

LEADERSHIP THEORIES AND AGAPE LEADERSHIP: AN EXPLORATION THROUGH THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

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Abstract

The concept of leadership is, to a certain extent, polymorphic in nature. Despite the attention it has garnered in empirical studies, theoretical work, books, and popular press articles, our understanding of leadership remains incomplete. Questions such as who a leader is, who can lead, or how a leader should be elicit varied responses depending on the perspective of the respondent. The multitude of explanations and definitions further complicates the matter. This article aims to elucidate the idea of leadership through the lens of Agape, a concept rooted in selflessness. To illustrate this, the life of Jesus Christ is chosen as an exemplary case. Jesus, as a leader, epitomized selfless love throughout his entire life. Leadership based on Agape is characterized by a selflessness that compels a leader to forget about personal concerns and dedicate themselves to the well-being of others. Such leaders steadfastly endure struggles and troubles for the betterment of humanity or society at large. Agape, derived from the Greek word for love, is often associated with the unconditional love emphasized in Christian teachings. Examining the importance of Agape in leadership, Jesus serves as the prime exemplar. His leadership was not driven by personal gain; rather, his entire existence was devoted to the welfare of the poor, sick, downtrodden, and marginalized members of society. Leaders practicing Agape leadership possess a keen awareness of the emotional needs of others and excel in creating an environment where everyone feels valued and supported. Jesus, through his indomitable spirit of selfless love, exemplified Agape leadership. This article delves into the exploration of Agape leadership through the life of Jesus Christ.

Keywords: Leader, Leadership, Agape, Selflessness, Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

Leaders and leadership hold a profound significance in human existence, yet a universally accepted definition remains elusive. The term 'leadership' is subject to diverse interpretations, with various attributes attributed to leaders, shaping perceptions of their successes and failures. Consequently, different models of leadership have emerged, reflecting individual understandings of the concepts. In the 21st century, leadership is globally perceived as a wielder of power, often yielding negative rather than positive impacts on those under governance. Notable exceptions to this trend include figures like the Dalai Lama and Pope Francis. Currently, leadership is tainted by elements such as position, power, wealth, autocracy, and a lack of respect for humanity and other living beings. In this context, a re-evaluation of leadership is imperative, emphasizing the aspect of Agape - a selfless approach where human beings, along with other living and non-living entities, are granted equal standing in the world. Agape leadership gains relevance due to its foundation in selflessness, consistently prioritizing the well-being of others (Mulinge, 2018). Beyond its literal meaning, selflessness in the context of leadership involves engaging in activities that benefit others, disregarding personal gains.

As leaders are integral parts of society, their actions affect the collective. Thus, the selfless leader's primary objective should be the welfare of others, setting aside personal interests - a concept encapsulated in Agape leadership. The exemplar of Agape leadership is found in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, devoid of personal ambitions or a desire for fame, devoted Himself to the well-being of the struggling and needy. Agape leadership, rooted in selflessness, fosters a connection between the leader and followers, granting equal dignity to all. This study seeks to underscore the importance of Agape leadership by examining the life of Jesus Christ, who demonstrated Agape leadership through self-emptying, culminating in His ultimate sacrifice on the cross. According to Nygren (1953) and Hallet (1989), a common thread between altruistic love and Agape is the willingness to engage in self-sacrificial activities for others, without expecting personal rewards for such acts.

LEADERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Research on male and female leaders suggests that around 30% of leadership qualities are inherited, while 70% stem from environmental factors (Noharia & Khurana, 2010). The development of leadership is intricately linked to life experiences that naturally occur, with learning being drawn from them (Noharia & Khurana, 2010). Genuine leadership is characterized by the ability to derive meaning, even from challenging circumstances, and to learn from such experiences (Bennis & Thomas, 2011). As Bennis and Thomas (2011) emphasize, true leaders possess the capacity to find significance in adverse situations, a quality that distinguishes them. Furthermore, leaders who can effectively manage their emotions demonstrate composure in stressful situations, thereby inspiring confidence in others through the example they set (Avolio, 2018).

