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The identification of misplaced moral ingredients that obscure sustainable leadership

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This article endeavours to liberate the concept of 'morality' and debrief the term 'sustainability' by exploring the fundamental moral questions that relate to leadership based on ethical living connected with self, others, nature and the environment. It investigates sustainability that cultivates leadership and undergirds the social, economic, political and moral subsistence of humanity. It explores the dire deficiencies of moral ingredients that have infiltrated all kinds of leadership that consequently restrain social transformation. The decay of unethical leadership that resulted in the unsustainability of regular life requires investigation because both morality and sustainability need liberation, to be 'unfrozen' from their 'static' or inoperative states so as to become once again positively functional in the practice of leadership. While ethics and morality focus on building correct relationships that uphold honourable living, it is also defined by an affiliation with a divine component that nourishes our collective well-being on earth. Entrenched moral assumptions that make it impossible to move morality forward are challenged so as to discharge our principled obligations to humans and the planet alike. The overarching aim is to formulate an ethical theory that defines a set of moral qualities that are exclusively aimed at sustaining the intrinsic worth of all, promoted by both individual and corporate leadership, that embraces reasonableness, independence, integrity, productiveness and justice.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article is housed in the discipline of Christian Leadership with theological ethics, moral theology and gospel values that interrogate the emasculation of sustainable leadership.

Keywords: leadership; sustainability; ethics; morality; unethical.

Introduction

The intention of this article is to reveal the importance of moral values and ethical behaviour related to both sustainability and leadership. The aim is to enable a more integrative understanding of leadership assigned to sustainability and vice versa. The central goal is to critically examine the three notions, namely sustainability, leadership and morality or ethics with particular focus on their interconnectedness. The article works from the belief that the concepts of ethics and morality have stagnated and hence progress in sustainability and sustainable leadership is impeded. The only way forward is to liberate ethics and morality from stagnation so as to bolster both sustainability and leadership. As sustainability holds different meanings for different settings and is constantly in flux, the article offers suggestions to allow it to break clear from iteration so that it can become productive and manageable. Directives are offered for sustainability and leadership to become disentangled from the debate between what is ethical and unethical behaviour so that sustainable leadership can be evaluated by means of credible guidelines.

The article deals with the stance that all leadership should embrace a new virtue harmony that re-visions the notion of human prosperity, which is purposefully situated within the integrity of the natural environment. In conclusion, the article endeavours to show what possible effects a virtue ethical approach could have on sustainability, for both sustainable learning and moral formation.

Sustainability and sustainable leadership

Sustainability appears to hold different meanings for different settings because it does not embody a comprehensive or universal definition that enfolds all scenarios. The various meanings of sustainability are constantly in flux, continuously redefined and are forever emerging to appropriate

different situations. The connection of sustainability to leadership is an emerging trend as sustainability was predominantly connected to the environment, ecology or the planet. Sustainable leadership as a leadership theory is relatively recent among the other leadership theories or styles.

The Sustainability Leadership Institute (2011) defines sustainability as the 'ability and capacity to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED 1987:8). Olivier (2012) 'described sustainability as one of the main contemporary social, economic and ecological challenges of the type of ethical leader in line with what Aristotle called the 'good man' (person), who seeks the welfare of his subjects because he is burdened with the pursuit of justice, in order to protect the common well-being of the community (Peterlin, Pearse & Dimovski 2015). The Institute for Sustainable Leadership (2015) also:

> [D]efines sustainable leadership in a business environment as those behaviours, practices and systems that create enduring value for all stakeholders of organizations, including investors, the environment, other species, future generations and the community. (p. 279)

Gurr (2007) is of the view that sustainable leadership is not yet 'at the level of a mature theoretical concept', but it has, nevertheless, reached the stage of being introduced into a big theory. Until recently, sustainability and sustainable leadership were predominantly linked to environmental and business definitions, to enduring prosperity and survivability. It has, however, increased its coverage to other areas of influence and concern. Working according to the terms of Reichers and Scheider's (1990) three-stage model of concept development Gurr (2007) affirms that sustainable leadership is at the introduction stage of leadership.

