

Leadership for Good Governance^o

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The past four decades have seen a revolution in the way in which nations are governed. Forty years ago, the majority of the nations that are now members of the United Nations did not have self-determination. Many were ruled by colonial masters or Marxist regimes. With the removal of authoritarian rule, the initial attempts at self-government often led to rather undemocratic governments. However, as we moved through the 1980's and the 1990's, there has been a major move toward more democratic governance.

This move has been motivated by a number of factors: most importantly, by increasing awareness on the part of the common people, but also by demands from potential investors, potential donors and lending agencies.

There have been several interesting landmarks along the way. One was the Concluding Statement of the Roundtable of Heads of Government of Commonwealth Africa on Democracy and Good Governance in Africa held in February 1997.¹ An even more monumental one was the decision at the OAU Summit last year that only those would be welcome who came to power through democratic means.² I consider this progression a miracle, considering the undemocratic models upon which the experiment for self-governing was based.

I am impressed. And yet, we face the major challenge of finishing the task. I am convinced that apart from one essential factor, we have reached a limit. The basic nature of man is not that of a democrat. On the one hand, our basic nature is to resist all authority, i.e., to be an anarchist. On the other hand, it is to control everyone else, i.e., to be a dictator. Man is, by his nature, then, at heart an anarchist and a dictator. Therefore, we have would-be dictators trying to rule anarchists.

Our avowed goal is good governance. What is good governance? Secretary-General Annan summarized our goal at the South Summit last month with these words: "Good governance comprises the rule of law, effective State institutions, transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs, respect for human rights, and the participation of all citizens in the decisions that affect their lives."³ This is as good a summary as I have heard. However, I believe we can go further. It is with the intent to push our understanding forward that I raise certain ideas with you.

There are two views of government in our world today:

1. The State is all-important and the individual is expendable in the pursuit of the State goals.
2. The individual is God's highest creation and the purpose of government is to serve the individual in reaching his/her full potential.

We would all agree that the second view is the ideal. I am convinced that this is what every human heart desires. And I am convinced that our definition for good governance must move all

^o Statement delivered to a group of diplomats at the U.N. 18 May 2000.

the way to the second position—*that the purpose of government is to serve the individual in reaching his/her full potential.*

Bringing this down to the level of the individual government official, corresponding to the two views of government are two views of government office:

1. Office is a prize to be won. Power is to be exercised. I am entitled to benefit from the exercise of that power.
2. Office is an opportunity to serve.

I believe that our weakness is that we do not yet see our goal as the second view, either *to serve* or *to help each individual reach his/her full, God-given potential.*

I am convinced that the key to understanding the level to which our view of good governance must be lifted comes from Nelson Mandela. In his autobiography, he relates how the mentor in his life taught him the importance of the attitude of a shepherd.⁴ I am convinced that it is this attitude that allowed him to accomplish the harmony we have seen during a dangerous transition. I am convinced that his attitude of a shepherd spared South Africa much pain, and may even have saved it. Many of his actions displayed the attitude of a shepherd. One that especially impressed me was an occasion when he had to be out of his country, and he appointed his rival as Acting President.⁵ This, in my opinion, is the act of a shepherd, not a politician who is seeking to lift himself up.

Where does the idea of the shepherd come from? You may say that it is natural for an African to display the attributes of a shepherd. Let me remind you that Africa has not systematically produced national leaders with a shepherd mentality.

However, Mandela's perspective is not so strange if one acknowledges that the foundational truth is that there is a God over every nation who is actively working to carry out His purposes for each nation. And that He has created each nation with a purpose and a plan. God, in His mercy, allows human beings the unbelievable privilege of working with Him in the process of fulfilling His plans. God paints the following picture of the Head of Government as shepherd of the people:

*He chose David His servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep He brought him to be the shepherd of His people....And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.*⁶

What is a shepherd? What does the shepherd do for the sheep? The shepherd makes sure that the basic needs of the sheep are met, specifically those needs that the sheep cannot meet for themselves. The shepherd protects the sheep. The shepherd anticipates danger to the sheep and avoids it. The shepherd protects the sheep from every kind of danger. The shepherd has complete responsibility for the safety and well-being of the sheep. The sheep are dependent upon the shepherd for their own well-being. In fulfilling this responsibility to the sheep, the shepherd is a servant of the sheep. The shepherd is not a free person. The shepherd cannot consider himself/herself as superior to the sheep. Literally, the sheep are the master and the shepherd is the servant. The shepherd has responsibility for serving those who cannot take care of themselves in this dangerous world. This is God's picture of what the Head of Government and, by extension, all government officials must do for the people of their nation.

