

‘Igwebuiké’ As the Moving Spirit of Pope Francis’ Compassionate Leadership

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Abstract

Leadership is a process by which an executive directs, guides and influences the behaviour and work of others towards the accomplishment of specific goals with confidence and zeal in a given situation or organization. The success of any organization, religious or secular, is highly dependent on the quality of leadership. Where there is no good leadership, the success of the group or organization would be affected. This explains why whenever an organization runs into crises the first step taken is to assess the quality of leadership and make a change if need be. Because of the significant place that leadership occupies, it has been an area of concern that Pope Francis has focused on in his major writings and homilies. Connectedly, a new concept which the Roman Pontiff brings into leadership discourse is the idea of compassion. This piece, therefore, has studied Pope Francis’ concept of compassionate leadership in a bid to generating the antidote for the diseases or maladies of leadership. This research discovered that the idea of compassionate leadership in Pope Francis is based on six pillars: listening, sympathizing, companionship, hospitality, protection and service. This discovery has also led to the understanding of ‘Igwebuiké,’ an African philosophy of humanity towards the other, as the moving spirit or operative condition of Pope Francis’ leadership of compassion. These pillars on which Pope Francis’ compassionate leadership stands, come together, as though knit by a thread to support the achievement or realization of compassionate leadership. For the purpose of this work, the thematic and ‘Igwebuiké’ approaches in research were adopted.

Keywords: Pope Francis, Compassion, Leadership, Moving Spirit, ‘Igwebuiké’

Introduction

Pope Francis would go down in secular and ecclesiastical history as the Roman Pontiff of the people, who in his teachings, especially, his landmark papal documents and life has been acknowledged by both

religious and atheists for his attention to kindness and compassion. He has been consistent in pushing the boundaries of the Church to remind us that we should love everyone, regardless of the situation they come from and emphasizing the need for people, the church included, in order to alter the way they interact with each other. Speaking to theologians and pastors, he emphasized the need for leaders who can put into practice a more just way for all to live in this world as sharers in a common destiny (Wooden). While speaking to medical personnel and social workers, he emphasized the need for them to not just focus on having a successful organization but one that prides itself in listening, accompanying and supporting the people they care for. At the same time as speaking of the conditions of migrants all over the world, Pope Francis has been critical of anti-migration policies and the need for social and economic justice. In the migrant, he sees not just a person but an opportunity for encounter with Christ (Bailey).

The Roman Pontiff asks that humanity reflects on her reactions when she reads news about tragedies such as starving children, enslaved women and child soldiers, etc., as we can often times become desensitized to tragedies, pain and sufferings of others in the world. God had compassion for His broken people and was able to restore their dignity as children of God. Christians therefore, must follow this example and when faced with tragedy, we must work to help those in need by restoring their dignity, welcoming them into our community and supporting them in any way we can. He calls for compassion on those who are different from us and those who are poor, with meagre economic means; for the measure of greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need, those who have nothing apart from their poverty. When humanity shows compassion after the person of Jesus who miraculously fed thousands of people, we not only show compassion, but also learn how to empathize with what others are experiencing on a deeper level and thus understand their struggles, hardships, fears and discover, in the frailness of every human being, his or her unique worth and dignity (Bailey).

A fundamental dimension which Pope Francis brings to the discourse on leadership is the idea of compassion. He understands the leader as a compassionate figure and thus makes compassion an indispensable ingredient of a good leader. This paper would study his concept of compassionate leadership from an *Igwebuike* perspective. This would therefore, take this research through different documents of the Roman Pontiff, using the *Igwebuike* approach, knit together the different tastes of compassionate leadership into a whole for a comprehensive understanding of Pope Francis' model of leadership.