Upcoming sustainable leadership finds itself among various other leadership theories, styles and approaches such as servant leadership and transformational leadership. Like all leadership approaches sustainable leadership shares many attributes with other leadership styles while also possessing its own distinctive elements. There is also much talk about leadership styles such as autocratic leadership, democratic, visionary with coaching skill, charismatic, bureaucratic and authentic among others (Emily, Akujah & Okanga 2019:1). However, sustainable leadership is not necessarily a style of leadership. What is distinctive about sustainable leadership is that it is vested in ethical mores because it is required to deal with problems and challenges that are often unethical and immoral. The apparent concerns that sustainable leadership have to deal with are often related to climate change, widespread poverty, corruption, social injustice and even political systems. Leaders that deal with these issues came to be known as sustainable ethical leaders (Emily et al. 2019:4) and sustainable ethical leaders focus on big matters that promote the common good. They deal with multiple interconnected problems to create a sustainable environment and futures for all (Buckler & Creech 2014). These leaders

need to have a holistic 'leadership' approach, whereby they do long-term planning for long-term prosperity and survivability that is in turn sustainable.

Only by contrasting sustainable leadership with other forms of *leadership* (*approaches*) does it become noticeable what precisely sustainable leadership embraces and by highlighting the characteristics thereof that it becomes possible to define sustainable leadership with a little bit more exactness. Sustainable leadership shares numerous features with transformational leadership such as the keenness to understand the whole, to create a sense of meaning that facilitates the commitment of stakeholders by focusing on the intellectual stimulation of participants and motivates by inspiring action that provides personalised management of colleagues (Aviolio, Bass & Jung 1999; Bass et al. 2003). A specific trait of transformational leadership is that it focuses more on personal charisma and on influencing followers (House, Spangler & Woycke 1991), whereas sustainable leadership focuses on 'nurturing future generations' potential for a dignified existence'. Sustainable leadership promotes long-term goals such as sustainable lifestyles, while servant leadership, according to Avery and Bergsteiner (2011), focuses more on the needs of others than on the leader's needs. Sustainable leadership is 'distinctive from servant leadership in the sense that it focuses on the future needs of many stakeholders, and not only the present needs of current followers' (Avery & Bergsteiner 2011).

While all leadership styles and approaches should practice strong moral standards, sustainable leadership is in fact based primarily on the notion of ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño 2006). In this regard, Brown and Treviño (2006) say it 'extends its area of application' by professing that its approach is ethical (or moral), in the sense that it takes into account the needs of a wider range of stakeholders, which include the generations to come as well as the conditions of the earth's natural environmental conditions (Peterlin et al. 2015:279). In comparison, therefore, to other leadership theories, 'sustainable leadership is distinguished by pursuing the value of sustainability at the individual, organizational, social and ecological level for both current and future generations' (Olivier 2012). The behaviour of virtuous leaders no doubt impact leadership sustainability and related ethical concerns such as environmental sustainability, economic rationality, ethical reasoning and social sustainability. All the same, behavioural patterns are not univocally consistent with leaders' interests, preferences or attitudes.

On the reverse side, unsustainable leadership is one that has become iterative meaning that it becomes repetitive and hence very difficult to opt out of the cyclical process. In this sense it is unmanageable and drives all prospects for sustainability to below ground level where social, political and cultural transformation has become immobilised and all the likelihoods of subsistence impeded. It is clear that leaders who abide by poor ethical and moral values will find it very difficult and even impossible to seriously deal with current problems and

challenges that confront them on a daily basis. They lack the moral courage or strength to do so. If sustainable leadership prides itself as a predominantly ethical style of leadership, it is important to look at how ethics or morality features in today's leadership environment because many people interrogate the operative validity of ethics or morals in the present leadership environment. The question is, 'what is a solid foundation for morality that enables sustainable leadership?' This question needs an answer for the credibility of sustainable leadership.

