Hanna 2006:24). This entails empowering the laity, working in partnership with them, and affirming the priesthood of all believers. Buffel (2023) asserts:

There is no longer any room for the pastor-centred church or ministry. The people must take ownership and have total participation in the ministry of pastoral care. All that professional pastors must do is to equip the believers and to empower them in this ministry, which should be in line with the 'priesthood of all believers'. (p. 137)

The clergy play a critical role in equipping the saints for ministry, enabling them to transform both the church and society. Moyo (2023:32) argues that 'Situational Holistic Pastoral Ministry is ministry for the whole Church rather than the clergy alone', emphasising the need for the clergy to foster collaboration. In practice, this means working closely with the laity, who often serve as board members with advisory roles in decision-making and see to it that pastors lead the implementation of these decisions (Gbekor 2020:372). Such collaboration exemplifies the church as 'the body of Christ' (Eph 4:12), where every part fulfils its function while remaining connected to the whole. Kouzes and Posner (eds. 2006:32) observe, 'Empowering leaders inspire and pass on their power to others, with a goal of equipping those they lead, and growing new leaders in the process'. African church leaders must demonstrate servant leadership by working collegially with other clergy and equipping the laity, thereby strengthening the body of Christ. This approach eradicates idolatry, promotes teamwork, and prepares the church for future leadership.

Secondly, leaders must be equipped to engage with local, national, and global ecumenical movements. Africa's context calls for churches at national and global level to 'come together and play some prophetic role towards political leaders against recolonisation' (Mwambazambi & Banza 2014:8). Collaboration shapes their responses to diverse challenges by allowing them to share different experiences with other leaders. Servant leadership fosters empowerment,

cooperation, trust, and ethical authority (Greenleaf 1991). Broader ecumenical engagement should include mainline Pentecostal and charismatic churches, African-initiated churches, and so-called mega-churches (Kobia 2018). Ecumenism is defined as 'the pulling together of all efforts by Christians of all persuasions' (Gaga, Masengwe & Dube 2023:62). Working in isolation hinders the church's ability to address Africa's challenges. To effectively fulfil their mission and respond to current challenges, churches should find ways to collaborate creatively and faithfully to build unity despite constellation of ecumenical groupings in Africa and the world (Kobia 2018). Denominational and confessional differences should not obstruct the church's mission to act as an agent of change in Africa. Instead, churches should adopt a missional focus, enabling denominations to work collectively to tackle socio-economic issues, rather than focusing on confessional differences (Hove 2020). This collaborative approach fosters enduring partnerships and facilitates the sharing of resources and tools for mission implementation (Zwana 2009:297).

Lastly, church leaders need to be empowered to collaborate with other stakeholders. The church cannot function in isolation; it exists within the community to serve the community. Addressing socio-economic and political challenges requires church leaders, who are open-minded to work towards broader collaboration, to engage with faith-based organisations, NGOs, civil society, human rights groups, and government agencies working towards social justice and poverty alleviation. Prophetic diakonia thrives on such collaboration, enabling the sharing of skills, financial, and human resources to address Africa's challenges. To conduct SHPM, churches and diaconal organisations must work together, embracing 'diakonia both as a public service and a public witness to respond to the challenges and threats that are undermining life and putting God's creation at risk' (De Faria 2019:251). Partnerships between the church, government, and businesses are crucial for addressing political challenges, historical economic imbalances, and inequalities (Buffel 2007). Such collaboration fosters critical solidarity on matters of state governance, economic policies, social protection as well as influencing national policies and decision-making (Gaga et al. 2023:64). As Moyo (2023:32) highlights, the clergy play a pivotal role in facilitating 'collaborative ministry if SHPM is to achieve meaningful results'. Stakeholder engagement ensures that community leaders have a voice on issues affecting them.

Conclusion

Africa's socio-economic realities cannot be avoided. It poses significant challenges for the church as it carries out its ministry. The socio-economic, cultural, and political circumstances associated with Africa must be integral to the church's focus. As such, church leaders – both clergy and laity – require empowerment to effectively respond to these realities.

This article highlights the importance of empowerment by examining some of the socio-economic and political issues

such as dictatorship, political violence, poverty, and unemployment, which leave many Africans, particularly the youth, facing a bleak and uncertain future. It further explores how African church leaders are influenced by diverse leadership styles rooted in African cultural heritage, missionary legacies, and political systems. These influences can lead to either positive or negative leadership outcomes, depending on how they are interpreted and applied.

Using Moyo's SHPM paradigm, this article advocates for church leaders to be empowered to empower others in areas such as preaching, Christian education, diakonia, and collaboration. By addressing these challenges as part of the church's mission, leaders can draw on the best practices of leadership from both African traditions and missionary heritage, underpinned by biblical principles of servant leadership. This approach discourages the idolisation of leaders as heroes or saviours and instead promotes role modelling for future generations.

Situational Holistic Pastoral Ministry underscores the importance of contextual awareness, enabling the church to respond effectively to societal needs. Given that the church's mandate is to fulfil God's mission, it requires well-equipped leaders to guide the church and address Africa's unique challenges.

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