

**Fellowship and Followership:
Maintaining Creative Tension in Ghana's Christian Leadership.**

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Abstract.

There are diverse leadership models in Ghanaian Churches in contemporary times. Interestingly, all the models are supposed to be taken from the Scriptures. However a closer look at most of the models indicate that they specifically want to offer spiritual leadership that will create space for their members to fellowship together or to practice their religion together. On the other hand, in doing so there is also the need to have the kind of leadership that will facilitate the maintenance of certain communal or cooperate as well as individual values and virtues. Now the dilemma of most of the Churches in Ghana is how to maintain these two concepts together. This, accounts for some of the lapses in Christian leadership in Ghana. The way forward is the attempt to address the imbalances between fellowship and followership so as to ensure balanced leadership that is both spiritual and exemplary and therefore iconic, transferable and sustainable.

Introduction

In John 1:29-43 there are instances where the disciples are called by Jesus to follow him. In verse 38, *Akolothesanton auto* (they followed) is stated. But Jesus himself issues the command in John 1:43 by saying, *akolouthei moi* (follow me). Peter of his own volition, through the prompting of his brother decided to respond to Jesus' *akolouthei moi*. It was therefore in response to Jesus' *akolouthei moi* that Peter became his disciple. So Peter was one of the followers of Jesus who was called as a disciple to follow Jesus. The disciples were convinced that Jesus was a person worth learning and associating with. Thus, "becoming a follower basically means total allegiance and pupilage."¹

Fellowship in the context of John 21 is closely related to associating with someone and relating intimately with the person. In this regard, according to the biblical account, somewhere along the line, Peter denied being a follower and Jesus came back to restore him to his status as a follower. This is what we see in John 21, where after the resurrection of Jesus, Peter is asked three times by Jesus as to whether he loves him. The question of Jesus to Simon Peter "do you love me?" and Jesus' command "feed my sheep" is a new call to fellowship as well as a restoration to being a shepherd.² Perhaps that was why Jesus used *akolouthei moi* (follow me) at the ending of John 21:19 to indicate a call to a new fellowship where we see Peter taking back his leadership role as a shepherd.³

Jesus' restoration of Peter to love is equated to fellowship and a restoration to followership which in this case was equated to feeding the lamb or being a shepherd. This paper therefore explores the concepts followership and fellowship and their relationship to leadership among Christians in Ghana.

The purpose of this study is to find out the kinds of leadership that is being practiced in Christian circles in Ghana, and whether or not the kind of leadership that is practiced maintain the critical balance of fellowship and followership.

Two theoretical considerations underline this paper. The first is the rational choice theory of religion. The rational choice theory of religion assumes that people approach religion, religious belief and affiliation with the same attitude and mindset that they approach the choice of goods and services. Thus people's participation in a religious congregation is done

consciously and for good reason. Thus, people will often vary their religious preferences in significant ways, including even switching religions altogether.⁴ People will vary their religious preferences depending on what satisfaction they perceive that their association with the religion or religious denomination gives them.

This study postulates that, the kind of leadership that churches offer is an important determinant of whether or not these churches succeed in retaining the loyalty of their followers or whether indeed the congregations continue to thrive or fades away with time. According to Iannaccone, “the combined actions of religious consumers (followers) and religious producers (leaders) form a religious market which, like other markets, tends toward steady-state equilibrium.”⁵ Therefore, leadership styles are important in determining the satisfaction of members of a religious congregation and this paper aims to assess the synergy between followers and leaders among Ghanaian Christians.

The second theoretical framework within which this study has been conducted is the exchange theory. According to Homans, this theory “envisages social behavior as an exchange activity, tangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons.”⁶ Homans argues that people would repeat an activity only when it is rewarding for them. Thus in a religious congregation or organization, people would opt out when they perceive that they continue to invest in the congregation while they gain nothing in return. Homans argues that “for all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action.”⁷ This study therefore discusses the leadership styles in churches in Ghana as stimulus either for satisfaction or dissatisfaction. If people are dissatisfied with the leadership style in their church or religious organization, they would likely adopt a lukewarm attitude towards the organization or quit altogether.