In 400 B.C., Xenophon initially delineated the essence of leadership in his work, *Anabasis*, serving as a guiding principle for Alexander the Great during his conquests (Ledlow & Coppola, 2014). Xenophon posited that leaders bear the responsibility of steering their followers toward successful outcomes, emphasizing the attainment of this objective through the embodiment of courage (Ledlow & Coppola, 2014). The discourse on leadership traces its roots back to Machiavelli, whose seminal work, *The Prince* (1527), espoused the notion that effective leaders ought to possess qualities that evoke both fear and admiration, encapsulated in the maxim "the end justifies the means" (Ledlow & Coppola, 2014). Despite these early insights, the formalization of leadership theories gained momentum in the modern era. In the period spanning 1840 to 1880, scholars such as Carlyle, Galton, and James delved into the study of historical great men, contending that their success could be attributed to distinct leadership traits (Ledlow & Coppola, 2014). This historical exploration laid the groundwork for subsequent theories, contributing to the ongoing evolution of our understanding of leadership dynamics. The overarching theme throughout these historical perspectives underscores the enduring significance of leadership discourse across diverse epochs.

The Trait Approach theory, also known as the Great Man theory, primarily centers on the inherent traits and qualities possessed by esteemed leaders throughout history (Northouse, 2015). This theoretical perspective contends that leadership success is predominantly determined by the individual traits of leaders. Essentially, the premise is that certain individuals are born with specific characteristics that naturally predispose them to leadership (Daft, 2014). Traits, in this context, refer to the most distinctive personal attributes that distinguish a person as a leader. However, despite

the initial emphasis on the significance of personality traits in leadership, research has revealed only a tenuous correlation between these traits and the success of leaders (Daft, 2014). The foundational idea that particular traits are the linchpin for effective leadership has been met with empirical challenges, pointing to the complexities involved in understanding and predicting leadership success based solely on inherent qualities.

In the late 1930s, a notable shift in leadership research emerged with a distinct focus on behaviour. During this period, scholars began to delve into the actions and conduct of leaders, emphasizing the examination of what leaders do and how they behave (Northouse, 2015). Albert Bandura contributed significantly to this paradigm by proposing the concept that human behaviour is acquired through observation. According to Bandura, individuals learn new behaviours by observing others, and subsequently, these observed behaviours serve as a guide for their own actions in the future (Ledlow & Coppola, 2014). Within the behavioural approach to leadership, the analysis is centred on the actions and conduct of leaders rather than their inherent traits. This analytical framework posits that effective leadership is contingent upon the demonstration of appropriate behaviours by the leader (Daft, 2014). In essence, the underlying principle of this approach suggests that individuals who exhibit the right behaviours have the potential to be effective leaders. The intricacies of human behaviour often prove to be elusive and challenging to decipher. Recognizing this complexity, the psychodynamic approach to leadership acknowledges that individuals are intricate and distinctive in their decision-making patterns and interpersonal interactions (Northouse, 2016). This approach, rooted in Freud's psychoanalytic theories of human behaviour, was established in 1946 (Northouse, 2016).

Max Weber, a prominent sociologist whose work dates back to 1947, has left a lasting imprint on contemporary theories of charismatic leadership, as elucidated by Yukl in 2011. The concept of charismatic leadership is intricately tied to its contextual nature, with society playing a pivotal role in shaping this phenomenon, as posited by Takala et al., in 2013. The term 'charisma,' derived from the Greek, originally meant a 'divinely inspired gift.' However, Weber repurposed the term to denote the followers' perception of a leader endowed with extraordinary qualities, as discussed by Yukl (2011). According to Weber, charisma tends to manifest during times of social crisis, wherein a leader emerges with a radical vision and provides solutions to the prevailing challenges, thereby attracting followers (Yukl, 2011). Charismatic leaders exhibit a myriad of qualities, notably excelling in devising radical solutions with societal relevance in the face of crises. The allure of charismatic leaders lies in their charisma, a quality that draws followers to them. This attraction is further bolstered by the leader's repeated successes, fostering increased faith and allegiance among their followers. Max Weber's insights from 1947 continue to shape contemporary theories of charismatic leadership, emphasizing its context-dependent nature. The societal backdrop significantly contributes to the construction of charismatic leadership, as explored by Takala et al., (2013). Charismatic leaders, equipped with exceptional qualities, prove adept at navigating and resolving crises, capturing the devotion of followers through the magnetism of their charisma and a track record of consistent triumphs (Yukl, 2011).