Uncompassionate Leadership as the Background to Pope Francis' Contribution

Pope Francis began his administration as the successor of Saint Peter on the platform that there was need to radically reform the administrative structures of the Catholic Church, which he regarded as insular, imperious and bureaucratic and inward looking. This he considered necessary as, first leaders are susceptible to an array of debilitating diseases like the human body: arrogance, intolerance, myopia, pettiness, etc., which can weaken the effectiveness of the Church's witnessing. Second, the vision of a healthy church is dependent on the realization of healthy leadership. The need for a leadership of compassion is based on what Pope Francis identifies as the maladies of leadership (Harmel). These maladies include:

1. **Feeling of Immortality, Immunity and Indispensability:** The consequence is that the leadership team ceases to be self-critical and as a body that does not do check-ups from time to time, it becomes weak and unfit. At this point, leaders turn into lords and masters, who think of themselves as above others. This feeling is the pathology of power and comes from a superiority complex and does not see the face of others, especially the weakest and those most in need.
2. **Excessive Busyness:** They are so engrossed in work activities such that they forget their primary responsibilities; the people. Leaders of excessive busyness are so engrossed in projects (such as building projects) and forget the human project; the projects of project. They are too busy to listen, too busy to help, too busy to accompany and sometimes, too busy to rest or take a leave. He or she works all through the year without listening to himself or herself or recognizing that he or she is sick of busyness.
3. **Mental Petrification:** There are those who think that having a heart of stone or being stiff-necked is a mark of good leadership. In this, they lose the human sensitivity, generosity, self-giving, etc., that enable the leader to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.
4. **Excessive Planning and Functionalism:** There are leaders who plan everything down to the last detail and believe that with perfect planning things will fall into place. They have no place for spontaneity and serendipity which can be more flexible than any human planning.
5. **Loss of the Sense of Community:** When leaders lose the sense of community in relation to the led, the body loses its harmonious

functioning and its equilibrium. It becomes an orchestra that produces noise. The consequence is that the members cannot work together and thus they lose the sense of *camaraderie*, teamwork and create an atmosphere of discomfort and parochialism.

6. **Leadership Alzheimer:** This disease shows its symptoms in forgetting those who nurtured, mentored and supported us in our own journeys. When we forget the great leaders who inspired us; when we are completely caught up in the present moment, in our passions, whims and obsessions; when we build walls and routines around ourselves and thus become more and more the slaves of idols carved by our own hands, then we know we have leadership alzheimer.
7. **Rivalry and Vainglory:** This disease becomes real when we shift attention from the primary concerns of leadership to focus on our appearances, our perks and our titles. When we build projects because we want them to become landmarks of our leadership rather than for the good of the group. With this disease, the leader is at the centre of leadership and not the people led.
8. **Existential Schizophrenia.** This is the malady of leaders who live a double life, the fruit of the hypocrisy typical of the mediocre and of a progressive emotional emptiness which no title or position can fill. Such leaders are most times not in touch with concrete people, as they are gradually led to the slaughter house by sycophants.
9. **Gossiping, Grumbling, and Back-Biting:** This is the disease of cowardly leaders who lack the courage to speak out directly, instead they speak behind the people they should, under normal circumstances'. Correct with the love and authority of a leader. In this way, the leader becomes the "sower of weeds" rather than the nourisher of the lives of the led. He becomes a cold-blooded killer of the good name of colleagues and those he or she imagines are his or her opponents.
10. **Self-Idolization:** This is the disease of leaders who wish to become idols while they live; who try to obtain the submission, loyalty and psychological dependency of their subordinates without deserving it. The result is that they surround themselves with those who are favour hungry, victims of careerism and opportunism, who are only interested in honouring persons rather than the larger mission of the group. Such persons are usually small-minded, unhappy and inspired only by their own lethal selfishness.