Fellowship

According to James Dunn, the word fellowship (which is usually linked with the Greek term *koinonia* “participation/sharing in”), is employed by Paul in his letters in a certain manner. Dunn argued that the import of Paul’s view on *koinonia* comes out clearly in 1Corinthians 10: 14-22 “in the sequence of words which speak of “sharing,” “partners,” “partake of,” The

concentration of these words is exceptional in Paul's letters"⁸ Dunn further stated that 'fellowship (in the usual sense) grew out of common participation in the one Spirit'⁹

So for Dunn the most important ingredient in fellowship is act of *sharing* together as a vehicle for building a community. The most common place is the word communion which is closely related to the Eucharistic meal that Christians partake. For example, the essence of sharing a common meal in most religions is related to people who owe allegiance to a particular divinity in a particular way. They therefore "fellowship with one another" by affirming their common bond in offering to one another (and also to others who they are keen to incorporate into their fold) the beneficiaries of their communion. This may be in the form of hospitality, welfare or some kind of support both spiritual and physical. In reverse form, it could also be related to enjoying or accepting some share of common support offered to people from a religious community. Dunn also stresses that the motivation for fellowship was not a common entity (like the congregation), but the subjective experience of the Spirit as something shared. The point is, that what draws and keeps believers together for Paul was not simply a common membership of the congregation, but the common experience of the Spirit. It was the awareness that their experience of the Spirit was one which others had also shared which provided the bond of mutual understanding and sympathy¹⁰. Expressions of love like this are not to be limited to known and familiar believers but are commended and encouraged when they are demonstrated toward strangers (traveling missionaries) too.¹¹

So it is expected that the discovery of and utilisation of common grounds to communicate with God should lead to breaking common grounds among believers. In the Christian context, it implies that there is supposed to be a development of mutual love between Christians which not only shows in being in the same room together singing, praying or participating in Bible Studies but also visiting one another and being there for one another whenever one is in trouble. This may also include extending that same hand to reach out to others outside the Christian community. Therefore the development of skills to manage the fellowship as well as practicalising them in one's life is a basic requirement for leadership (1Timothy 3: 1-7).

Regarding the role of the church in leadership, Dairo argues that

as a fellowship, the congregation or institution functions on the basis of opinions, values, and relationships that exist between people, and the more a Church functions as a fellowship, the more necessary are the consensus-type actions required to the group.¹²

However, as Churches grow and become large fellowships, other complexities due to the sheer numbers set in and thus it becomes very difficult to enjoy that mutuality and love. No wonder in the 1970s there were town fellowships in Ghana. These were para-Church organizations which evolved out of the evangelical movement in Ghana which were related to the University Christian fellowships and the Scripture Union. When they were going to meet they said that they were ‘going to fellowship’. When they were small movements, there were few problems but as they started growing in numbers, they started dis-integrating and today we do not hear of the town fellowships any more.

This paper argues that one of the main reasons for the decline of the town fellowships was lack of followership. In fact, these fellowships came to being because the mainline Churches at that time also lacked effective fellowship and so they filled in the gap for the mainline Churches in that respect. Even though the Mega Churches and their vibrant fellowshipping techniques have swallowed up the town fellowships, this paper puts forth the thesis that a continued over-emphasis on fellowship will eventually lead to the demise of these churches just as has happened to the town fellowships.

A number of church buildings in Europe have closed down in recent years. Hitherto, these church buildings were a bee hive of activity. So what happened? Sometime ago, Christian leadership was seen as a good counterpart in governance. So why do only few people trust Christian leadership in Europe?

At this point, this paper will discuss in greater detail, the issue of followership as a leadership model which is a counterpart to fellowship.

Followership.