The skill approach to leadership constitutes a perspective centred on the leader, highlighting the pivotal role of knowledge and abilities in achieving effective leadership. This approach traces its roots to an article penned by Robert Katz in Harvard's

business review in 1955, aptly titled 'Skills of an Effective Administrator' (Northouse, 2016). Katz identified three fundamental personal skills crucial for effective administration: technical, human, and conceptual. Notably, he contended that these skills diverge from the inherent characteristics commonly associated with leaders (Northouse, 2016).

According to Sanders (1967), an assertion is made that both God and humanity are engaged in an unceasing quest for leaders. In the realm of spiritual leadership, the impetus is to inspire followers to infuse spiritual significance into their labour (Yukl, 2011). It is underscored that spiritual leadership is not contingent on election or appointment; rather, it is a divine prerogative, something only bestowed by God (Sanders, 1967). This form of leadership is intricately linked to the spirit, a quality conferred solely through divine intervention (Sanders, 1967). Sanders further posits that a spiritual leader does not exert influence merely through the force of their personality. Instead, their impact emanates from a personality that is illuminated, interwoven, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. In the context of spiritual leadership, the leader places unwavering trust in God, seeking divine guidance to discern God's will. Through adherence to God's methods, these leaders dutifully obey the divine directives. The motivation for such leaders stems from a profound love for both God and humanity, characterized by a reliance on God's providence (Sanders, 1967).

Derived from Reddin's (1967) 3-D management style theory, Hersey and Blanchard (1969) formulated the situational approach theory, as expounded by Northouse in 2016. This theoretical framework places emphasis on leadership within specific contexts. Contingency or situational theories posit that a single leadership style does not universally apply; instead, leaders should adeptly modify their styles, showcasing excellent skills that align with the demands of each situation (Ledlow & Coppola, 2014).

The emergence of the Path-Goal theory can be traced back to the leadership literature of 1970, as illuminated in the works of Evans. This theory delves into the intricacies of how leaders inspire and propel their followers towards predetermined objectives (Northouse, 2016). Path-Goal theory elucidates the mechanism through which leaders can bolster their followers along the trajectory to their goals. By discerning the specific behaviours that best align with the circumstances in which followers operate, and by adeptly selecting the appropriate leadership style, leaders heighten the expectations of their followers regarding both success and satisfaction (Northouse, 2016).

The exploration of servant-leadership traces its origins to Greenleaf's seminal essay titled 'The Servant as Leader' in 1970, later expanded upon in his book 'Servant-Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness' (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). The essence of becoming a servant-leader, as articulated by Spears and Lawrence (2002), commences with an innate desire to serve, placing the act of service at the forefront. The spirit of servant-leadership is characterized by moral authority, explicitly stating a commitment to prioritizing service to others over self-interest (Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Servant leadership is not confined to a select few; rather, it is a quality that can be embodied by anyone. The cultivation of servant leadership within oneself has a transformative effect, instigating a ripple effect that begets servant leadership in others. Ethical conduct is a cornerstone of servant leadership, manifesting in behaviors that contribute to the greater good of the organization, community, and society at large (Rowe & Guerrero, 2019). Spears and

Lawrence (2002) identified ten key characteristics central to Greenleaf's conceptualization of servant leadership:

- 1) Listening: Servant leaders base their communication on attentive listening, acknowledging the perspectives of their followers.
- 2) Empathy: Servant leaders demonstrate empathy by understanding and appreciating the thoughts and feelings of their followers.
- 3) Healing: Caring for the personal well-being of followers is a hallmark of servant leadership.
- 4) Awareness: Servant leaders exhibit attentiveness and responsiveness to their surroundings.
- 5) Persuasion: Gentle persuasion, devoid of positional authority, is employed by servant leaders to effect change.
- 6) Conceptualization: Servant leaders, as visionaries, provide direction and solve complex organizational problems.
- 7) Foresight: Anticipating the future and the consequences of actions is a characteristic of servant leadership.
- 8) Stewardship: Servant leaders take responsibility for their role, managing people and organizations with a focus on the greater good of society.
- 9) Commitment to the Growth of People: Servant leaders actively contribute to the personal and professional growth of their followers.
- 10) Building Community: While respecting individuality, servant leaders foster a sense of community within organizations, creating an environment where individuals feel safe and connected to one another.

The inception of the term 'Transformational Leadership' is attributed to the seminal work of Downton in 1973, while its holistic manifestation as an encompassing approach to leadership emerged in the influential tome by political sociologist James Mac Gregor Burns titled 'Leadership' in 1978 (Northouse, 2010). Described as a complex and involved process, transformational leadership intricately binds leaders and followers in the profound task of transforming individuals, organizations, or even entire nations (Rowe & Guerrero, 2019). In the pursuit of instigating change, transformational leaders assume the role of formidable role models for their followers. They exude confidence, demonstrate competence, and espouse lofty ideals. Notably, these leaders exhibit a willingness to attentively listen to their followers, displaying an openness to divergent perspectives. This engenders a spirit of cooperation that flourishes between transformational leaders and their followers (Northouse, 2010). Transformational leadership, as articulated by Yukl (2011), has the remarkable ability to foster trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect among followers towards their leaders. Through this leadership style, followers are not merely inspired to meet their initial expectations but are motivated to surpass them significantly. The transformative influence of such leadership serves as a catalyst for followers to contribute more than originally envisioned (Yukl, 2011).

The term 'team' typically denotes a compact task group characterized by members who share a common purpose, possess interdependent roles, and bring complementary skills to the collective endeavour. Within the team dynamic, both the

leader and followers collaboratively form an integral unit. The team leadership model of 1989 underscores the pivotal role of leadership, placing it in the metaphorical driver's seat and emphasizing the leader's responsibility for monitoring the team and undertaking necessary measures to ensure its success. As elucidated by Northouse (2010), comprehending the leadership role within teams is imperative for achieving team success and averting potential team failure. The leader's intervention, coupled with behavioural flexibility and adept problem-solving skills, emerges as crucial components in the framework of effective team leadership (Rowe & Guerrero, 2019). The spectrum of effective team leadership encompasses two essential dimensions: task and relational issues. Rowe and Guerrero (2019) assert that addressing both these facets is paramount for optimal team performance and holistic team development. The equilibrium between addressing task-oriented objectives and nurturing interpersonal relationships forms the cornerstone of effective team leadership, leading to the realization of the team's full potential.

The focal point of adaptive leadership lies in the conduct of leaders, emphasizing how they motivate individuals to acclimate to diverse life situations, encompassing challenges, problems, and changes (Northouse, 2016). The foundational work on adaptive leadership emerged in the form of Heifetz's book, titled 'Leadership Without Easy Answers,' published in 1994, which holds a seminal position in the realm of leadership literature (Northouse, 2016). Distinguished from a leader-centric approach, adaptive leadership revolves around the followers, underscoring the significance of fostering an environment where individuals are encouraged to adapt and evolve. The objective of adaptive leadership, as outlined by Northouse (2016), is to inspire people to embrace novel ways of living, facilitating personal growth and development. Adaptive leadership transcends traditional paradigms by centring its focus on the needs and dynamics of the followers. The crux of this approach lies in propelling individuals toward a continual process of learning and adaptation, ultimately contributing to their personal advancement and overall well-being (Northouse, 2016).