The shepherd has a responsibility before God to govern in such a way that every man, woman and child will be safe and able to enjoy "a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."⁷ The shepherd, by virtue of his/her position, can see danger that the sheep are unable to

perceive. The government official understands a multitude of dangers that the average citizen cannot imagine or perceive. The Head of Government and his team have access to information that allows him to understand the national and international scene as no other person in the nation. God holds the government official accountable to reduce the impact of potential danger upon the sheep. The government official is to act on behalf of the people to protect them and ensure the highest quality of life.

The picture of the government official as a shepherd applies to every nation. When God called Cyrus to become King of Persia, which office he entered in 538 B.C., God used these words: "I am the LORD, ...who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd and will accomplish all that I please.'"⁸ God views the Head of Government of every nation as His shepherd and holds each one to this level of accountability.

Wherever our societies have moved away from true knowledge of God, there has been a misunderstanding of public office. This misunderstanding includes the misguided belief that the public official can use the office for personal benefit. Obviously, there is great danger to the public resulting from this misguided belief. However, there is also great danger to the public official arising from this error.

God makes it very clear that when the government official does not serve the people, God deals with him/her as He described in this warning:

*Woe to the shepherds...who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally....I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for My flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue My flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.*⁹

The clear statement is that God deals with those who do not properly shepherd His sheep. He makes it clear that no government official who abuses his office can remain for long. God loves the sheep so much that He insists that His shepherds perform their jobs properly.

One lesson we learn from these passages is that when we view government office as God does that we will see it as a stewardship. The shepherd is responsible to make sure that none of the sheep are lost or mistreated. In this case, the shepherd is responsible to the owner of the sheep, who is God Himself. The government official is held accountable by the owner of the sheep—God—for the way he/she, as a steward on behalf of God, takes care of the sheep.

God cares so much about the sheep that he deals firmly with those shepherds who abuse their responsibility.

The Head of Government is the chief human shepherd over the nation. By extension, the same principles apply to all government officials.

There are several consequences of viewing the Head of Government as shepherd. One is that the responsibility of the Head of Government is to shepherd the whole flock, not just the sheep that selected him/her as shepherd. The responsibility of the Head of Government is to shepherd the whole flock to pasture. There are shepherds who are placed in office through partisan politics. It may be one segment of the community who selects the shepherd. However, once installed as shepherd, the Head of Government has responsibility for the welfare of the whole flock, including those who initially felt a different shepherd would be preferable. The

sheep are the master and the shepherd is the servant to them. The shepherd does not have the right before God to treat differently the sheep who initially opted for a different shepherd.

Another consequence of viewing the government official as shepherd is that every individual in society must have the following attitude toward public service: I have a responsibility for the good of my community. I have a responsibility to my community to accept public responsibility whenever my community chooses. Whenever the sheep select me to fill a public responsibility, I must quickly and gladly accept it. By the same token, once the sheep determine that I have fulfilled that responsibility, I must quickly and gladly accept that as well, and return to private life.

God's attitude toward shepherding is perhaps best expressed in the words of Jesus:

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me—just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father—and I lay down My life for the sheep.*¹⁰

An important consequence of viewing the government official as shepherd is that office must be viewed as *an opportunity to serve my fellow citizens* rather than *a prize to be won and then used for my own glory*. God admonishes leaders to shepherd those whom they oversee with these words:

*Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*¹¹

You may think that the things I am sharing apply only to Heads of Government. Certainly the decisions of the national leader have the greatest consequences. However, these truths apply to leaders at all levels. They apply to each of us. Each one of us must allow God to prepare us to fill any responsibility, including Head of Government. In the meantime, viewing yourself as a shepherd will affect the way you fulfill your current responsibilities. If God should choose to lift you to a higher position, you will be better prepared to fill that office if your heart attitude is that of a shepherd. God is looking for shepherds to lift to strategic offices.