Followership can be defined as, “the act of following the opinions or teachings of another or the act of one who imitates another person.” So ‘religious followership’ means an art of adherents of any religion patterned according to the teachings or opinions of a religion or religious leader.”¹³

With specific reference to Christianity therefore the kind of leadership given to Christian followers will produce the desired kind of Christian followership. Interestingly, as more Churches are planted, as more FM stations churn out Christian programs, as more huge Auditoriums are being built, the more there is the involvement of Christian leaders in all kinds of immoral and corrupt practices which sometimes occupy the front pages of news papers in both Ghana and Nigeria in the West African Sub-region.

In 1990 when the researcher was a student at the Trinity Theological Seminary, an Ecumenical Seminary, Ghana for training to become a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, there were many clubs on the campus and students who got themselves involved in these clubs tried to acquire leadership skills. However, most of them operated as power bases rather than service fraternities. People talked with so much authority. There was no stewardship but mainly a warm fellowship with a macho leader. There were no leadership courses offered to the students to help them try out their leadership skill more effectively. In other words, what kind of followership program is in place for the seminarians to use as a measure in practising leadership in the respective clubs? The point is that there is no uniqueness about the management of clubs in seminaries or theological institutions.

Leadership, like most academic concepts, has several definitions. For the purpose of this paper however, we shall cite Daniel Wambudta one of the great Old Testament scholars in Africa. He defines leadership as

*the art of reciprocal interplay between the led and the leader;
leadership takes place in a space which is circumscribed and
conditioned by certain features, be they geographical, ecological,
historical or cultural. Leadership emerges within time identified with
particular circumstances because the leader is able to give answers to
problems conditioned by the space and time on hand.¹⁴*

Indeed this definition shows clearly the relationship between the leader and the led which indicates the close relationship between followership and leadership. In this paper, followership is being explored in the context of the interaction between the one in charge of a group and the group members. In other words, how does one create a good followership program that would ensure effective operation of the group for transformation and positive self extension to both insiders and outsiders?

We would here like to explore the concept of followership in the context in which Jesus identifies himself as ‘the good shepherd’ in John 10:4 with identified flock as the sheep. ‘That is a much clearer indication that Jesus Christ saw himself as a leader with definite but open-ended followership.’¹⁵

The famous Psalm 23 in the Old Testament is quoted by most Ghanaians to indicate that the Lord God is the Shepherd of the people of Israel. God is the one who leads the flock to greener pastures, water, and safety. He protects them and delivers them from the hands of wicked attackers. John L. Mackenzie notes that

In ancient Near East, the title shepherd was applied both to kings and the gods. Lipit-Ishtar of Ism is the wise shepherd, the humble shepherd, and Hammurabi is the shepherd of the people. The god Shamash is addressed as shepherd. The Old Testament theological use of the title, however, shows a variation from the Mesopotamian use. The king of Israel is never called a shepherd directly.¹⁶

However, the Lord Jesus called himself the good shepherd and some other persons also recognized him as such (Heb.13:20). The imagery of the shepherd here is that of a guardian who takes good care of people. Thus in Christianity, leadership connotes being a shepherd and having guardianship responsibility for your flock.

The question here is, what type of guardianship is being suggested? Indeed, it denotes a type of quality of leadership. In this regard, one of the key tenets of followership is the concept of exemplary leadership. Jesus showed exemplary leadership, not just by talking about it or calling himself ‘a humble servant’ but he demonstrated it as he led them. Some of the instances isolated were Jesus will not discriminate against non-Jews (Mt. 15:21-28 and Mk.

7: 24-30); He would not allow people to kill a sinner, but asked the sinner to repent (Jn.8:3-11); he discouraged hypocrisy by placing mercy and compassion above religious legalism (Mt.12:9-14. Mk.3:1-6; Lk.13: 10-17, Jn 7:20-24). And the disciples saw that he often prayed and asked Him to teach them how to pray. (Lk.11:1-4 and Mt.6:7-15)

What is lacking today in the Church in Ghana are iconic leaders who are role models that others can follow. Indeed we have so many powerful charismatic and flamboyant preachers but we do not have many whose life styles we can follow. One charismatic preacher once said to a group of young students at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana during a University evangelistic mission in 2007 that they should not copy him or try to do the things he or any other Christian leader says or does. They should look up to God alone to direct them because most leaders have nothing to offer in the area of exemplary leadership. Such teaching cannot be said to be in tandem with the teachings of Jesus.