11. **Indifference:** The symptom of this disease is when a leader thinks only of himself or herself and loses the sincerity and warmth of human relationships. This is usually the child of greed and insecurity.
12. **Severity and Sterile Pessimism:** This disease is noticeable in leaders whose faces are always downcast and gloomy, who think that to be serious you have to put on a face of melancholy and severity and treat your inferiors with rigor, brusqueness and arrogance. A show of severity and sterile pessimism are frequently symptoms of fear and insecurity.
13. **Accumulation of Material Goods:** This occurs when a leader tries to fill an existential void in his or her heart by accumulating material goods, not out of need but only in order to feel secure.
14. **Closed Circles Disease:** This occurs when leaders create cliques and makes them more powerful or important than the group's shared identity. The result is that other members of the group feel denigrated.
15. **Extravagance and Self-Exhibition:** This happens when a leader turns his or her service into power and uses that power for material gain or to acquire even greater power. This is the disease of persons who insatiably try to accumulate power and to this end are ready to slander, defame and discredit others. This disease shows itself when the leader puts himself on display to show that they are more capable than others. This disease does great harm because it leads people to justify the use of any means whatsoever to attain their goal.

At the same time as these fifteen diseases of leadership serve as the basis for the evaluation of our leadership in different capacities, they also create a background and in fact the need for Pope Francis' teaching on compassionate leadership.

The Dimensions of Pope Francis' Compassionate Leadership

Having studied the background to Pope Francis' thoughts on compassionate leadership, this section of the research would focus on the different dimensions of compassionate leadership in the writings of Pope Francis.

a. A Great Listener

Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of listening in leadership, which is an approach that many leaders have failed in. He refers to the approach of listening as the approach of Jesus who listened to the little children even at a time when what they were saying might not have

made sense to the apostles who wanted to send them away. The problem with many leaders is that instead of listening to people attentively, “all too often, there is a tendency to provide pre-packaged answers and ready-made solutions, without allowing their real questions to emerge” (*Final Document* 8). In relation to young people, he observes that listening “allows young people to make their own contribution to the community, helping it to appreciate new sensitivities and to consider new questions” (*Final Document* 8). The consequences of a leader not listening are greater distance, less closeness, less mutual assistance and cooperation.

b. A Great Empathizer

We live in a time when people struggle in war zones and experience violence in countless different forms: kidnapping, extortion, organized crime, human trafficking, slavery and sexual exploitation, wartime rape and so forth. Others, because of their faith, struggle to find their place in society and endure various kinds of persecution, even murder. Many, whether by force or lack of alternatives, live by committing crimes and acts of violence: child soldiers, armed criminal gangs, drug trafficking, terrorism, and so on. Abuses and addictions, together with violence and wrongdoing, are some of the reasons why people go to prison (Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit* 72). Many people are taken in by ideologies and exploited as cannon fodder. What is even worse, many of them end up as individualists, hostile and distrustful of others; in this way, they become an easy target for the brutal and destructive strategies of political groups or economic powers ((Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit* 73).

The leader is like a mother who watches over and cares for her children. A mother weeps when her children are hurt. She weeps as though it was she who was hurt. Leaders therefore, must never fail to weep before these tragedies of their people and our time. Pope Francis teaches that “anyone incapable of tears cannot be a mother”(Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit* 75); in the same way, anyone who cannot weep cannot be a leader. There are leaders who because of a reasonably comfortable life do not know how to weep. Some realities in life are only seen with eyes cleansed by tears. Pope Francis raised these questions which every leader should think about: “Can I weep? Can I weep when I see a child who is starving, on drugs or on the street, homeless, abandoned, mistreated or exploited as a slave by society? Or is my weeping only the self-centred whining of those who cry because they want something else?” (Pope Francis, *Address to Young* 7). He writes further, “Weeping is also an expression of mercy and compassion. If tears do not come, ask the Lord to give you the grace to weep for the sufferings of others.

Once you can weep, then you will be able to help others from the heart”(Christus Vivit 76).

c. **A Great Companion**

Pope Francis understands a leader as a companion to those who are led. Companionship within this context implies three distinct and complementary levels of sensitivity. The *first kind of sensitivity* is directed to *the individual*. It is a matter of listening to someone who is sharing his very self in what he says. A sign of this willingness to listen is the time we are ready to spare for others. More than the amount of time we spend, it is about making others feel that my time is their time, that they have all the time they need to say everything they want. The other person must sense that I am listening unconditionally, without being offended or shocked, tired or bored. We see an example of this kind of listening in the Lord; He walks alongside the disciples on the way to Emmaus, even though they are going in the wrong direction (Lk 24:13-35). When Jesus says he plans to go farther, they realize that He had given them the gift of His time, so they decide to give Him theirs by offering their hospitality. Attentive and selfless listening is a sign of our respect for others, whatever their ideas or their choices in life (Christus Vivit 292).