The incessant dispute over what is ethical and what is unethical leadership

As sustainable leadership prides itself as a virtuous and moral leadership and is concerned primarily with the greater good of humanity, one of its primary tasks is to expose and address unethical and unsustainable leadership wherever it occurs. Some scholars, according to Hassan et al. (2022:2), consider 'unethical leadership as the flipside of ethical leadership and equate the absence of exemplary leader behaviours with the presence of unethical leadership'. Others such as Gan et al. (2019) challenge this view stating that 'a quantitative distinction between unethical and ethical leadership styles requires separate lines of academic inquiry'. This notion is encapsulated by Ünal, Warren and Chen (2012) who assert that a single occurrence of a dysfunctional leader's conduct does not necessarily 'amount to unethical leadership'.

Regardless of the fact that unethical leadership is toxic irrespective as to where it is practiced, it remains the least researched concept among its academic spin-offs. The crystallisation of the conceptual underpinnings of unethical leadership suffers from widespread academic discourse; hence, the continuous debate over the distinction between what comprises ethical and unethical leadership remains unhelpful. In fact, it has distorted the conceptual foundations of both concepts.

However, in the effort to conceptualise 'unethical' leadership Brown and Mitchell (2010) depict it as 'behaviours conducted and decisions made by organisational leaders that are illegal and violate moral standards and those that impose processes and structures that promote unethical conduct by followers'. Despite the attempt to grasp unethical leadership the argument still remains that while destructive leadership comes in a myriad of behaviour descriptions, it does not clarify the concept of unethical leadership as a distinct concept. There exists no agreement that ill behavioural practices are often described as unethical and the violation of human rights is hardly ever described as unethical. For this reason, the need to re-examine the concept of 'unethical leadership' remains so as to facilitate a robust understanding of 'unethical leadership' as a distinct concept.

According to Resick et al. (2011), the drawback of the definition of Brown and Mitchell lies in its inability to clearly identify which behaviours can be regarded as unethical or immoral.

This specific argument is based on the belief that morality is a 'diverse and culturally ingrained phenomenon' hence there is no agreement on the moralities to determine whether the behaviour is ethical or not. For this reason, the manifestations of unethical behaviours are so diverse that it 'renders unethical leadership a relative concept'. This ethical red herring impacts the sustainability of ethical leadership. In fact, it undermines the practice of sound and honest leadership.

The comparative research of cross-cultural and cross-sectorial similarities in unethical leadership, perceptions by Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014) highlights, the 'interplay of compliance-oriented and value-oriented perspectives' within the area of unethical leadership. They identified certain behaviour practices such as 'dishonesty, unfair treatment, irresponsible behaviour, non-adherence to rules, laws and regulations, engagement in corruption' together with other criminal activities, as well as 'egocentric, manipulative tendencies and a lack of empathy towards followers as the common manifestation of unethical behaviour'. These patterns of unethical behaviour, which were revealed by the research of Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2014), can commonly be identified as the practices that render any chances of sustainable leadership ineffective (Hassan et al. 2022:4).

The search for clarification of what unethical leadership is and not just the opposite of ethical leadership, requires looking at unethical leadership as a concept on its own so as to provide independent understanding of sustainable leadership.

Leadership fragility requires the unfreezing of ethics and morality

It is very apparent that leadership in the present-day context is positioned in a very fragile position when it comes to morality and ethics. To define morally acceptable leadership today remains a challenging task. For this reason, Ben Bayer, the author of the article: *Why scientific progress in ethics is frozen* (2021) questions why humanity has made so little progress in philosophy, especially in the areas of ethics or morality. He underscores that any field of learning advances when thinkers make new discoveries and by so doing expand the frontiers of knowledge. He claims that this is not the case concerning ethics and morality hence the description that ethics are frozen or unchanging.

From history, we know that major figures such as Galileo, Newton, Einstein and others made significant breakthroughs in the physical sciences and by so doing they pushed human knowledge forward in leaps and bounds. Since the fifth century BC philosophers, such as Socrates, have raised and analysed big questions about what is right and wrong. It appears, however, that current deliberations look more like centuries-old debating societies, rather than modern explorers who open up new landscapes of knowledge in morality and ethics especially in view of leadership. Ben Bayer (2021) claims that one of the major reasons for this lack

of progress in ethics or morality is that many thinkers lack the ability to agree on how moral questions are to be answered, least of all to resolve them. Today, questions about right and wrong are often thought of as a matter of personal and private opinion. As ethics or morality is perceived as a subjective attitude or appraisal, it therefore rests on grounds that are insufficient to produce complete and common belief, hence it lacks collective credence.