For Jesus, sayings and doings are an essential part of Christian principles and practice. Secondly, Jesus taught (trained, educated) his disciples on what Godly leadership should be. He started by washing the Apostle's feet and then, explained his actions to them by saying;

Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly, so I am, If then, I the Lord and Master have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. (Jn. 13:12-15).

By washing the disciple's feet Jesus taught that leadership is not about lording it over the people, but serving the followers. As J.L. Mckenzie notes, this point was demonstrated by Jesus in the course of settling a dispute among the disciples over who is the greatest amongst them.

The Lord astonished the disciple by stating that:

You know that among the pagans the rulers lord it over them, and make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your slave and anyone who wants to be the first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not

to be served but to serve, and to give life as a ransom to many.

(Mt.20:25-28; Mk.10:42-45) ¹⁷

Thus, as far as Jesus Christ was concerned leadership implied self-sacrifice. That was the kind of training he gave to his disciples. Judging by the accounts of his life, he demonstrated altruism not only in words but in deed. In relating this to the Church, we must remind ourselves that the Church cannot separate itself from Jesus Christ because ‘the Church constitutes His organized and structured followership ¹⁸ That is why the Church established by Jesus has stood the test of time.

However, in contrast to Jesus’ model of leadership, what pertains in our churches and Christian groups today is self-centered leadership. It has become a machinery for controlling the lives of people by amassing wealth and using all sorts of power structures to win souls and then milk them so as to enjoy life. Contrary to this mode of living by today’s men of God, Jesus said that foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head (Lk 9: 57-58) which is a lesson in modest living.

As Peter J. McCord observes, this is in sharp contrast with the conduct of many Bishops, Pastors, Prophets and Evangelists, who maintain courts or headquarters with aides and domestic servants. McCord concludes that it is hard to combine servant-hood or love, as advocated by Jesus, with power. While Jesus Christ denied Himself acquisition of power and earthly wealth, most Christian leaders in our part of the world (Africa), have administrative authority with which rightly or wrongly, they seek for and control funds.¹⁹

Let us now turn our attention to the Town Fellowships which were grounds for training evangelical leadership in Ghana which prepared the way for Charismatic Churches to take root and flourish in Ghana.

The town Fellowships originated from the Scripture Union Groups. The Scripture Union Groups operated in the secondary, commercial and technical schools in Ghana. According to the records, the camps and schools movement which was initiated by Tony Wilmot a British colonial civil servant and devout Christian in Accra in 1952 blossomed and dozens of Ghanaian schools had Bible Study groups, which met once or twice a week to sing and study the scriptures. They were known as “Scripture Union”.²⁰ The basic leadership structure that emerged was that of Patrons who were resident Christian teachers in Secondary Schools and

Regional Travelling Secretaries who assisted the students in their schools and camps to acquire Christian principles and live by them while in school and to go out and be fruitful in their lives. This kind of training took place both in the camps and also in the schools. The over all leader was the General Secretary who coordinated the activities of the Travelling Secretaries assigned to the various regions of Ghana. The General Secretary is assisted by a General Council.

