African Monarchism and Biblical Leadership: A Theological Evaluation of the Use of Authority in Church Governance

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Abstract

This article explores the theological and cultural intersections between African monarchism and biblical principles of servant leadership particularly in the context of church governance. It addresses African monarchism's influence on church leadership highlighting both congruencies and tensions between traditional monarchic authority and the Bible's model of humility and service. A broad cultural perspective is employed comparing African monarchic systems with other global monarchies such as those in medieval Europe and Confucian Asia to underscore varied approaches to divinely sanctioned leadership. The study further examines the diversity within African monarchism itself drawing on examples from Ethiopian, Yoruba, and Luba monarchies to illustrate regional variations in governance, ritual authority, and power distribution. Historical insights into early Christian and Jewish leadership practices provide additional context revealing how servant leadership principles subverted the hierarchical norms of the Roman Empire and aligned with the Old Testament's covenantal ethics. Through a critical analysis of (Matt 20:25-28 and 1 Pet 5:2-3), the article argues for an adaptive biblically rooted church leadership model that respects African cultural heritage while fostering transparency, service, and humility. This paradigm aims to support spiritually robust and community-centred church leadership that aligns with scriptural values.

Keywords: African-Monarchism, Leadership, Authority, Servant-Leadership, Governance.

Introduction

Background and Context

African Monarchism refers to the traditional systems of kingship and chieftaincy prevalent in many African societies that is perceived as their tradition. *The Westminster Theological Dictionary* defines tradition as "a long established custom or belief that has been passed on from one generation to another. It is a paradosis, which means the transmission of a received teaching or practice."[1] Monarchism has a long history of existence and is deeply ingrained in the cultural and social fabric of the respective communities. Monarchs often wield considerable authority which can extend to religious and spiritual realms. According to McCleary "a leader derives from the assigning powers, … the authority and capacity to lead."[2] In other words people assign the right of authority to a leader and allow him or her to function. Myrna confirms that "authority is assigned by people as they see one's leadership skills."[3] Meanwhile there should be a judicious balance between a monarchy and anarchy. However, Mageza differs with McCleary's notion that leadership is from the assigning powers for he believes that "a leader should have authority and should be able to command, enforce and get things done anyhow."[4] Mageza believes the leader should not be at mercy of his or her subordinates, instruments of power should empower him or her. Monarchism believes that authority or power is meant for enforcing allegiance. That is why Turnbull observes that "some Africans find it difficult to adapt to the Christian way of doing things because it seems at variance with the way they were

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[1]   Donald K. McKim, "Tradition," *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms: 2ed. revised and expanded* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 1082.

[2]   Wolf Heydebrand, "Forms of Power," *World Book Encyclopedia*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Scott Fetzer, 1992), 731.

[3]   Myrna Tezt, *Leadership Lessons from the Life of Neal C. Wilson* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2011), 46.

[4]   Laurent Mageza, *African Religion: The Morale Traditions of The Abundant Life* (New York: MaryKnoll, 1994), 86.

socialized."[5] People are moral creatures who can comply without being coerced by any means.

On the other hand, Biblical leadership as exemplified by the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles that emphasize servant leadership, humility, and accountability. Grebe is right in noting that "God is the giver of authority however, the function of exercising it comes with responsibility and accountability from its giver."[6] It is not about titles but the towel (John 13). Thus, Setiloane submits that "this culture directly or indirectly seems to have permeated the church in some areas of the world."[7] Leaders are competing for positions of leadership because to them that is a symbol of power.

This article explores the intersections and divergences between these two leadership paradigms particularly in the context of governance. The integration of traditional African leadership structures with biblical principles of church governance presents both opportunities and challenges. Scripture admonishes "brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (Jas 3:1). "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required …" (Luke 12: 48).

The hierarchical and authoritative nature of African Monarchism can sometimes conflict with the servant leadership model promoted in the Bible. This tension raises important questions about how authority should be exercised in African churches and what models of leadership are most conducive to fulfilling the church's mission. The purpose of this article is to theologically evaluate the use of authority in church governance within African contexts where traditional monarchic structures influence leadership. By examining biblical teachings on leadership alongside African Monarchism, this article seeks to provide insights and recommendations for

5   Turnbull C., *The Mbiti Pygmies: Change and Adaptation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winstone, 1983), 76.