Bayer's (2021) discussion on what the best method is to learn morality states that the 'idea that there are objective facts that could help to scientifically determine the best way to live our lives strikes many as outlandish'. He, however, argues that if there are no 'new moral truths to discover', then clearly there cannot be 'progress in our knowledge' of moral or ethical applications. If this is the case, what can we offer leadership and sustainability to move forward, to advance and thus be relevant to our times, especially in the areas of leadership. This static state and lack of advancement in moral knowledge do not have the capacity to make headway in the field of sustainable leadership.

As pointed out by Bayer (2021) there are, however, new outstanding and foremost public academics that have come forward and who advocate that moral questions can be answered by using scientific methods. To verify his views, Ben Bayer (2021) cites thinkers such as Sam Harris, Steven Pinker and Michael Shermer who in turn have published present-day books that endeavour to lay the foundations of a scientific morality. Despite their efforts, it cannot be said that they made major contributions to the field. To this end, Ben Bayer (2021) states that to make a 'scientific breakthrough requires the bravery to seek out new truths, untrammelled by prejudice, convention, or preconception'. For progress to take place new questions ought to be asked and the readiness to do so could imply that hitherto wrong questions were posed. Bayer (2021) points out that while Harris, Pinker and Shermer 'deserve credit for pointing out' that scientific approaches may have the ability to 'make progress in ethics', they have not been innovative enough, because their efforts remain stuck because they continue to display the 'marks of serious conventional assumptions' regarding the type of questions ethics ought to ask and answer in the effort to remain relevant with the pulse on current moral issues. The overarching question is: *Does morality sustain leadership morals*? Especially in the context of immoral and unsustainable leadership?

There are some pertinent questions concerning morality and leadership. What is morality in contemporary times? How does real scientific progress in morality reveal any glimpse of progress? What are the questions that ought to be asked to take morality forward and to provide moral guidance, moral relevance and moral capacity to leaders in all spheres of life? Does 'humanistic' morality[1] and 'scientific morality'[2] sustain

leadership morality? Does morality today still remain a matter of what is right and wrong? What is a solid foundation for morality that enables sustainable leadership? Is there a difference between what is moral and what is proper behaviour; what is true and what is untrue; what is honest and what is dishonest? Does morality involve how we think, feel and act towards other moral agents? Does moral and immoral behaviour still involve social morality? Has morality as a living concept become stagnant and thus no progress is made in exercising good leadership or producing good ethical leaders.

It is clear that progress in scientific moral progression depends on new questions and better answers to contemporary ethical situations. To address contemporary ethical questions, it is also imperative to strive for a constant up-to-date understanding of the fundamental issues that give rise to pervasive contemporary ethical questions. It implies that if any progress in ethics is to be made it is necessary that the notion of morality needs unfreezing in order for it to flourish in significance and meaning. For this development to materialise scientific courage is required. This links in with sustainability and how is sustainability sustained by and strengthened by morality?

The dire deficiency of moral ingredients promotes unsustainable leadership

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary (2019), ethics is described as 'moral principles that govern a person's behaviour' or the subject that teaches ethics generally informs the student what is morally right or wrong. Events around the globe have confirmed to us that leadership today is catastrophic simply because of the serious deficiency of moral ingredients or moral capacity by which leaders operate. Vandana Shiva (2005), the world-renowned environmentalist, activist and physicist, is of the opinion that leadership that suffers from moral deficiency is unsustainable because it creates exclusions based on violence; it is profit driven for a few, which in turn creates cultures of dispossession and scarcity. Shiva's sustainable leadership rhetoric is largely connected to the survivability of the earth and humanity, but the sustainability element of leadership applies to leaders across the board and in every dimension of reality. It is not limited to the environment, but it does form the foundation thereof. Without morals and values leadership is fragile, untenable and hence unsustainable.

