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INTRODUCTION

In the Marcan gospel Jesus is presented as the authoritative one in that he exercises power and rule by virtue of his high position and relationship to God the Father.¹ More so, the most prominent editorial comment by Mark which speaks to the authority of Jesus is the first statement of the gospel which begins his entire work by identifying Jesus as the Son of God. This authoritative position is reinforced by the presentation of John the Baptist preparatory ministry as fulfilment of prophecy (1:1-3) and the announcement of John the Baptist in 1:4-8. Other signs of his divine authority include his connection with the Spirit in his baptism and his temptation as well as the voice from heaven at his baptism. Within the first few verses of the gospel there are approximately six elements which speak clearly to the divine authority of Jesus.

The authoritative one is the one who serves and the proof of that authority is in the service rendered on behalf of others. Hence, the authority of Jesus (in Mark's gospel) is demonstrated in the wonders he performs, in his call to disciples and in his conflict with religious leaders.² Through these scenes key elements are added to the characterization of Jesus and new dimensions are given to his work. This work is aimed at presenting Jesus as the leader per excellence and thus a model to all especially our leaders in Nigeria. This position is aptly captured by Murdock when he observed that Jesus was an action man, a people person. He produced. He healed. He preached and taught. He walked among the people.³

1 For further discussion see, N.F. Santos, "Slave of All: The Paradox of Authority and Servant hood in the Gospel of Mark", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series, ed. Stanley E. Porter, no. 237(New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003): 17.

2 See E.K. Broadhead, *Mark*, Second Edition (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009): 15.

3 M. Murdock, *The Leadership Secrets of Jesus* (Tulsa. OK. Honor Books, 1996): 28-29.

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MARK 1:21-28: NEW TEACHING WITH AUTHORITY

Mark's gospel has been described as a paradoxical gospel, a riddle that teases its readers' response, and a narrative that possesses an enigmatic and puzzling character.⁴ In this gospel, Jesus' first miracle as succinctly captured by Brown *et al* is significantly an exorcism, a sign that in his presence the power of evil is reduced to impotency.⁵ God's rule is at hand. This is evidently true in that Mark opens Jesus' public ministry in 1:21-28 by establishing his supremacy over the highest authorities in both the temporal and supernatural realms. The temporal realm is represented by the scribes whose erudition no less than their prestige among the people was legendary. The scribes stand in the tradition of the Fathers (7:8-13), however, whereas Jesus received his authority directly from the Father (1:11).⁶ The scribes derive their authority from the Torah but Jesus appeals to a superior authority resident in him. It is fitting to note that authority that is personal is not something that comes cheaply. It comes from experience, integrity, and maturity. Jesus had a personal authority like no other, because his person is and was like no other. The scribes only had borrowed authority. Jesus had inherent and innate authority. The scribes quoted scripture. Jesus spoke scripture and it was astonishing. His teaching was fresh and authoritative. We are not told what Jesus taught but Mark focuses on the reaction of the audience: "The people were astonished at the way he taught, for he spoke as one having authority and not like the teachers of the Law (1:22)."⁷ The people were astonished at his teaching. Mark, more than any other gospel writers, loves to emphasize the people's amazement at what Jesus said and did. Literally, the word astonished means 'to strike with panic or shock'. It means that his preaching struck them like a blow. It comes from something that is so incomprehensible that one's mind cannot fathom what has been experienced. These are not terms of faith. In Mark, miracles do not produce proper faith and the two Greek words that describe the people's reactions are *ekplessomai* (v.22) and *thambeo* (v.27).

While Jesus is preaching, a man with an unclean spirit is among them in the synagogue. The appearance of the possessed man in the synagogue provides an occasion for Jesus to display his

4 For detail, read the work of J.L. Bailey, "Perspective on the Gospel of Mark," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 12, (1985): 18-19.

5 R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, and R.E. Murphy, "The Gospel of Mark," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968): 26.

6 Cf. J.R. Edwards, "The Authority of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 37/2, (1994): 221.

7 All scriptural quotations unless otherwise stated are from *The New Community Bible*, Catholic Edition. The Bombay Saint Paul Society, (2008).

authority over demons. We see the unclean spirit cry out through this man: “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: You are the Holy One of God (v.24).” Notice the confession made by the unclean spirit. *First*, there is recognition of who he is. They know he is Jesus. *Secondly*, they confess that Jesus has power (authority) to destroy them. *Thirdly*, there is a confession that Jesus is the Holy One of God. The unclean spirit is a witness to the authority of Jesus. Edwards will claim that as supernatural powers themselves, the demons recognize the mission and authority of Jesus before humanity does (cf. 1:24; 3:11; 5:7)⁸ while Augustine of Hippo (354-430), remarked that “faith is mighty, but without love it profits nothing. The devils confessed Christ, but lacking charity it availed nothing. They said, ‘what have we to do with you (Mark 1:24)?’ They confessed a sort of faith, but without love. Hence they were devils.”⁹

Two things are distinct in this periscope, namely: New Teaching and Authority.