In the realm of leadership, ethics delves into the essence of who leaders are, encompassing their character, actions, and behaviours. Ethical theories take a comprehensive approach, scrutinizing both the behaviour and character of leaders, evaluating whether their actions yield positive or negative outcomes, and discerning the ethical or unethical nature of these outcomes (Rowe & Guerrero, 2019). The genesis of ethical considerations in leadership can be traced back to 1996, originating from a series of working documents by select leadership scholars, later summarized by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Northouse, 2016). At its core, ethical leadership is inseparable from personal integrity, contingent upon the leader's steadfast commitment to uprightness and adherence to espoused morals (Yukl, 2011). Aristotle's ethical framework proposes a set of virtues that characterize an ethical individual, including generosity, courage, temperance, sociability, self-control, honesty, fairness, modesty, and justice (Rowe & Guerrero, 2019). The term 'Ethics' itself, derived from the Greek word 'ethos,' signifies character or custom, highlighting its fundamental association with the moral fabric of individuals (Rowe & Guerrero, 2019). In navigating the complex landscape of decision-making, ethics serves as the compass that delineates between right and wrong. The ethical theories not only guide leaders in making choices but also assess whether the outcomes of a leader's behaviour align with ethical principles (Rowe & Guerrero, 2019). Thus, ethics stands

as a guiding force, aiding individuals in discerning and choosing the morally sound path in any given situation.

Luthans and Avolio initially introduced the concept of Authentic Leadership in 2003, describing it as a leadership style characterized by heightened self-awareness and self-regulated behaviours that cultivate positive relationships between leaders and followers (Rowe & Guerrero, 2019). The inaugural book on authentic leadership was authored by Bill George in the same year, where he asserted that authentic leaders are crucial in navigating the contemporary leadership crisis (George, 2003). According to George, authenticity serves as the linchpin of leadership, encapsulating its entirety in a single word- 'authenticity.' He defined it as the act of being true to oneself, embodying the person one was meant to be (George, 2003). Contrary to the notion that authentic leaders are inherently born, George argued that authenticity is a quality cultivated through overcoming personal weaknesses (George, 2003). Authentic leaders, as outlined by George, prioritize service and empowerment over personal gain, eschewing the pursuit of wealth, power, and prestige for the greater good (George, 2003). Their leadership is characterized by purpose, meaning, and values, and they exhibit consistency, self-discipline, and enduring relationships with others (George, 2003). Embracing authenticity allows individuals to shape their leadership style based on their unique personalities and characters (George, 2003). A critical aspect of authenticity, as highlighted by George, is acknowledging one's shadow side - the aspects of oneself that may be less favourable or acknowledged (George, 2003). George identified five essential qualities inherent in authentic leaders:

1. Understanding Their Purpose (Passion): Authentic leaders define their leadership purpose, recognizing that adopting someone else's purpose is incompatible with authenticity.
2. Practicing Solid Values (Behaviors): Values, shaped by personal beliefs developed through study, introspection, consultation with others, and life experiences, form the foundation of authentic leadership. Being true to these values garners respect and fosters followership.
3. Leading with Heart (Compassion): Authentic leaders develop their hearts by embracing their unique paths and remaining open to life's diverse experiences. Compassion is seen as a key element in becoming authentic human beings.
4. Establishing Enduring Relationships (Connectedness): Authentic leaders excel in building trustful relationships, regardless of the individuals they encounter or the organizational context in which they operate.
5. Demonstrating Self-Discipline (Consistency): Authentic leaders manifest their values through consistent and self-disciplined actions, reinforcing the authenticity of their leadership (George, 2003).

The aforementioned theories delve into various facets of leadership, yet none of them explicitly incorporate the notion of love or Agape as a significant component in the practice of governing states, leading organizations, or navigating academic settings. The scholars under consideration are now exploring the concept of Agape and its pivotal role in leadership, spotlighting Jesus as a paragon of Agape Leadership.