6   Karl Grebe and Wilfred Fon, *The African Religion and Christian Counseling* (Cameroon: Bemanda - Nkwen, 1995; reprint., 1997), 67, 69.

7   G. M. Setiloane, *African Theology: An Introduction* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986), 213.

church leaders seeking to navigate these complex dynamics. In order to solve the problem the following questions will need to be answered: What are the key characteristics of African Monarchism in terms of authority and governance? How does the biblical principles of leadership as outlined in (Matt 20:25-28 and 1 Pet 5:2-3), compare with traditional African leadership structures? What are the theological implications of integrating African Monarchism with Biblical leadership principles in church governance? What practical strategies can church leaders employ to implement Biblical leadership principles in the contexts that are influenced by African Monarchism? We start by exploring the historical contexts.

Historical Context of African Monarchism

Monarchism in Africa encompasses a variety of traditional systems where kings, queens, chiefs, or other hereditary leaders govern. These monarchs often derive their authority from ancestral lineage and are seen as custodians of cultural heritage and spiritual well-being. Kittel submits that "authority is translated from Greek '*exousia*' which is derived from '*exestiv,*' which denotes the 'ability to perform an action' to the extent that there is no hindrance in the way. This word portrays the right to do something granted either by a court or state."[8] Kittel admits that authority is necessary for a leader to lead but he does not side with either side. Leadership roles and influence can vary significantly across different regions and tribes. The following are examples of African Monarchism in Africa: The Zulu kingdom in South Africa is one of the most well-known monarchies in Africa. It is led by a king known as the *Isilo*, the Beast. The Zulu monarchy dates back to the early 19th century when King Shaka Zulu unified various clans into a formidable kingdom. The king plays a significant role in cultural ceremonies, conflict resolution, and as a symbolic figure of unity for the Zulu people. Guy posits that "the role of the Zulu king extends beyond mere ceremonial duties; he is a crucial figure in preserving Zulu

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8   Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testame*nt, Vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI.: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964; repr.; Stuttgart, Germany: W. Kohl Hammer Press, 2006), 2: 562.

traditions and addressing social issues within the community."[9] The leadership becomes the focus and pivot of social and religious life of the Zulu people.

The same goes for the Ashanti Kingdom in Ghana which is part of the larger Akan ethnic group, one of the most powerful and enduring traditional states in West Africa. The Ashanti king is known as the Asantehene he wields significant authority and influence. The Golden Stool he sits on is a symbol of the Ashanti nation. He is believed to house the spirit of the Ashanti people and the Asantehene is its custodian. McCaskie concurs that "the Asantehene is not just a political leader but a spiritual and cultural beacon for the Ashanti people. He plays a central role in traditional festivals and the adjudication of disputes."[10] Leadership roles includes social, cultural, as well as spiritual in an African context and practice.

Then comes the Buganda Kingdom which is one of the oldest and prominent traditional monarchies in Uganda. The king is known as the Kabaka a pivotal figure in the Baganda society. The kingdom's structure includes various chiefs that oversee different regions and report to the Kabaka. This hierarchical system facilitates the governance and cultural continuity. In his book Kagwa notes that "the Buganda monarchy remains a vital institution that is deeply intertwined with the social and political life of the Baganda people. He has influence in both contemporary politics and cultural practices."[11] The three examples given above represent the West, Central, and Southern Africa just to show that monarchism is part of the African leadership DNA. Monarchism in Africa typically operates through a hereditary system where leadership is passed down through familial lines. Gareth agrees

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[9]   Jeff Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand, 1879-1884*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1994), 67.

[10]   T.C. McCaskie, *State and Society in Pre-Colonial Asante,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 14.