New Teaching: Mark does not tell us what Jesus taught as earlier observed. He was emphatically silent about it. This is because his focus is not so much on what Jesus had taught or said but rather on the method, that is, *how* he taught and verse 22 contrasts the teaching of Jesus with that of the “scribes”.¹⁰ The point Mark wants to buttress here is that Jesus taught with authority. Here, it can be noted and observed that:

- i. The people were *amazed* at his teaching. There was something about Jesus and his teaching that stood out to them.
- ii. There was something about Jesus when he taught that their usual teachers lacked and that was *authority*.
- iii. The people recognized that his message was *not* a second hand message but one that comes from the source. It is pure, natural and original.

This also demonstrates the *charisma* showed by Jesus in his words as affirmed by Yukl¹¹ who quoted Weber thus:

Charisma occurs during a social crisis, when a leader emerges with a radical vision that offers a solution to the crisis and

8 J.R. Edwards, “The Authority of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark,” 221.

9 Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on the Gospels* 1.8, (354-430).

10 Y.A. Collins, *Mark: Hermeneia- A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, edited by Harold W. Attridge (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 2007): 164.

11 G. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2010): 261.

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attracts followers who believe in the vision. The followers experience some successes that make the vision attainable, and they come to perceive the leader as extraordinary.

Authority: Collins believes that “the description of Jesus as one having authority recalls the scene related to his baptism (verses 9-11) in which he is endowed with the Holy Spirit and appointed Son of God, that is, messiah.”¹² The word for authority, *exousia*, is related to the verb *exesti*, meaning “it is free” or “it is permitted.” In other words, *exousia* is the “sovereign freedom” of one who acts without hindrance. Jesus’ teaching in sovereign freedom is contrasted with the teaching of the scribes.

In Jesus’ day, evil spirits were considered even by many Jewish teachers to be numerous and powerful. Hanging around everywhere and doing whatever they could to inflict trouble and suffering. Liefeld presents *seven* characteristics of demon possession. These include disregard for personal dignity in nakedness, demonic recognition of Jesus’ deity and extraordinary strength.¹³ More so, when someone seemed to be possessed of a demon, the exorcists whether Jewish or pagan used complicated magical rites and spells to compel the demon to leave. The power was in the magic, it was believed, so whoever knew the right incantations and ingredients and methods could use them to bring about the unseen conditions that would manipulate the spirit world. However, Jesus was astonishingly *different*. He simply ordered the demon to leave and it left. The people in the synagogue had never seen anything like it. It awed, surprised, and puzzled them. The response of the demon highlights the authority of Jesus. He correctly identifies him (‘The Holy One of God’ in 1:24), recognize his authority (notice how he begged and pleaded with him) and obeyed his commands. Jesus simply speaks and the demon has no choice or power to resist; he obeyed because he has no option. The contrast between the power the demon have over his host and the powerlessness he displayed at the authoritative words of Jesus is clearly demonstrated. The periscope concludes with the astonishment of all present with the following words: “*What is this? A new teaching and with authority*” (1:27). Those persons present in the synagogue where Jesus performs his first miracle recognize that his teachings will set him at odds with the scribes (v.22).¹⁴ Collins states that “the

12 Y.A. Collins, *Mark: Hermeneia- A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, 165.

13 L.W Liefeld, “Luke”, *The Expository Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, Edited by F.E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984): 797-1059.

14 E.L. Keck et al, *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Volume VII, The Gospels and Narrative Literature, Jesus and the Gospels*, Matthew, Mark (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2015): 393.

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acclamation of the crowd in verse 27 implies that the power exercised by Jesus over the demon legitimates his teaching. Both the authority to teach and the power to exorcise have a divine source.”¹⁵ Four realities are thus obvious in 1:21-28: (i) Jesus exhibit his authority through his teaching (vv.21-22); (ii) The demons recognized his authority (vv.23-24); (iii) Jesus exhibits his authority over the spiritual realm (vv.25-26); and (iv) The people recognized his authority (vv.27-28). The authority was different, not just by degree, but by substance.