The Town Fellowships which were off-shoots of the Scripture Union was initiated by John Agama in 1960, who was a police officer after returning from further studies in Southampton in the United Kingdom. It started as a house group that met in his house and this time round they were adults. John did not call the group Scripture Union but he invited people from the Scripture Union leadership to address the group. Others from other parts of Ghana who had contacts with Agamah like Ben Wobil from Kumasi who visited the group also started their own groups in other parts of the country in their homes. Later when Agamah, being a police officer was moved to a high security bungalow, where visitors could not easily meet, people started other groups in other parts of Accra. This groups spread so fast to other regions of Ghana. For instance in Brong Ahafo Region were the groups started in 1965, within the year they grew up to 56 groups compared to 20 Scripture school groups in the same region.²¹ According to Godfried Bamfo regarding the relationship between the Town Fellowships and the Scripture Union, ‘The founding fathers of Scripture Union (SU) fought for years to keep it a purely student work; but the situation on the ground suggested otherwise. The very same students grew into adults, who did not find all the spiritual nourishment they needed in the Churches. They formed town fellowships, and those town fellowships needed help’¹⁹ They were fellowships with vibrant worship, bible study and prayer program but they needed a followership pattern to ensure effective leadership. The town fellowships were referred to as “community fellowships”²²

The governance structures in the Town Fellowships varied from Region to Region. At the local levels they had executive committees. One common factor however was the Town or Village Fellowship Committees in the various regions that managed them. In some areas there were zonal committees. In Ashanti and Brong Ahafo they had zonal committees that organized camps and leadership training programs for the groups which has become so many in the region and therefore cannot manage one camp or training program for them on regional basis.²³

In Accra, the capital of Ghana there were so many groups that they had to form the Coordinating Committee of Christian Fellowships (CCCF) to administer the Accra fellowships which was not under the leadership of the Scripture Union. They had Executive Committee Members who were appointed from the various Town fellowships in the Region. Their main task was to organize monthly all nights and to plan Annual CCCF Evangelistic Missions.

By 1979, the need for the Town fellowships to have a national committee was felt. A national leadership conference was held and the Scripture Union Council agreed to the formation of the National Fellowships Council in 1981. By this act the fellowships Secretary was appointed to oversee the fellowships as part of the Scripture Union Structure.

Interestingly, at the leadership conference, the issue of organization came up. Among others were the following issues; why people leave, lateness and irregularity, lack of involvement in outreach and lack of balanced teaching especially on the subject of spiritual gifts. There was very little or nothing at all on leadership among the issues that led to the formation of National Fellowships Council. So one can see that followership was not their priority and therefore was not part of the term of reference for who ever is to be appointed as national leader. And the one appointed to oversee the Fellowships was Edward Okyere who is into Prayer Warrior and deep issues of fellowship as a one time Travelling Secretary of the Scripture Union.

From Town Fellowships to Charismatic Churches

The town fellowships had a checked relationship with the Churches. Even though initially they operated as para-church organizations that are not to function as Churches, in some areas the local churches resented the role of town fellowships. Some members grew discontented with their local Churches and spoke of breaking away to form their own. Efforts were made by the Scripture Union leadership to maintain people in fellowships who wants to break away to stay and help their local churches to grow.

Inspite of these efforts, some fellowships did later on turn themselves into Churches. As recorded by Barker and Boadi-Siaw,

A Scripture Union member returned in 1980 from training with Pastor Idahosa in Nigeria, and succeeded in taking over ten town fellowships in Dormaa area to form his own (Charismatic Church). In 1989 one of Scripture Union's own staff, Emmanuel Dua-Agyeman, used eight town and village fellowships in the Goaso area to form the Harvest Time Bible Church. Something similar happened in Somanya in the 1990s, when some leaders of the fellowship in Somanya led members to form branches of two Accra churches²⁴.

The breakaways continued as the town fellowships continued to dis-integrate and Charismatic Churches continued to spring up throughout the 1990s into the 2000s. As we speak now the town fellowships have lost their role as adult fellowships to the Charismatic Churches that pick up those who go through the Scripture Union groups in schools. The Charismatic Churches therefore have made room for school leavers from secondary, technical and commercial schools and provide the kind of adult fellowship that hitherto the town fellowships provided from the 1960s to the 1990s.