[11]   Sir Apolo Kagwa, *The Customs of the Baganda*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 46.

that authority comes by virtue of being either older or being born in a particular household."[12]

African monarchism while unique shares similarities with Asian and European leadership traditions particularly in the theological grounding of a ruler's authority. For example, in Confucian philosophy rulers were seen as moral exemplars accountable to the 'Mandate of Heaven.' This notion can be compared with the African monarch's divine authority fostering a discussion on morality in leadership across cultures. Thus, Confucianism for instance positions the emperor as a 'Son of Heaven,' whose legitimacy relies on moral integrity much like the divine mandate seen in African monarchic structures.[13]

Similarly, the concept of the divine right in medieval Europe paralleled African monarchic views by presenting rulers as divinely endorsed figures responsible for guiding their communities.[14] In other words, Medieval European monarchies often practiced 'the divine right of kings,' which claimed leaders were divinely chosen a concept that can be juxtaposed with African monarchic views on divinely ordained leadership. Furthermore, biblical kingship also provides an ethical framework where leaders are divinely chosen and yet accountable to God thus offering a historical and theological model for modern church leadership.[15] In the Old Testament the role of kings in Israel was often seen as divinely appointed yet constrained by ethical responsibilities adding a comparative historical layer on leadership in church governance. Monarchs often have advisory councils that are made up of elders or chiefs who assist in governance and decision-making. These councils ensure that the monarch's decisions are informed by the wisdom and experience of senior members of the community.

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[12] Gareth Austin, *TJAH*, 37, 23.

[13] Dahpon David Ho, Confucianism and Chinese Monarchism, (New York: Academic Press, 2010), 58-62.

[14] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 89-93.

[15] J. Gordon McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology, Genesis–Kings*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 102-105.

Challenges of Monarchism in Africa

African monarchism is not without challenges especially as it interfaces with political and spiritual leadership systems. One of the primary challenges facing traditional monarchies is the tension that exists between maintaining traditional practices and adapting to modern spiritual and political structures. In some instances the authority of monarchs has been diminished by national governments leading to conflicts over jurisdiction and governance. Sometimes Africans transport monarchistic tendencies into church leadership realms where the approach is different. The next challenge is that of hereditary succession that has led to disputes within royal families and communities. Rival groups claim to the throne can result in factionalism and instability that can undermine the cohesion and authority of the monarchy.

In the church system of annual, triennial and quinquennial elections of leadership some people feel hard done if they are not retained to positions they were occupying because of the traditional orientation. Some go out campaigning to be retained to their positions.

The next challenge is that of balancing traditional monarchic authority with contemporary democratic principles. Monarchs should navigate their roles within modern state frameworks that prioritize democratic governance and individual rights. However, there are advantages that can be noted in the African monarchism, and these are: monarchies play a crucial role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. They are custodians of traditional customs, rituals, and languages ensuring that these cultural elements are passed down through generations. Second, monarchs often serve as unifying figures within their communities. Their symbolic status and authority fosters a sense of identity and continuity that promotes social stability and cohesion. Third, traditional monarchs are often seen as impartial arbiters in disputes. Their involvement in conflict resolution provides a culturally relevant and accepted means of maintaining peace and order within communities. On the same note, Kalu argues that "despite these challenges the creative fusion of Christianity with African traditional religions

has produced a vibrant and contextually relevant faith that speaks powerfully to the spiritual needs and aspirations of African people."[16] Contextualised Christianity has a tendency of adopting those traditional practices that are not biblical.

Generally speaking monarchism in Africa is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that plays a significant role in the social, cultural, and political lives of many African communities. While traditional monarchies face numerous challenges in the modern era, they also offer unique advantages that contribute to cultural preservation and social cohesion. The cultural and spiritual significance of monarchies cannot be understated. They embody the history and identity of their people serving as living symbols of tradition and continuity. For instance, the Zulu king's role in cultural ceremonies and the Asantehene's guardianship of the Golden Stool illustrate the deep-rooted spiritual connections inherent in African monarchism. The integration of traditional monarchies within contemporary political systems often leads to friction. The balance between respecting traditional authority and promoting democratic governance requires careful navigation. Monarchs must adapt to changing political landscapes while maintaining their cultural and social relevance. Monarchism in Africa remains a vital and dynamic aspect of many societies. Its enduring presence highlights the importance of cultural heritage and social stability. Despite the challenges posed by modernization and political change, African monarchies continue to play a crucial role in the lives of their people. By understanding and respecting these traditional systems, there is an opportunity to create a more inclusive and cohesive approach to governance that honours both heritage and progress. Authority in African Monarchism is generally hierarchical and centralized. Monarchs are expected to exhibit wisdom, justice, and benevolence. However, their authority can also be absolute with

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[16]   Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Story*, (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005), 178.

limited accountability mechanisms which contrasts with more participatory or egalitarian governance models.