AGAPE

Everyman's Encyclopaedia, curated by E.F. Bozman in 1967, delineates the etymology of the term 'Agape,' tracing its roots to the Greek language, where it conveys the profound concept of 'love'. According to Coe and Coe (2015), Agape epitomizes a transcendent form of affection, characterized by a selfless devotion to causes greater than one's personal interests. This love style, termed 'Agapeic,' is distinguished by its lack of expectation for reciprocal love. Individuals embodying Agapeic love exhibit emotional stability, devoid of physical preferences, and tend to be remarkably tolerant and supportive (Galinha et al., 2013). Within the Christian scriptures, the notion prevails that effective leadership necessitates the possession of intrinsic moral qualities, particularly altruism and Agape (Mulinge, 2018). In the organizational context, manifestations of Agape are observable through acts of compassion and unwavering dedication (Mulinge, 2018).

Ancient Greek philosophy further enriches our understanding of love by categorizing it into four distinct types: (a) Eros, denoting sensual or romantic love; (b) Storge, representing familial love; (c) Philia, signifying brotherly love; and (d) Agape, described as divine, pure, perfect, and self-sacrificing love (Flaceliere & Cleugh, 1962). Rollo May, an existential psychologist, expands on this conceptual framework by introducing the terms Libido and Manic, in addition to the pre-existing Eros, Philia, and Agape, to articulate specific facets of love. Notably, May's interpretation omits the concept of Storge as a distinct form of love. In his seminal work 'Love and Will' from 1969, May articulates five distinct types of love: (a) Libido, representing the biological dimension of love fulfilled through sexual expression; (b) Eros, a psychological desire oriented towards procreation; (c) Philia, denoting an intimate non-sexual friendship between two individuals; (d) Agape, expressing esteem for the other, characterized by genuine concern and welfare, transcending personal gain; and (e) Manic, portraying impulsive, emotionally-driven love (May, 1969).

AGAPE LEADERSHIP AND JESUS CHRIST

Jesus, the epitome of selflessness, directed His actions exclusively towards the betterment and well-being of the society He inhabited. His leadership was devoid of any personal agenda, as He tirelessly dedicated Himself to the alleviation of human suffering. His overarching motive and guiding principle can be encapsulated in the concept of Agape, the highest form of universal love, akin to altruism - an unselfish concern for the welfare of others (Mulinge, 2018). His entire existence was a testament to a life lived for others: He mended the infirm, extended unwavering empathy to the marginalized, and identified with the struggles of all within society, seeing their challenges as His own. In the realm of Jesus' leadership, any injustice perpetrated against one individual resonated as an affront to justice everywhere, a conviction rooted in the transformative power of Agape. His profound commitment to eradicating injustice was manifest in His tireless efforts to address and remedy societal ills. The hallmark of Jesus' leadership was not self-aggrandizement but a selfless dedication to fostering Agape, an altruistic and boundless love for humanity. In essence, Jesus' leadership transcends conventional paradigms, representing a sublime manifestation of Agape that serves as an enduring beacon of inspiration for those who seek a model of leadership rooted in compassion, altruism, and a profound commitment to the well-being of others.

Within the annals of leadership history, the guidance exemplified by Jesus emerges as an embodiment of Agape, a profound and selfless essence. The Holy Bible stands as a testament to the Agape leadership of Jesus, with the pinnacle of His selflessness revealed through the ultimate act of sacrificial love on the cross. His entire earthly journey unfolds as a testament to a life steeped in Agape, where love for God through obedience to the Father's will intertwines seamlessly with a deep and selfless love for humanity, expressed through acts of Agape service. At the core of Jesus's existence lies an unwavering commitment to meeting the needs of others, showcasing His selfless concern for the well-being of those around Him. Agape, characterized as unconditional and selfless love, finds its embodiment in the life of Jesus, as depicted in the New Testament of the Holy Bible.

The Apostle Paul, in a poignant chapter dedicated to love, delineates the qualities of true love. Love, according to Paul, is patient, kind, devoid of jealousy, arrogance, or rudeness. It does not insist on its own plans, and it remains unfazed by frustration or dissatisfaction. Love rejoices in truth and abhors injustice. It endures, believes, and hopes in all circumstances. Above all, love is everlasting, surpassing even faith and hope, with love reigning supreme (1 Cor. 13:4-8, 13). The biblical exhortation to live is intricately linked with the concept of love, loving every human being without the imposition of checks on deservedness or merit. It advocates for a selfless concern for the holistic well-being of others, echoing the sentiment that to live authentically is to love unconditionally. The scriptural wisdom further underscores that all actions should emanate from a foundation of love, as the mere presence of other virtues does not equate to the absence of love. The directive to 'do everything with love' (1 Cor. 16:14) encapsulates the essence of a life modelled after the Agape leadership exemplified by Jesus.

