



EMPATHIC LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS INTERVENTION

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"Leadership is about the people and the people about leadership. Leadership is not about the leader but the people. Leadership is for the people, by the people and with the people." Empathy is a virtue beyond just a skill set. A virtue like we know, is the habit of doing good. A good person is presumably, a virtuous person. In the same vein, every leader is expected to be a virtuous person, male or female. And one of the virtues any present day political, religious, or traditional leader should possess, is EMPATHY. From a psychological lens, empathy, to use the words of Nick Stevens, is switching off your own thoughts and feelings for the moment and engaging your clients and their experiences. It demonstrates a willingness for at least one party to be open to what the other person has to say. It is about identifying the thoughts and feelings of others, thereby, making a complainant, traumatized, victimized, an offended, abused, and oppressed person feel understood, accepted, and welcomed. It is putting yourself (leader) in the shoes of the other person. Thanks to the power, art, skill, and gift of listening. Empathy is about listening emotionally and lovingly to understand, connect and be in the world and realm of the poor, suffering, sick, oppressed, and dehumanized people whom one is called to lead in the world.

For Robert Scuka, there are three goals of empathy. First, to make the other person(s) feel understood and accepted. Second, to deepen the other person(s) self-understanding. Third, to help you, the empathizer, better understand the other person(s) feelings, concerns, and desires. There are adequate benefits that accrue from these

goals. The first benefit of good empathy is that it encourages the other person(s) (feeling listened to and understood) to go deep in exploring and sharing his or her experiences, grievances, hurtful feelings, and pains. A second benefit is that in feeling understood the person(s) will be more receptive to hearing your point of view, suggestions, opinions, and comments and to resolving issues constructively. A third benefit is that it helps you, the empathizer (leader), dissipate negative feelings, biases, misconceptions about the real issues, and increases receptivity to hearing the other person(s) point of view and concerns. A final benefit of empathy is that it fosters a deepened sense of intimacy, connection, compassion, and emotional bonding in your relationship. What this means is that an empathetic leader, can quell any inferno or crisis, if and only if he/she cares to listen to his/her followers. It takes the virtue, skill, and grace of empathy

Leadership has often been defined as the art and skill of leading and influencing people to achieve a common goal and end. One particularly important point I would like to make here is that political, religious and traditional leadership is not only about the object, i.e. to achieve the set goals, objectives and *telos* (end) of the organization, as the case may be, it is even more about the subjects, the people who make up the organization. It is about the peoples' lives, dignity, integrity, safety, health, well-being, welfare, good, and ultimately, salvation. Leadership is about the people and the people about leadership. Leadership is not about the leader but the people. Therefore, when a leader fails and refuses to listen emotionally and lovingly (empathically) to the needs, voices, yearnings, aspirations, concerns and complaints of his/her people, he/she gets disconnected and all can never be well. This is where empathic leadership comes in.

Leadership is incarnational. Jesus, even though he is fully God, assumed a bodily form, and became a human being like us, out of his superabundant love, to save and redeem humanity from sin and eternal damnation (Cf. Phil. 2:6-8). God came down from heaven to earth and became one like us to save us. "*And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*" (Jn. 1:14). By this he has given us an example of what leadership means. He came down

from heaven above to show us the way to the Father (Jn. 14:6). He was born among the people. He lived among them and experienced the same harsh realities of life like, insecurity, migration, exploitation and oppression by the Romans and Jewish religious authorities, poverty, economic hardship, discrimination, and prejudices. It was because of the way and manner he went about his life and ministry as an empathic leader, that the people observed he was different from their leaders and on one occasion, the religious leaders, teachers of the law and elders were forced to ask Jesus, *"Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? Or who is the one who gave you this authority?"* (Luke 20:2). Jesus made it clear that he came not for the righteous, but for the sick and sinners (Mk. 2:17, Lk. 15:1), for the poor (Mk. 10:21-22; Lk. 16:19-25), for the oppressed (Lk. 4:18) and for the children (Matt. 18:1-7; 19:14). To do all these, he became one with the people. He connected emotionally and lovingly with their realities and world. He suffered with them and died for their sake. Even till today, Jesus still feels the pains, sufferings, and oppression of his children, including the youths who are protesting presently in Nigeria. He is fully with them.

Every leader today, whether elected or appointed, must incarnate himself into the realities and world of the people he is called to live. He cannot afford to create another world for himself, different from the world of the led. An empathic leader is the one who de-mounts and descends his exalted office and privileged position, comes down to the realm and world of his people, connects and bonds with them and listens to their **A**spirations, **N**eeds, and **Y**earnings (**ANY**). These are what he articulates and integrates into his *instrumentum laboris* (working instrument), policy and vision, and not the mandatum (mandate), wishes of some external forces, godfathers (mothers), hegemony, and cabal. There is no more denying the fact that Nigeria is both in distress and crisis. Any leader who denies this is in his/her own world indeed. For years now, the average Nigerian has been complaining, lamenting, and praying about the current situation of things in the country. A lot of issues have been causing this distress and crisis in Nigeria. They include bad leadership, rate of unemployment of youths, threat to human life and dignity, lack of quality education, insecurity, poverty, poor infrastructures (roads, hospitals facilities), lack of adequate power (electricity) and corruption. The present global corona virus pandemic and the on-going strike by the teeming youths in Nigeria has further exacerbated the National crisis and distress.

It was Pope Francis who once warned against what he described as the “Babel syndrome”. He says the “Babel syndrome” is not simply *“the confusion that arises when we don’t know what the other person is saying”*. But the real “Babel syndrome” is when *“I do not listen to what the other person is saying and think that I know what the other is thinking and is about to say. That is the bane!”* The question is, what should our leaders do? I may not have the perfect answer and solution, but my advice is simple: **Listen, Judge and Act**. First, **listen** to what God is asking you to do through the youths of Nigeria at this material time before it is too late. Look into their **A**spirations, **N**eeds, and **Y**earnings empathically sincerely, honestly, emotionally, and lovingly. Second, **Judge** for yourself wisely and prudently what to do. No deceit! No empty promises! No pretense! This is not the time for all that. Then, **Act** promptly, as soon as possible, and accordingly. There is no time to waste. The earlier the better. A stitch in time saves nine.

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