Monarchism across African cultures encompasses a variety of governance structures and theological viewpoints. For example, Ethiopian monarchism integrates Christian beliefs into its authority structure which creates a unique theocratic model distinct from other African monarchies.[17] In simple terms Ethiopian monarchism is rooted in Christianity and it combines religious authority with monarchical rule illustrating a distinct model within African monarchies. Similarly, the Yoruba kingdoms exhibit a more decentralized approach where kings work in tandem with councils demonstrating an African model that values power-sharing.[18] The Yoruba kingdoms of Nigeria for instance demonstrate a decentralized monarchic structure with leaders sharing power among chiefs and councils unlike more centralized models. On the contrary, among the Luba of the Congo, monarchic authority is closely tied to spiritual responsibilities emphasizing ritual stewardship.[19] These examples highlight a rich diversity of the African monarchism challenging the view of a monolithic system.

Biblical Perspectives on Leadership

"In the early Christian context, two models of leadership existed which contrasted against each other; these are Emperor Model shaped by the social-political realities of the Roman Empire, where emperors held absolute power and often ruled with an iron fist;[20] and the Communal Model where leadership was rooted in communal service and mutual accountability." However, the early church, as

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[17]   Steven Kaplan, *The Monarchy in Ethiopia: Evolution of a Unique Institution*, (London: Clarendon Press, 1995), 72-75.

[18]   Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 45-50.

[19]   Allen F. Roberts, *A Dance of Assassins: Performing Early Colonial Hegemony in the Congo*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 33-37.

[20]   Roberts Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Cultural Setting*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 112-115.

seen in Paul's letters, adopted a servant-leadership model (Philip 2: 3-7; 1 Cor 9: 19-23), mentoring leadership (2 Tim 2: 2; 1 Tim 4: 12). All the above models are rooted in servanthood and mutual care contrasting sharply with the prevailing Roman ethos.[21]

Old Testament leadership among the Israelites emphasized servanthood and covenantal responsibilities, contrasting with the authoritarian rule of surrounding nations. This servant-oriented approach also drew from Jewish traditions of covenantal leadership where leaders were seen as servants of God and the people, not as autonomous rulers.[22] Jesus Christ's teachings on servant leadership were thus both a continuation of Jewish ethical norms and a profound challenge to the imperialistic leadership models of His time.

Jesus Christ contrasted worldly authority with the servant leadership expected of His followers. He emphasized that true greatness in His kingdom is marked by serving others not by exercising dominion over them. This model prioritizes humility, service, and self-sacrifice (Matt 20: 25-28, NIV). N. T. Wright concurs that "Christian leadership is always lived out in the light of the coming kingdom of God. This eschatological perspective shapes our understanding of authority, power, and service, as it reminds leaders that they are accountable to the ultimate authority of Jesus Christ himself."[23] The theological analysis of biblical leadership is deeply rooted in the example of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the New Testament. His works emphasize several key aspects of leadership that are essential for understanding and practicing Christian leadership today. Wright underscores that Jesus' leadership was characterized by self-sacrifice rather than self-promotion. This is evident in Jesus Christ' willingness to serve others culminating in his sacrificial death. This model of leadership

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[21] Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 193-195.

[22] Richard A. Horsley, *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 140-142.

[23] N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, (San Francisco: Harper One, 2006), 227.

is countercultural especially in societies that often value power and prestige.

Wright views leadership as a form of stewardship where leaders are caretakers of God's people and resources. This perspective emphasizes responsibility and faithfulness encouraging leaders to focus on the well-being of their communities and the advancement of the gospel. The eschatological perspective here in reminds leaders that their authority is temporary and accountable to Jesus Christ. This view helps to frame leadership within the broader narrative of God's kingdom. It encourages leaders to act justly and mercifully in anticipation of Jesus Christ's return. There must be a balance between exercising legitimate authority and embodying servant leadership, that is a constant challenge. Leaders must ensure that their authority is exercised in a way that promotes service and community well-being. The next segment will exegete (Matt 20: 25-28 and 1 Pet 5: 2-3) as examples of the Bible's position on the use of authority.