Leadership deprived of moral values robs people and the earth of natural resources and in the words of Shiva (2005) they deprive people of their 'rightful share of ecological, cultural, economic and political space'. She states that Earth Democracy requires sustainable leadership and sustainable leadership requires moral integrity, honesty and the values of caring and sharing by creating meaningful livelihoods (Shiva 2005:5). Considering the context into which Shiva was talking she simply declared that leaders today rule us with

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1.Humanist morality is focused on humans and they are of the opinion that religion or any supernatural ideas do not form a requirement of good moral living and values.

2.Scientific morality seeks the best ways to motivate and shape individuals by teaching them how to explicit virtues, building strong characters and forming mental associations, accompanied by practical reasoning.

stupidity and our greatest challenge is against stupidity. She says the morals we need today are values of knowledge, knowledge of nature – of how to share and how to care – values of caring and sharing. Shiva says we should not be afraid of corruption, deceitfulness, dishonesty as well as the brute power of leaders. To remain afraid is to keep us imprisoned, not to be afraid is true freedom. Jacinta Ardern in a BBC interview (23 April 2022) also stated that political leaders are in need of a new range of leadership traits to be modelled and that the portrayal of moral values such as kindness and gratitude should not be perceived as leadership weaknesses. Moral decisions impact people and leadership roles where people can truly be themselves.

Sustainable leadership calls for the radical shift in the moral values that govern all systems and in particular political systems so as to counter the unrestricted political power of autocratic and so-called democratic leaders that destroy environments and livelihoods, need identification and naming have become imperative. Some of those values are inclusion, non-violence, sharing the resources of the earth and caring for the earth. This says Vandana Shiva (2005:1) can be learnt from the Earth Democracy 'in both an ancient worldview and an emergent political movement for peace, justice and sustainability'. She states that 'Earth Democracy connects the particular to the universe, the diverse to the common and the local to the global' (Shiva 2005:1). Shiva continues stating that Earth Democracy '…is the awareness of these connections and of the rights and responsibilities that flow from them'. Immoral leaders lead to the unsustainability of the Earth because they view the earth as private property.

Vandana Shiva (2005:5) describes ecological security as people's most basic security and in her view 'ecological identities are the most fundamental identity'. Shiva (2005:5) says: 'we are the food we eat, the water we drink, the air that we breathe'. She believes that it is essential to reclaim democratic control over our food and water and our ecological survival, because only then do we participate in the project of our personal freedom. Shiva stated that living democracy offers humans the space for 'repossessing our fundamental freedoms, defending our basic rights, exercising our common responsibilities and duties to protect the earth, defend peace and promote justice' (Shiva 2005:5). Sustainability and sustainable living is related to 'resource management' and sustainable leadership is meant to do just that, however, unsustainable leadership does not possess the ethic of caring and sharing. Leadership that is connected to power is bent on destroying and exploiting. Going to war and killing is considered important by unethical, unsustainable leadership.

Economic dictatorship is related to political dictatorship and so is toxic religious fundamentalism and right wing extremism. Earth democracies not only facilitate human beings to envision but also create living democracies and Shiva says 'living democracies are based on the intrinsic worth of all species, all peoples and all cultures'. This she claims amounts to a 'just and equal sharing of the earth's vital resources and sharing the

decisions about the use of the earth's resources' (Shiva 2005:6). Earth democracy globalises compassion, justice and sustainability. Moral ingredients amount to integrity, honesty, and making ethical decisions based on moral values.

Sustainable leadership requires directives to build ethical stamina

According to Marek (2015:29), there appears to be no universal method of guiding people to become leaders that separates leaders with *motivation* from those with *a vocation* (a calling to lead). Marek states that the difference between the two types of leaders is that the leaders with motives (intentions and/or reasons) think that they are the rightful owners of material possessions such as monetary wealth, possessing companies, control relationships with people and hold social ranks and positions, whereas the leaders with a vocation believe that what they possess come as a gift from God, who is the Creator of all and everything depends on God's will. These two approaches to leadership create mind-sets that inculcate the disposition whereby leadership is considered and executed.