The *second kind of sensitivity* is marked by *discernment*. We need to ask ourselves what is it that the other person is trying to tell me, what do they want me to realize is happening in their lives? Asking such questions helps me appreciate their thinking and the effects it has on their emotions. This kind of listening seeks not to only discern the salutary promptings of the good Spirit who proposes to us the Lord's truth but also exposes the traps laid by the evil spirit – his empty works and promises. It takes courage, warmth and tact to help others distinguish the truth from illusions or excuses (Christus Vivit 293).

The *third kind of sensitivity* is the ability to *perceive what is driving* the other person. This calls for a deeper kind of listening one able to discern the direction in which that person truly wants to move. Apart from what they are feeling or thinking right now and whatever has happened up to this point in their lives, the real issue is what they would like to be. This may demand that they look not to their own superficial wishes and desires, but rather to what is most pleasing to the Lord, to His plans for their life. This kind of listening seeks to discern their ultimate intention, the intention that definitively decides the meaning of their life (Christus Vivit 294).

When leaders listen to others in this way, at a certain moment we ourselves have to disappear in order to let the other person follow the

path he or she has discovered. We have to vanish as the Lord did from the sight of His disciples in Emmaus, leaving them alone with burning hearts and an irresistible desire to set out immediately (Lk 24:31-33). Jesus vanished because he did not need to impose His own roadmaps, for those processes have to do with persons who remain always unique and free (*Christus Vivit* 297). Moreover, if leaders are to accompany others on this path, they must be the first to follow it, day in and day out (*Christus Vivit* 298).

d. An Agent of Hospitality

In a world where many feel orphaned, the leader has a responsibility to be welcoming and accommodating. To be welcoming and hospitable is to create a 'home' and for Pope Francis, this implies creating "a family":

It is to learn to feel connected to others by more than merely utilitarian and practical bonds, to be united in such a way so as to feel that our life is a bit more human. To create a home is to let prophecy take flesh and make our hours and days less cold, less indifferent and anonymous. It is to create bonds by simple, everyday acts that all of us can perform. A home, as we all know, demands that everyone works together. No one can be indifferent or stand apart, since each is a stone needed to build the home. This also involves asking the Lord to grant us the grace to learn how to be patient, to forgive one another, to start over each day... To create strong bonds requires confidence and trust nurtured daily by patience and forgiveness. And that is how the miracle takes place: we feel that here we are reborn, here we are all reborn, because we feel God's caress that enables us to dream of a more human world, and therefore of a world more divine (Pope Francis, *Address at the Visit* 10). In relation to young people, leaders of institutions need to provide them with places they can make their own, where they can come and go freely, feel welcome and readily meet other young people, whether at times of difficulty and frustration, or of joy and celebration (*Christus Vivit* 218). Pope Francis observes that:

Friendship and discussion, often within more or less structured groups, offer the opportunity to strengthen social and relational skills in a context in which one is neither analysed nor judged.... The young are able to guide other young people and to exercise a genuine apostolate among their friends (*Final Document* 36).

e. A Protector and Defender

A leader is a protector, especially in our time when there are cries of victims of different kinds of abuse in families and other institutions. Abuse exists in various forms: the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience, sexual and financial abuse. It is the responsibility of a leader to eradicate ways of exercising authority that make all these abuses possible and the irresponsibility and lack of transparency with which so many cases of abuse have been handled have to be challenged. The desire to dominate, lack of dialogue and transparency, forms of double life, spiritual emptiness, as well as psychological weaknesses are the terrains on which corruption and other forms of abuses thrive (*Final Document* 30). The consequences of these abuses, are “sufferings that can last a lifetime... This phenomenon is widespread in society and it also affects the Church and represents a serious obstacle to her mission” (*Document of the I,4*).