The Exegesis of Matt 20: 25-28

Jesus Christ said to his disciples "you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20: 25-28). This passage is set within a discourse on true greatness following a request by the mother of James and John for her sons to have places of honour in Jesus' kingdom. Jesus Christ contrasts the worldly understanding of authority with the principles of His kingdom. In verse twenty-five, Jesus Christ used the phrase, "lord it over them" in Greek, *κατακυριεύουσιν*, transliterated as *katakyrieuousin*, which in essence implies a domineering, oppressive control. By 'exercise authority' in Greek, *κατεξουσιάζουσιν*, or *katexousiazousin* here indicates the wielding power in a domineering manner.

According to France, Jesus Christ highlighted the autocratic and exploitative nature of Gentile rulers as a negative example to avoid.[24] In highlighting this Jesus Christ wanted to show the negative effects of this kind of leadership so that disciples will follow His example. Keener also adds that Roman rulers were known for their oppressive tactics which made Jesus Christ' contrast with their kingdom values stark and poignant.[25] Jesus Christ's mission was to serve than to be served.

In the twenty-sixth verse Jesus Christ highlights the concept of a "servant" in Greek, *διάκονος*, *diakonos* where we derive the word deacon. It literally means to serve tables, a waiter, emphasizing humility and service. Commenting on the same verse Nolland explains that Jesus Christ redefined greatness in terms of service rather than power.[26] The greatest is the one who serves than the one who expects to be served. This notion brings about a paradox of servant leadership. Likewise, Blomberg emphasizes the radical nature of this teaching in a culture that valued status and honour.[27] Blomberg is correct because what Jesus Christ was introducing was foreign and radical.

In the twenty-seventh verse Jesus Christ said whoever wants to be the first must be a "slave," in Greek, the equivalent is *δοῦλος*, *doulos* which denotes a person who is entirely at the disposal of another, connoting a complete submission. Hence, Carson then highlights the deliberate intensification from "servant" to "slave," where he underscores a total self-giving.[28] In other words properly understood leadership is a function of service than it is of authority. Hagner adds that the concept of slavery was associated with the lowest social status making Jesus' teaching countercultural.[29] Jesus Christ being God had incarnated taking the form of man, so His disciples needed to do the same. He proposed a new order of exercising power.

The twenty-eighth verse continued "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The equivalent word for "ransom" in Greek is *λύτρον, lytron* which refers to a price that is paid to liberate a slave or captive. And "many," *πολλοί*, *polloi* means "many" in

contrast to "all," indicating a large number. Morris interprets the phrase "ransom for many" as indicating Jesus Christ's sacrificial death for the redemption of humanity.[30] Jesus Christ died for the salvation of many. On the other hand, Luz discusses how the term "ransom" implies a substitutionary atonement aligning it with the Old Testament sacrificial themes.[31] He may have a point there, because Jesus Christ's death was a fulfilment of the Old Testament's sacrificial system. Indeed He died that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

The Exegesis of 1 Pet 5:2-3

The apostle Peter also admonishes elders "be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5: 2, 3). This epistle is written by the Apostle Peter to Christians in Asia Minor that were facing persecution. In chapter five he addresses the elders giving them guidelines for leadership within the church. He emphasized a model of shepherding that contrasts with authoritarian or self-serving leadership styles. The next segment will do a verse by verse analysis of the passage.

In verse two Peter charges elders "be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve." The word "shepherds" in Greek is ποιμάνατε, *poimanate* which implies tending the flock, feeding, and guiding them similar to the care of a literal shepherd for sheep. While "watching over" in Greek is ἐπισκοποῦντες, *episkopountes*, which conveys the idea of oversight and care, akin to a bishop or overseer. According to Grudem the term 'shepherd" reflects a

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[30]   Leon Morris, "The Gospel According to Matthew," *Pillar New Testament Commentary,* (Eerdmans, 1992), 515.