The practical question is: Can God change a person from one with the capacity to hurt the sheep into one who can be a shepherd of healthy sheep? I am convinced that God is powerful enough to do much more than this. Let me share one example of His power in the life of my wife Elaine. Fourteen years ago, Elaine was diagnosed as having a malignant ovarian tumour at an advanced stage. This kind of tumour at such an advanced stage is very difficult to treat effectively. Furthermore, the malignancy had spread to other locations in her reproductive system. Did this mean that God was going to allow my beloved wife to die? We did not believe it was God's intent. Two days later, she returned for further testing. As she was waiting in the examination room for the tests, in great pain, Jesus appeared to her in person. This was a miracle in itself. He told her: "You are going to be all right. You are going to be all right." She thought

this meant she would not die from the cancer, but that she would have to undergo extensive treatment. Then, Jesus disappeared. A few minutes later, the medical technician began the tests and scanned her body for an hour looking for the tumour, but could find none! Subsequently, the doctors have taken tissue samples but have found no evidence of cancer cells. The symptoms, which had been present for more than a year, immediately left and never returned. She did not need any medical treatment. God clearly performed a miracle! The God who gave Elaine a new body can work in our hearts to make us, who are by nature dictators, into shepherds.

I would like to share with you two examples of God working in the hearts of public officials to make them better shepherds. So as not to betray trust, I will share very cautiously, without identifying anyone. One example is a man who governed for several years during the 1980's as a Marxist dictator. With the close of the Cold War and the opening up of his country to free elections, he was soundly defeated in the first election and removed from office. In the process, God began to work in his life. God caused him to repent before the parliament, certainly sparing him from the consequences of his past abuses. He then focused his life on getting to know God. When the next elections were held in his country, he had so changed that he was elected by popular acclaim to head the nation again. One member of his cabinet told me that there is no comparison between the way he governs now and the way he governed before. I am convinced that as a result of submitting his life to God as his shepherd, he is becoming more of a shepherd himself. This man governs more compassionately as God is becoming the ruler in his personal life. The more he submits to God, the more he will be a shepherd and his sheep will experience God's good governance.

The second man was recently elected President of a strategic nation. This man had been President of his nation two decades ago. His earlier regime was reputed to be extremely corrupt. This time, as President, his efforts to remove corruption from his country are astounding friends and critics alike.¹² What is the difference in his life between his two terms in office? Previous to his return to office, he was imprisoned on charges that were politically motivated. In the process, he submitted his life to God as his Lord. Recently, he said "Without Jesus, as President I can do nothing. With Him, all things."¹³ It appears that God humbled him in order to remake him into God's instrument in the nation. He described his years in prison as "God's way of slowing me down to hear His message and His words."¹⁴

I am convinced a person cannot exercise shepherd-leadership without submitting his/her own life to God. Thus, I expect each of these Presidents to become a better shepherd to his people as he listens to God.

Listen to the testimony of another African President:

Humility...is one of the most important attributes necessary to become a good leader. When you observe leaders of all levels of society, throughout Africa and I suppose throughout the world, you find them overcome by power, greed and self-interest. Somehow, after they have attained the prominence and positions of trust, they forget the people, their poverty and need. They forget that they could become a great instrument to help their country, and instead they begin to live like little kings and dictators.

Only with a humble spirit, one which recognizes that we who have been given opportunities greater [than most, that we] are in fact servants of God and the people rather than masters, will we be able to help our countries move from Third World status and lead the people to a new day....Please pray that God will give me the strength, wisdom and sense to be a humble servant.¹⁵

This is the heart of a shepherd.

I am convinced this is true if God calls you to be a government official at any level—Head of Government or Ambassador—that He is, in fact, calling you to submit your life to Him.

The crucial question becomes: How does a public official become so intimately linked with God as to become God's shepherd in his nation? God created us out of love and for the purpose of bestowing love upon us as part of this intimate relationship. The God who reigns over nations is holy—without moral imperfection. However, we are not morally perfect. We have the capacity for evil. We hurt others, even the ones we love, with our selfishness. Our moral imperfection—our unholiness—blocks this relationship with God. It blocks us from the full benefits available to us as human beings and as government officials. It excludes us from the presence of Holy God. Our unholiness is incompatible with God's perfect holiness. The problem is insurmountable from a human point of view. By ourselves, there is no way we can come into the presence of Holy God. By ourselves, we are eternally separated from the One who created us and loves us. The eternal consequences are great when one recognizes that being separated from our Creator at the end of this lifetime means a literal hell.