It is the responsibility of the leader to adopt rigorous preventative measures intended to avoid the occurrence of these crimes, starting with the selection and formation of those to whom tasks of responsibility and education of others will be entrusted (*Final Document* 29). At the same time, the determination to apply the “actions and sanctions that are so necessary” must be reiterated (Pope Francis, *Letter to the People* 7).

f. A Great Servant

Leaders need a vigorous change of approach to money and service. We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (Ex 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 55). We are at a time when money determines and shapes life and the attitude of leaders. Money must serve, not rule! The rich must help, respect and promote the poor. There is need to return to an approach which favours human beings (*Evangelii Gaudium* 58).

Behind this attitude lurks a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God. Ethics has come to be viewed with a certain scornful derision. It is seen as counterproductive, too human, because it makes money and power relative. It is felt to be a threat, since it condemns the manipulation and debasement of the person. In effect, ethics leads to a God who calls for a committed response which is outside the categories of the marketplace

(*Evangelii Gaudium* 57). With this in mind, Pope Francis encourages financial experts and political leaders to ponder the words of one of the sages of antiquity: "Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs"(Saint John Chrysostom, *De Lazaro* II, 6).

Compassionate Leadership and Igwebuike Philosophy of Inclusion

Igwebuike is an Igbo proverb and an Igbo proper name. It is from three Igbo words: *Igwe*, *bu* and *Ike*. *Igwe* is a noun which means number or multitude, usually a large number or population. The number or population in perspective stands for entities with ontological identities and significances, however, part of an existential order in which every entity is in relation to the other. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is a noun, which means *strength* or *power*. *Igwe*, *bu* and *Ike* put together, literally means 'number is strength' or 'number is power'. Beyond the literal sense of *Igwebuike* and at the philosophical level however, it means *otu obi* (one heart and one soul) – *cor unum et anima una*. It captures the solidarity or complementarity of reality- the reality that reality exists in relation to one another. This is anchored on the fact that the universe in which the human person lives is a world of probabilities. An Igbo proverb says: "If a thing remains one, then nothing remains". This is because the power or strength generated by a person is not strong enough to withstand the existential gamble of life, as the chances of being overcome are on the high side; thus the need for an existential backing. The words closest to *Igwebuike* in English include: solidarity and complementarity (Kanu, '*Igwebuike*' *Personal*).

Why then is *Igwebuike* understood as the moving spirit of Pope Francis' leadership of compassion? It is for the simple reason that the Roman Pontiff's leadership model which emphasizes compassion springs from the philosophy of sensitivity and appreciation of the other in relation to the leader. The major pillars of compassionate leadership speak of how the leader positively stands in relation to the led and what he or she needs to do for the other for the achievement of good leadership such as listening- you listen to the other; defending- you defend the other who is weak; hospitality- you become hospitable to the other; companion- you are not alone, you are with the other; empathize- you feeling with the other his pains and difficulties; service- you serve the other for the enrichment of his or her humanity. Leaders are agents of change (Kanu, *Leadership Workshop* 1). They have the task of taking people from where they are to where they have not been (Kanu, *Leadership Workshop* 1); it is the leader who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way (Kanu, *Leadership Workshop* 1) *Igwebuike* posits that the level of the leader's impact is dependent on the level of connection he or she is able to have with the led (Kanu, '*Igwebuike*' *and the Unity*).

Leadership within the context of *Igwebuike* philosophy is understood as an inclusive enterprise. The leader does not see himself as a separate entity from the people, but as leading from among the people; while the individual is a potent and viable being, as such a force, it is potent and viable in a limited way; however, when there is a conglomeration of forces, the human potency can be extraordinary. Leadership is not about power but about service. The leader sees himself or herself as part of a group and not as a person different from the group or better than the people he or she is serving. He or she understands that there are no leaders without followers and leadership always involves interpersonal influence or persuasion (Crewe, *Five Styles* 2). In the absence of followership, interpersonal influence and persuasion, the so-called 'leader' is only taking a walk and not leading (Kanu, '*Igwebuike*' as an *Igbo* 165-183).