[31]   Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary Hermeneia*, (Fortress Press, 2001), 545.

pastoral role of caring and nurturing with a special emphasis on relational leadership.[32] The shepherd should lead relationally for the sheep to trust and follow him or her. Furthermore, Jobes highlights the willing nature of this service contrasting it with mere duty or compulsion.[33] On the other hand Schreiner brings out the ethical dimension where he emphases on integrity and eagerness to serve rather than seeking personal gain.[34] Christian leadership is about service than positions.

The third verse counsels "not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. The apostle Peter taking from Jesus Christ's teaching in (Matt 20: 25) condemns "lording it over" its Greek word is *κατακυριεύοντες, katakyrieuontes,* which indicates domineering or authoritarian control, reminiscent of Gentile rulers. He counsels elders to be "examples," in Greek *τύποι, typoi*), which refers to a model or pattern to be imitated. In his commentary Davids explains that Peter rejects any form of oppressive leadership, advocating instead for a model where leaders lead by example.[35] Yet Elliott emphasizes the contrast between secular and ecclesiastical leadership styles with a call to humility and service.[36] Then Green highlights the transformative impact of exemplary leadership in fostering community cohesion and spiritual growth.[37] In all these comments the underlying principle is servant leadership which implies a leadership that serves. The

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[32] Wayne Grudem, "1 Peter." *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (IVP Academic, 1988), 189.

[33] Karen H. Jobes, "1 Peter," *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2005), 301.

[34] Thomas R. Schreiner, "1, 2 Peter, Jude," *New American Commentary* (Broadman & Holman, 2003), 236.

[35] Peter H. Davids, "The First Epistle of Peter," *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1990), 190.

[36] John H. Elliot, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 2000), 847.

[37] Gene L. Green, "1 Peter," *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2007), 174.

following segment will look at the theological implications for Christian leadership.

Theological Implications For Christian Leadership

These two passages of Scripture fundamentally challenge the conventional notions of power and leadership. In contrast to the hierarchical and often oppressive structures seen in Gentile governance systems. Jesus Christ advocates for a model of servant leadership which aligns with the broader biblical narrative where true leadership is characterized by humility, service, and self-sacrifice (Philip 2:5-8). Like (Matt 20: 25-28 and 1 Pet 5:2-3) outlines a model of leadership that is based on service, willingness to serve, and example rather than compulsion, greed, or authoritarianism. This is a paradigm that is needed in church leadership today. Kalu notes that "African Christianity has always existed in dialogue with the cultural contexts in which it is embedded, constantly negotiating its identity and expressions through a dynamic interplay with indigenous traditions."[38] He continues to point out that "the process of inculturation has allowed African Christians to retain significant elements of their cultural heritage while embracing the Christian faith, resulting in a unique synthesis that reflects the continent's diverse religious landscape."[39] Leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist church may be carrying forward tendencies from monarchism unawares. Hence (Matt 20:25-28 and 1 Pet 5: 2-3) aligns with the broader New Testament teaching on servant leadership, as seen in the Gospels and Pauline epistles.

Josephus a Jewish historian contrasts the authoritarian rule of Roman governors with the more communal and service-oriented leadership found in some Jewish traditions.[40] He describes the ideal leader as one who cares for the people rather than exploit

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[38]   Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Story*, 15.

[39]   Ibid., 47.

[40]   Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Translated by William Whiston, (Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 20.8.5; 6.5.4.

them, drawing a contrast with Roman rulers.[41] In simple terms a leader should be selfless and be willing to serve those under him or her. A Greek philosopher named Plato in his *Ideal Republic*, also admits that rulers should be servants of the state who prioritize the well-being of the polis over personal gain.[42] The Bible presents a radical paradigm for leaders based on humility and service that sharply contrasts with worldly notions of power. These passages call believers to emulate Jesus Christ's example of self-sacrifice and servant leadership. Philo added emphasis on the role of the leader as a shepherd that guides and nurtures the community.[43] Leadership is a function of service to others than self-seeking. Ellen G. White emphasized Christ's model of leadership through service as an antidote to selfish ambition. The greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."[44] She adds "the work of the true shepherd is a representation of the work of Jesus Christ. Ministers should care for the flock of God."[45] (1 Pet 5:2-3) presents a profound vision of church leadership that is grounded in service, selflessness, and exemplary living. This model stands in stark contrast to secular notions of power and control. It urges leaders to embody Christ-like humility and care. I will now do a comparative analysis of the two paradigms.