How can this blocked relationship with God be overcome? We need a way to be forgiven so that God can draw us close to Himself. By ourselves, there is no way we can accomplish this. Only Almighty God can do it. That is precisely why God Himself came to earth as Jesus to die on our behalf to pay the penalty for our sins. God has told us:

*Jesus is the image of the invisible God....By Jesus all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together...He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Jesus and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things...by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.*¹⁶

Mahatma Gandhi described that sacrifice when he said that Jesus, “a man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.”¹⁷

Thus, Jesus has told us “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”¹⁸ God has told us “There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”¹⁹ Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God is able to forgive us and to see us as holy. Jesus' death and resurrection is the only provision given to mankind whereby we can have our sins forgiven and have this intimate relationship with God. God has told us:

*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*²⁰

*God took the sinless Christ and poured into Him our sins. Then, in exchange, He poured God's goodness into us!*²¹

Let me be very clear: What I am advocating is not religion. It is the person of Jesus. As God Himself, Jesus is for all of us, not just certain races, cultures, or regions of the world. I believe this is what Mahatma Gandhi meant when he said:

*Because the life of Jesus has the significance and the transcendency to which I have alluded, I believe that he belongs not solely to Christianity, but to the entire world; to all races and people, it matters little under what flag, name or doctrine they may work, profess a faith or worship a God inherited from their ancestors.*²²

The repentance and forgiveness that allows us to have an intimate relationship with God and, as a result to operate in partnership with God as His shepherd in the nation, is centered in the person of Jesus. Let us not think we can have this any other way but through embracing Jesus and Him alone.

How do we place our faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, so we can experience this intimate relationship with God that lasts forever and follow Him in being a shepherd-leader? The illustration that communicates best to me relates to the region where I grew up—near Niagara Falls. The water flows over Niagara Falls so violently that if anyone falls into the water, it is certain death. Many people do risky things over Niagara Falls to gain attention. One of these was a tightrope walker. He had a wire strung over the Falls, from one side to the other. This man first walked along this wire from one side of the Falls to the other, and back. Then, as the crowd grew, he repeated his walk but this time he pushed a wheelbarrow in front of him as he walked over to the other side and back. Then, he boldly filled the wheelbarrow with bricks and guided it along the wire to the other side of the Falls and back. By this time, the crowd had grown very large and was cheering loudly for him. He then asked the crowd “How many of you believe I can take this wheelbarrow to the other side of the Falls and back carrying a person inside instead of these bricks?” The crowd cheered wildly. Then, he asked the crowd “Who is willing to get into the wheelbarrow?” The crowd became silent. Their belief lacked 100% confidence. To place our faith in Jesus Christ means to get into the wheelbarrow with Him, making ourselves completely dependent upon Him. Our sole basis for having our sins forgiven and for entering a close relationship with God is Jesus’ death on our behalf.

It is this making ourselves dependent upon Jesus that gives us the capacity to be a true shepherd as God intends. No one—neither you nor I—can become the kind of shepherd God would have us be without the life of Jesus in us. Therefore, if you are serious about developing the kind of relationship with God necessary for effective leadership in your nation, I challenge you to come to Him. Jesus invites us:

*If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.”*²³

As we come to Jesus and drink, He will satisfy us and this will spill over to others in our societies, causing them to come to Jesus and drink. As others around us drink, the leadership of our nations will be made up of individuals who are able to develop a healthy relationship with their Shepherd, and to become the shepherd-leaders our nations need.

For this reason, I can invite you to come to Jesus and drink. Let me encourage you to embrace the Master Shepherd of our world and your life. I encourage you to invite Jesus into your life by praying to God:

Holy God, please forgive me for sinning against You. Thank You for loving me enough that You came to this earth as Jesus and died on my behalf so that I could have an intimate relationship with You. I ask You to come into my life to dwell. Today, I receive you as my Saviour from my sins. I ask You to guide me moment-by-moment as I serve You. Thank You. Amen.

Not only will this start you on the most exciting journey known to mankind, but it is the most significant thing each of us can do to become God's shepherd in our nations.

References

NOTE: All Bible references are from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

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