A leader guided by the principles of Agape must navigate their followers with a selfless concern, embodying an unconditional and sacrificial dimension for the well-being of others, even when faced with less-than-lovable followers. This commitment, according to the teachings of Jesus, reflects the essence of the second greatest commandment: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31). Notably, Jesus broadened the definition of 'neighbour' to encompass everyone, emphasizing that whoever is in need becomes one's neighbour. In illustrating this point, Jesus shared the parable of the good Samaritan, illustrating how a compassionate Samaritan extended love and aid to a beaten and half-dead stranger left by robbers. He encouraged His followers to emulate this Samaritan's example, demonstrating active compassion (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus further emphasized that the mark of true discipleship lies in the ability to love one another (John 13:35).

Agape leadership, therefore, is characterized by an unselfish nature and is a deliberate, creative choice rooted in sacrificial giving. Its primary focus is the comprehensive well-being of others, regardless of the perceived worthiness of the recipients. This form of leadership perseveres in loving others amid circumstances that may be deemed unlovable and responds to unkindness with unwavering love. Jesus stands as a quintessential inspiration for any leader aspiring to embody Agape leadership. In understanding the essence of Agape, it becomes evident that love is not merely an emotion but a deliberate and continuous choice. It finds meaning in acts of sacrificial giving, always prioritizing the welfare of others. This form of leadership does not dwell on the merit of the recipients but persists in extending love even in the face of unlovable responses. Jesus' teachings highlight the divine origin of love, asserting

that love emanates from God. Those capable of love are deemed to know God and are undoubtedly born from God. Conversely, individuals lacking the capacity for love are considered to be unfamiliar with God, as love is intrinsic to the nature of the divine. The ultimate revelation of God's love is epitomized by the sending of His only son for the sake of humanity, enabling them to live their lives in Him (1 John 4:7-9).

The essence of leadership, according to the teachings of Jesus, is fundamentally intertwined with the principle of love, as clearly elucidated in the Gospel of John. A poignant illustration of this concept transpired during a conversation between Jesus and his disciple, Simon Peter. After their meal, Jesus directed a probing question to Simon Peter, inquiring, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' Simon Peter earnestly responded, affirming his love for Jesus, to which Jesus, in turn, entrusted him with the directive, 'Feed my lambs' (John 21:15). This exchange did not conclude there, as Jesus posed the same question to Peter once again, emphasizing the significance of love. 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Jesus queried. Undeterred, Peter reiterated his love, prompting Jesus to entrust him with a greater responsibility: 'Tend my sheep' (John 21:16). The repetition of this inquiry, however, left Peter with a sense of remorse and distress. When Jesus, for the third time, asked, 'John's son Simon, do you love me?' Peter, feeling the weight of the question, responded with a solemn acknowledgment of his love for Jesus. In a profound and conclusive declaration, Jesus charged Peter, saying, 'Feed my sheep' (John 21:17). In this poignant exchange, Jesus not only reinforced the paramount importance of love in leadership but also underscored it as the central and indispensable quality that a leader must embody. The deliberate repetition of the question served as a powerful reminder to Peter and, by extension, to all leaders, that love is not only an emotion but a foundational principle upon which effective leadership is built.