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[41]   Ibid., 6.5.4.

[42]   Plato, *Republic*, Translated by G.M.A. Grube. (Hackett Publishing, 1992), 6.485d.

[43]   Philo, *On the Special Laws*, 4. 23.

[44]   Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountainview, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898), 650.

[45]   Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, (Mountainview, CA.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1915), 182.

Theological Analysis of African Monarchism

The topic of authority in church governance raises significant theological questions, especially when comparing traditional African monarchism with biblical leadership principles. This reflection evaluates the use of authority in church governance in light of (Matt 20:25-28 and 1 Pet 5:2-3), supported by other scriptural passages. In (Matt 20:25-28), Jesus Christ contrasts the leadership styles of the Gentiles with His vision for His disciples. He emphasizes that true greatness in His kingdom is not about lording over others but about serving them. He points out the Gentile rulers' abuse of power, then instructs His followers that leadership among them should be characterized by servanthood. Jesus Christ specifically taught that the greatest must be a servant. In this whole discourse Jesus Christ exemplifies this by His own life stating that He came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. Likewise in (1 Pet 5:2-3), the apostle Peter addresses elders urging them to shepherd God's flock willingly and eagerly not domineering but being examples to the flock. The apostle proposed that shepherding should be done not under compulsion but willingly as God would have it. Elders should not lord over those entrusted to them but should be examples.

African monarchism often involves hierarchical structures and centralized authority. While this can provide stability and order it may sometimes lead to the abuse of power and authoritarianism contrary to the biblical model of servant leadership (cf. John 13:13-17). Jesus Christ washes his disciples' feet modelling for them how to serve one another. (Philip 2:3-8). Paul exhorts the believers to have the same mind as that which was in Jesus Christ who humbled himself and took on the form of a servant. In (Eph 4:11-12) Paul describes church leaders as equippers of the saints for the work of ministry highlighting their role in building up the body of Christ. (James 3:1) warns of the greater judgment for teachers implying the need for humility and responsibility in leadership.

Comparative Analysis of African Monarchism and Biblical Leadership

The African Monarchism and biblical leaderships recognize the importance of authority and governance. However, while African Monarchism often centralizes authority in a single figure or small group while biblical leadership advocates for shared leadership and servant leadership. The two paradigms can learn from each other on the positives unlike where Kalu commends the African independent churches for emerging as powerful examples of how Christianity can be adapted to local contexts incorporating traditional rituals, music, and leadership structures in ways that resonate deeply with African believers.[46] Power in the biblical terms is exercised through servanthood and humility in contrast with the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of African Monarchism. This difference highlights a potential area of tension in integrating these models within church governance. Adopting servant leadership requires church leaders to prioritize the needs of their congregations, embody humility, and foster an inclusive community. This shift can challenge traditional authority structures but is essential for aligning with biblical principles. Humility and accountability are crucial for effective church leadership. Leaders must be open to feedback, willing to admit mistakes, and accountable to their congregations and God. This transparency builds trust and enhances the church's witness. Involving the community in decision-making processes and promoting shared leadership can mitigate the risks of authoritarianism and ensure that leadership is more representative and responsive to the needs of the congregation. Kalu notes that "the challenge of syncretism remains a significant issue as the blending of traditional African religious practices with Christian beliefs sometimes leads to tensions and debates about theological purity and authenticity."[47] Syncretism becomes real when people bring monarchism systems into church leadership. Good knowledge is in every culture and that is appreciated and the good must be disseminated however creating kings and kingdoms in church was never Jesus' idea. However, Chitando continues to argue that "contextual theology in Africa is a dynamic field where traditional African practices and Christianity intersect resulting

in a theology that is deeply rooted in the African experience and responsive to local cultural contexts."[48] Chitambo has a point here because Christianity is not based on a particular special culture on earth, but all cultures need a Jesus Christ hermeneutic that will rid them of the profane and preserve that which is good for leadership and practice. Monarchism is one aspect of African systems that does not sync well with servant leadership as portrayed in the Bible.