This falls in line with the two theories that this work is based on namely, the rational choice theory of religion and the exchange theory. With the former, upon analysis, one cannot fail to realize that the kinds of leadership offered by the town fellowships tend to focus on creating an atmosphere for rigorous and warm religious activities like testimonies, preparing and leading Bible studies, given talks and leading prayer meetings and evangelistic missions. These types do not satisfy people who are looking for people to emulate and follow. The leadership training programs emphasized these types of functional leadership. So as time went on and changes in community membership after community leadership, the followers began to lose interest in the town fellowships. They found the emerging leadership from the charismatic churches more appealing and exciting. This partially accounted for the decline of the town fellowships. With regard to the latter, which is the exchange theory, one realizes that the idea that the fellowships had was just to provide the spiritual nourishment to supplement what was lacking in the Churches of their time. Members who felt capable of manning Churches as pastors did not find their efforts rewarded adequately in the organizational structure of the fellowships that operated as loose fellowships with no permanent ecclesial leadership and programs that matched the kind of spiritual awakening that was in the town fellowships. So they decided to exchange what they had in the fellowships with their own charismatic Churches that gave them the platform to develop structures that will give them

adequate space to invest in rigorous Christian activities and create their own followership that is rewarding to them. These charismatic churches which were created had more appeal and gave more followership that is lacking in the fellowships so more of the youth were ready to exchange their involvement in town fellowships in their adult life with that of charismatic churches. This also marked the decline of the town fellowships in Ghana. Now it seems the concept of Town Fellowships and its leadership is gone and we no longer hear of them any more when Ghanaian Christianity is being talked about. However, recent developments in Charismatic Churches indicate that the issue of followership needs to be looked at again as there seem to be leadership challenges in this regard in contemporary times.

That is why Odumuyiwa, in his *A Religious but Criminal Society: Any Remedies?* has catalogued the reasons for bad followership in religious practice in Nigeria.

Among other things, he identifies the lack of religious and moral instructions in schools, colleges and even the universities in the country, negligence on the part of parents to train their children in religious norms, various acts of commissions and omissions by religious leaders and parents as being responsible for the lack of followership in churches and mosques. He argues further that the tenets of the religions practiced in Nigeria are not followed strictly. Commercialization of religion, religious intolerance, extortion of religious followers, injustice, lack of integrity of some religious leaders and embezzlement of funds and many other disgraceful practices by adherents of Christianity are largely responsible for the huge deficit in followership.²⁵

Perhaps we should end with Frédéric Jézégou's work on one of the sayings of Robert Townsend that “a leader is a person with a magnet in his heart and a compass in his head.”²⁵ There is therefore the need for a combination of a heart of fellowship and a head of followership. Christian leadership in Ghana has a difficulty in not having a followership plan and a succession plan. Motivational speakers on leadership using the Charismatic model can only create a strong self-identity and a sense of direction in pursuing one's career goals but it has very little to do with growing leaders with a heart to serve humanity and to multiply in that effect.

It is therefore important for Christian leaders to bear in mind that when people attend church they do so as a rational choice decision and besides the spiritual fulfillment, they also expect,

as postulated by the exchange theory, to gain some social and physical benefit. If these are not forthcoming, they would not have the motivation to stay as members of the congregation or if they stay, they would become only passive participants and this does not augur well for the development of a strong followership as far as Christian leadership in Ghana is concerned. Thus, as the exchange and rational choice theories stipulate, people are now making full commitments to Ghanaian Charismatic churches because they were not getting as much as they are putting in the town fellowships. If their relationship with their Head Pastors or overseers are not reciprocal and do not produce goods that are mutually beneficial to the producers of religious goods (leaders) and consumers (followers) they will definitely start finding other alternatives as it happened in the case of the town fellowships. Perhaps that is why town fellowship groups that were very vibrant in the 1990s are now a thing of the past. The type of followership that we need today ought to go beyond just developing fellowship skills. There is a demand for the type of leadership which Jesus demonstrated that is sustainable and transferable due to the values that it exhibits.

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