Jesus, by commissioning Peter to care for His flock, highlighted the inseparable link between love and the responsibilities of a leader. This narrative serves as a timeless lesson, emphasizing that true leadership is grounded in love, a virtue that transcends personal ambitions and desires. It establishes a paradigm where leaders are not merely authoritative figures but compassionate shepherds, caring for the well-being and nurturing the growth of those under their guidance. The Gospel of John, through this profound dialogue, unequivocally asserts that love is the linchpin of authentic and transformative leadership.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus expounds on the profound nature of love. He declares that merely loving one's neighbour is insufficient, and harbouring animosity towards one's enemies is unjust. Instead, he advocates for praying for one's enemies, emphasizing that they too are children of the Heavenly Father. This divine Father, impartial even to the unjust, allows the sun to rise on both the good and the evil and provides rain to the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:43-46). This love, as elucidated by Jesus, transcends mere affection for those who reciprocate. He challenges the notion that loving only those who love you yields any meaningful reward, likening such behaviour to that of tax collectors. This type of love, according to Ferris (1988), involves a conscious choice, enabling individuals to perceive others with profound respect and a sense of oneness. It is characterized by acceptance without judgment, unconditional in nature, and epitomizes the love that Christ imparted (Ferris, 1988). Notably, the Gospels recount Jesus' actions, illustrating his commitment to doing good for others as he traversed various communities (Acts 10:38).

Jesus' leadership, as depicted in the scriptures, revolves around the well-being of people. Remarkably, he sought neither personal acclaim nor fame. Instances such as his healing of a leper underscore this selfless nature, as he instructs the healed individual not to publicize the miraculous event (Matthew 8:4). His entire life exemplifies the embodiment of Agape, a love that is evident even in his final moments on the cross. Despite being in the likeness of God, Jesus did not deem equality with God as something to be clung to. Instead, he humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant and being born in human likeness. In his earthly existence, he further humbled himself by obediently facing death, even the ignominious death on the cross (Philippians 2:6-8). The pinnacle of Jesus' Agape leadership finds its fullest expression in this profound passage from Philippians, highlighting the depth of his sacrificial love and humble servitude.

CONCLUSION

Leadership, a protracted and arduous journey, often finds the leader grappling with the temptation to abandon the pursuit of their targeted goals. It can be likened to a mirage, requiring persistent travel before the anticipated outcomes materialize. Jesus, as a leader embodying Agape, embarked on a journey with the purpose of fostering a better society that upholds individual dignity and freedom from both internal and external pressures. Despite encountering struggles, persecution, and ultimately facing death on the cross, Jesus, through his earthly existence, imparted a profound lesson to humanity - the meaning of life lies not in acquiring name or fame but in contributing selflessly to society. The leadership of Jesus was rooted in compassion, service, and, most importantly, the refined form of Agape. Selfless love, epitomized by Agape leadership, establishes a profound connection between the leader and their followers. This enduring bond is why Jesus's leadership remains an enduring icon of uniqueness. Agape, denoting a state of profound selflessness, underscores the idea that a truly effective leader is one willing to sacrifice personal interests for the greater good.

Leadership theories align with the notion that selflessness is a pivotal attribute of effective leadership. Jesus, however, transcends the conventional definition of a leader; he emerges as the illuminated conscience of God the Father, working towards the establishment of the kingdom of God. In the face of prevailing injustice, inequality, and selfishness, Jesus stands as a beacon, guiding humanity towards the paths of freedom, selflessness, and equality. His preached ideas found embodiment in his lived experiences. The Agape leadership exemplified by Jesus poses a challenge to contemporary leadership paradigms, where the allure of money, power, position, and fame often takes precedence. Leaders in the twenty-first century are urged to embrace the principles of Agape, dispelling the shadows of self-serving leadership and ushering humanity into the illuminating realm of leadership where selflessness is the guiding principle, ensuring the well-being of followers. Jesus's overarching aim was the establishment of the kingdom of God, a blissful state characterized by freedom, justice, equality, and peace within a fraternal framework. This divine vision, achievable only through the medium of selfless love, encapsulates the essence of Agape.

AUTHOR DECLARATION FORM

Here by the authors declare that the work titled 'Leadership Theories and Agape Leadership: An exploration through the life of Jesus Christ' is an original work, and it has not been published in any form prior to submitting with Community Practitioner Journal and the work has not been submitted elsewhere concurrently. The authors don't have any conflicts of interest and the corresponding author has the permission of co-author for submitting the work with Community Practitioner Journal.

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