Interestingly Chitambo then turns around and admit that "one of the significant challenges in this intersection is the potential for syncretism where the blending of the Christian and traditional elements can sometimes lead to theological ambiguities and controversies within the broader Christian community."[49] He is right on this point being African should not make us gullible of all that comes from Africa. The word of God sets the parameters within which we can operate and still be saved as true African Christians. Wright asserts that "the pattern of Jesus' ministry; his taking up and redefining of the role of Israel's servant points towards the new form of leadership he had in mind for his followers. This leadership is not about self-promotion, but about self-sacrifice."[50] Monarchism revolves around an individual, and that systems of governance is prevalent in the political and traditional sphere. He continues "true leadership in the kingdom of God is about serving others not wielding power. This is a radical redefinition of leadership which is at the heart of the Christian faith."[51]

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[48] Ezra Chitando, *Christian Theology and African Traditions: An In-Depth Analysis of the Intersections of African Traditional Practices and Christianity* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2016), p. 12.

[49] Ibid., 88.

[50] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 597.

[51] N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, (London: SPCK, 2001), 166.

Implications for Church Governance

Church leaders should adopt a servant leadership model where they prioritize the needs of the congregation over their own personal power or prestige. This attitude aligns well with Jesus Christ's teachings in (Matt 20:25-28) and that is exemplified by His own life and ministry. Leaders should shepherd the flock of God with willingness and eagerness, as instructed in (1 Pet 5:2-3). This means that they will serve out of love for God and His people rather than out of a desire for power or control. Elders and pastors should be examples to their congregations demonstrating humility, integrity, and godliness in their personal and public lives. Church governance should involve the community of believers, fostering collaboration and mutual support. This paradigm helps to prevent the centralization of power and encourages collective discernment and accountability. Leaders should be accountable to God and to the church community. Structures should be put in place to ensure that there is transparency and to address any potential abuses of power. Church leaders should consciously practice servanthood which emulates Jesus' model of humble service. They should promote egalitarian leadership at all levels. This will avoid hierarchical structures that concentrate power to a few individuals. Instead, it promotes a shared leadership and collective decision-making. There must a deliberate plan to invest in the spiritual formation of leaders and ensuring that they are rooted in the Christ-like humility and service.

Summary and Conclusion

The biblical leadership as taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles emphasizes servanthood, humility, and example-setting in contrast with the hierarchical and sometimes authoritarian models found in traditional African monarchism. Church leaders are called to shepherd the flock willingly and eagerly not domineering but serving and setting examples. By embracing these principles, churches can cultivate healthy Christ-centred communities where power is exercised in a way that honours God and serves His people. This approach does not only align with the teachings of

Jesus Christ and the apostles but it also fosters a more inclusive and accountable church governance. This article found out that traditions are many and diverse so they tend to divide than unite.

Some traditions seem to be inspired by the heathen background of church that is still drawing from their previous orientations. Jesus Christ said "the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger and he who governs as he who serves." (Luke 22: 23-25). The measure of a person's authority is directly proportional to their responsibility. Little responsibility means little authority and a bigger responsibility equals to a lot of authority. Authority without responsibility is frightening while responsibility without authority is frustrating. God requires those who exercise authority to be co laborers together with Him, applying the golden rule (Matt 7: 20). Ellen White then notes that "Jesus Christ mingled with people as one desiring their good, He ministered to their needs, He won their confidence, and then He bade them follow me."[52] Jesus Christ models a Bible-based leadership that is characterized by service, humility, and love for mankind than self- aggrandizement. African monarchism should learn from Jesus Christ the role model. The theological analysis of biblical leadership provides a comprehensive framework for understanding Christian leadership. It emphasizes self-sacrifice, service, humility, stewardship, and an eschatological perspective. This model of leadership is deeply rooted in the teachings and the example of Jesus Christ. It then challenges contemporary leaders to rethink their approach to leadership prioritizing the well-being of their church communities and aligning their practices with the values of the kingdom of God.

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[52]   Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Hagerstown: Pacific Press, 1905), 143.