THE NEED FOR AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

We cannot but say that leadership is *not* a prerogative of a privilege few as is the case in Nigeria today, nor is it the private reserve of a handful of charismatic men and women who are genetically endowed with some superman special power. Similarly, it is not about celebrity or wealth, and it is definitely not about being a hero or heroine. It is about good qualities like altruism, patriotism, moral uprightness, sense of historical mission, comprehension of developmental challenges and how to overcome them, courage, boldness and determination.¹⁶ More so, leadership is a set of skills and abilities that are accessible and learnable by anyone who has the motivation and desire to learn it. Leadership is the process through which one individual consistently exerts more influence than others in the pursuit of group behavior and that a leader is expected to have some qualities that make him/her exceptional.¹⁷ For Ologbenla, it is the quality of being good at leading a team, organization, or a country.¹⁸ Briner and Pritchard¹⁹ argue that:

Leadership is largely about authority-acquiring it, using it, and investing it in others ... Leadership is not about issuing orders. Leaders should attempt to replicate themselves, pulling followers along so that they can-act on their own to advance the cause.

15 Y.A. Collins, *Mark: Hermeneia- A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, 174.

16 E.E. Osaghae, “The Limits of Charismatic Authority and the Challenges of Leadership in Nigeria,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 28, No. 4, (2010): 407-422.

17 C. Okadigbo, *Power and Leadership in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Company Limited 1987).

18 K.D. Ologbenla, “Leadership, Governance and Corruption in Nigeria,” *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 9(3), (2007): 97-118.

19 A.R. Briner, & R. Pritchard, *The Leadership Lessons of Jesus: A Timeless Model for Today's Leader* (Nashville, TN Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997): 76-77.

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Mark's depiction of Jesus in the text of interest here is that of an authentic and effective leader. A leader in whom the scribes and Pharisees are disturbed by the challenge his teaching and activity pose to their traditions (cf. 2:16; 3:22; 7:5).²⁰ Not only can Jesus speak with authority, he can do the deed. This is what the Nigerian society needs today. Leaders who are dependable, credible, and reliable and can contribute effectively to the unity and development of the nation. Because Jesus follows his words with powerful actions, his authority is established. He is a healer and a game changer. He is one to be trusted, one who speaks and then acts in accordance with his words. He is unlike the leaders of the synagogue and the scribes who have plenty to say but little to do. In our country today, we badly need leaders who not only *speak* with authority but *behave* with conviction. This is because "lack of effective leadership in the country has contributed to lack of direction, unity and cohesion required for democratic sustenance and national development."²¹

Jesus is never worried about becoming unclean or sick by fraternizing with or touching the spiritually or physically or morally unclean. Indeed, he seems to have gone out of his way in some cases to minister to them. Not surprisingly this behavior offended those who were part of the holiness movement of that day... the Pharisees movement. The question Mark I raises for us (especially Nigerian leaders) is: Are we more concerned with public opinion and with not offending some people by being compassionate to society's outcasts, or are we more concerned with helping those in the greatest need in our society? The answer to this question in Jesus' case seems obvious from the very outset in Mark. Jesus did not particularly care whom he scandalized if he believed he was doing God's work and helping to bring in God's dominion. He was also more concerned with who got the cure than who got the credit. How different from the conception of power and authority in our politics!

JESUS' USE OF AUTHORITY: PROTOTYPE FOR NIGERIAN LEADERS

Authority and power in the first century, much like today were commodities to be used and abused for the purpose of self-benefit, self-preservation and/or self-promotion. Servanthood was for those without power or authority and was also the lot in life for those who had no other choice. The life and teaching of Jesus as exemplified in the above periscope, presents an *alternative* paradigm to these

20 S.E. Malbon, "The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Marcan Characterization," *JBL* 108, (1989): 259-81.

21 A.E. Okolo, & M.D. Abalogu, "An Investigation on the Illusionary of Nigeria Democratic Leadership and the Way Forward," 30.

structures. Jesus had all the authority in the world. Yet, he did not use his incomparable authority the way Nigerian leaders tend to use their little springs of authority. For many of them, authority becomes merely a means of enriching themselves, of getting their own way, of suppressing the truth and of getting and holding the power to keep doing those things. The Nigerian state is a victim of high level corruption, bad governance, political instability, and a cyclical legitimacy crisis²². Not so with Jesus. He has all the authority there is, yet he uses it entirely differently from the way many people would.

Note the *beneficiary* of the exorcism presented, a man silent and isolated. One without power, influence or status that might be of help to Jesus. He had nothing to offer him. His emotions, compassion and words in this periscope reveal Jesus' willingness to serve as a servant would and that he was free and willing to use his authority to serve those most in need of his help. *Three* things stand out in Jesus' action here which should serve as a model to Nigerian leaders. Namely:

- (a) He took action when necessary.
- (b) He did not overreact. He did not make a movie production out of making the demon leave.. He just made it go.
- (c) Jesus did not use the incident to further his image. He did not print up flyers and bill himself as the one who tossed out demons.