The relevance of the leader is based on the people whom he or she is leading; if there are no people, there cannot be a leader and the ability of the people who constitute the state to achieve their national goal, is dependent on the ingenuity of the leader. The leader therefore needs the led as much as the led need the leader. This springs from the understanding that every reality has its purpose of existence. The leader and the led both share in this pool of universal purposefulness of existence, which they draw from and contribute to by playing their unique roles in the journey of existence. Situations where by the leader sees himself or herself as superior and indispensable to the people that he or she is leading can be considered an aberration or alienation of true leadership. In the same way, the polarization and fragmentation of society into antagonistic factions, in the bid to 'divide and rule' is a disservice to and an aberration of the human society (Kanu, '*Igwebuike*' as an *Igbo* 166).

In every circumstance, the good of those led is placed over the self-interest of the leader. This is the leadership that promotes the valuing and development of people, the building of community and the promotion of shared power. Leadership is therefore, not a position, rather, it is about how well we work together; the great leader is the one who has been able to connect to the different dimensions of society, not minding the depth of its diversity. There are all kinds of human beings- good and bad, in the society and this is where the role of the leader comes in, it is a responsibility and not a call to enjoy life; the leader should be able to manage all these peoples and make the best out of them. This makes the deciding difference. As a philosophy, *Igwebuike* in relation to leadership recognizes that a team is made stronger through diversity; it acknowledges that our differences are what make us stronger (Crewe, *Advantages of* 3). This would mean that the less the diversity, the less the power of the group. The qualities of inclusive leadership would therefore, include: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, stewardship as well as commitment to the growth of people (Kanu, '*Igwebuike*' as an *Igbo* 167).

This is the leader that makes the difference in society. If there are leaders who have made impact; if there are leaders who are celebrated; if there are leaders who have transformed society positively, these leaders are the inclusive kind of leaders.

Conclusion

A cursory glance at leaderships all over the world reveals indices or symptoms of diseases or maladies of leadership. Very common is the feeling of immunity, immortality and indispensability by leaders; sense of extravagance and self-exhibition; excessive busyness, planning and functionality. Many leaders have idolized themselves and lost a sense of community. Mental petrification, rivalry, vain glory and leadership Alzheimer are abundant. One does not need to go far to see how leaders have been bewitched by sterile pessimism, insatiable hunger for wealth against the growth and development of their people. Backbiting, gossiping and operation in closed circles are evident. These diseases of leadership are eating deep into leadership and thus making followership come with pain and hopelessness.

This piece has studied Pope Francis' concept of compassionate leadership in a bid to generate the antidote for the diseases or maladies of leadership. The whole idea of compassionate leadership in Pope Francis is based on six pillars: listening, sympathizing, companionship, hospitality, protection and service. These are the pillars on which compassionate leadership stands. All these pillars come together, as though knit by a thread to support the achievement or realization of compassionate leadership. No one is born a leader with all these pillars, however, as a person grows in holiness, selflessness and understanding that you are a being in relation to the other, one is able to build gradually on these pillars and thus achieve compassionate leadership. No one who lives within the proportions of selfishness can be a compassionate leader.

Igwebuike is considered as the moving spirit of the Roman Pontiff's compassionate leadership because it is born out of 'the sense of the other intelligence' or the *Igwebuike* thought current of the other as a part of me. You cannot be compassionate if your 'sense of the other intelligence' is dead or weak. Compassion is born out of a profound understanding of who the other person or thing is in relation to you. *Igwebuike* understands the other person as part of me, in spite of his or her peculiarities, weaknesses, etc. From this spirit, compassion takes up the forms of seeing with the eyes of another, hearing with the ears of another and feeling with the heart of the other. Compassion is richer when we understand, are sensitive, aware and vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts, experience of the other in an objectively explicit manner, and it is only possible within the context of *Igwebuike*, when I understand the other as a part of me.

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