Edwards is of the view that Jesus' authority is shown here as one employed not "for his own self-benefit, but is always in service to others."²³ No doubt, he used his authority to serve and not to be served. This is how he wants authority to be used. Whatever it is, authority should be that of service as Jesus has demonstrated. Thus, he is a model for leaders in our contemporary society. Jesus did not have any power at all. He was not a worldly king with political or military power. He was not of the priests, who had power in Roman Judea. He was not even a scribe with the authority of Jewish tradition. The only authority he had was the supreme confidence that what he did and said was God's will and God's truth.²⁴

22 Cf. O. Fagbadebo, "Corruption, Governance and Political Instability in Nigeria," *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 1, (2007): 28-37.

23 R.J. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark: The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002): 5.

24 S. Hultgren, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary-id=218>. Retrieved on 20:02:2022

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Jesus' acting in authority brought blessings to people - health and healing (1:23-28). His authority possessed an irresistible power that drew people not through manipulation, but simply by the person that he was and the truth of his own existence and the gifts that he gave. This was not a claim to authority that was necessarily open to empirical verification in his own time. This style of authority is needed in Nigeria now more than ever before.

CONCLUSION

We live in a fast changing world and the only thing that is constant in this world is change. The old style of leadership as "command and control" is outdated and cannot work today. Any attempt today to exercise authority and power solely from a position or title is bound to fail. Moreover, position does not help much today to earn the respect and trust of the people.²⁵ We can earn respect and exercise authentic authority *only* when we establish credibility with people by demonstrating our intention to do the right thing (character), our knowledge as to how to do the right thing (competence) and our ability to inspire and mobilize (spiritual power).

Jones wrote that Jesus' focus while he was here on earth could be summed up by one word-- Education.²⁶ Mark 1:21-28 is education on the use of authority for credible and authentic leadership. In fact, Mark 1:21-28 uses an exorcism narrative to demonstrate the authority of Jesus' word (cf. v.27). Its focus remains the divine authority exercised by Jesus.²⁷ It also shows us a portrait of Jesus with actions which display his inherent power and authority as the Son of God. He gives us a Jesus who is confrontational yet gentle, enigmatic yet transparent, authoritative yet submissive. Mark shows us Jesus the powerful servant. His "new teaching and with authority" show his power and yet, one of the dominant themes of the gospel is that he came to serve. Indeed, he is the teacher empowered to challenge the boundaries separating humans from the full life of God's kingdom. Jesus is the teacher whose authority is demonstrated in his deeds and his teaching stirs controversy and opposition among some religious leaders.

The incident in 1:21-28, demonstrated Jesus' sovereign authority and power and is a model of service for all leaders to emulate, especially in Nigerian contemporary society. The reason for this is as a result of corruption that has infected the political system of the

25 M.R. Chennattu, "Towards a Covenant Model of Leadership: An Interpretation of John 13," *Jeevadhara* XLII/248, (2012): 133-45.

26 B.L. Jones, *Jesus CEO: Using Ancient Wisdom for Visionary Leadership* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 1995): 210.

27 H.R. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993):77-78.

country, most especially through the political leaders. Furthermore, the leadership presented in our text challenges all leaders to lead by example and by the power and wisdom of God's abiding word. Jesus as we have seen repudiates any form of authority that treats others as subjects.

Leadership should be collaborative. Collaborative or participatory leadership calls forth the vision and gift of others. People are blessings and gifts of God rather than functionaries and commodities to be used. Hence, all are partners in mission and no one is seen as a threat. The result is a community of *equals* where all contribute their different but non-competing abilities and talents. Leadership entails providing vision and direction for the achievement of the goals of God's reign. Leaders are called to equip and empower others to be at the service of God's project. The model of leadership presented by Mark 1:21-28 shows that authority is not for domination but for mutual service in love unto death. It is characterized by quality service, participation and fair treatment, transparency and accountability.

Martyr. History is selective about the memories it cherishes. Generations of young Catholic Irish people today are familiar with the story of the martyrdom of St. Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh, who was executed at Tyburn in 1681. Yet in many ways his was the end of a much longer story, for he was the last Irish Bishop to die for his faith during more than a century of violent religious repression. The first was Patrick O'Healy, Bishop of Mayo.

- MARY MCALEESE, *The 17 Irish Martyrs*, (Dublin: Columba Press, 2022), p. 20.