The Roman Catholic Church is renowned for its social teachings and is it is often referred to as the Church's best kept secret. Marek (2015) uses this teaching as her source to explore the basis of sustainable leadership. The central value of the Church's social teaching is the common good, the collective good of all of humanity. Marek is of the view that the Catholic social teaching can serve as a source of inspiration for those who are called to leadership that sustains. Sustainable leadership and leadership that sustain the common good of all always seek the will of God as inspiration. For this reason, sustainable leadership is based on the internalisation of important values and in this regard the Catholic social teaching identify 'respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, justice the subsidiarity principle and cooperation' so as to create the common goal (Marek 2015:31). The most important values for leadership, regardless of its nature, be it religious leadership, educational leadership, social leadership, political and economic leadership would be these above-mentioned values.

Roman Catholic social teachings encourage those in leadership to be mindful of the value of human beings and the common good with direct connection and protection of the person's human rights, human dignity and the well-being of the human person rather than production and capital. The emphasis on economic development and production should be secondary to human worth. Human knowledge and competencies should be used for the benefit of human beings and not for the benefit of the individual who is in leadership. According to Pope John Paul's *Laborem exercens* the fundamental human right, that is, the right to 'life is inseparably linked with personal dignity and both are incomparable to other goods and values'. For this reason a leader 'should create conditions in which human life will not be endangered' and as John Paul II says: human dignity should not, at any time, be endangered (John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, no 9:33).

According to Roman Catholic teaching 'God is in the centre of Catholic leaders' life, work, decisions and actions, because they are aware that the work is completed not only for earthly progress, but also for the development' of God's Kingdom, therefore they combine performing duties with prayer (cf. John Paul II 1981:98–99). This forms the foundational tenets of sustainable leadership. Based on the parable in Matthew 25:14, the significance of perceiving management as a kind of a loan (as Biblical talents) which were entrusted to God's servants and which should be given back with interest, is to realise that leadership is a gift with responsibility. The listed rules that are realised by servant leadership can be appropriated by sustainable leadership. The concept of working in the field of management originates from Christ's speech: 'whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant' (Mt 20:27) (Marek 2015:27–28). The role of leaders, if realised in agreement with God's Word, is to feel responsible for their realisation and accountability towards those whom they serve.

According to Marek (2015:30), if leadership contemplates the social teachings of the Catholic Church and considers the essential values such as: respect for the individual's 'personal dignity and vested rights; primacy of work in relation to capital; the subsidiarity principle; and the common good' then sustainable leadership is well grounded. What is more says Marek (2015:30), 'work should be treated as a way which leads to salvation and is participation in the act of creating the world'. For this reason, Catholic leaders are urged to perceive their vocation as leaders with a deeper spiritual calling and not only as a means to make profits or gains. These learnings can support sustainable leadership, which should not allow financial gain to be the main precedence.

Misplaced moral ingredients that obscure sustainable leadership and sustainable transformation in South Africa

There is no doubt that South Africa has experienced what Duke (2020) calls 'a dearth of effective leadership', accompanied with 'daily reports of unethical behaviour in the media'. The results of the lack of sustainable leadership in South Africa are evident in the daily deteriorated conditions the citizens are lumbered with. As a result of corruption and material greed of unsustainable leadership: 'productivity is low, the economy has deteriorated, unemployment is higher than ever', mining industry has shrunk significantly and 'South Africans are finding themselves becoming more polarized as a society' (Duke 2020). The obvious ethical and moral decay, in conjunction with a global environment that is evolving very rapidly, had caused many South African leaders, especially political leaders, to fall prey to 'money laundering, bribery, fraud and corruption, often involving high-profile companies and prominent political or business leaders' (Duke 2020). South Africans are victims of the consequences of the morally depraved and inefficient leaders, aggravated by an 'increasingly turbulent global environment and international divestment' which consequently have made 'the legislative and socio-economic environment' very complex and the morale of the country very low (Duke 2020).

As it is the proposed application of this article to academically excavate the unethical ingredients that demoralise any form of sustainable leadership and essential transformation in South Africa, it is clear that the efforts to rescue South Africa from iterative unsustainable leadership and lack of transformation, to salvage whatever little sustainability is left for survival have gone far beyond investing in the formation of morally principled leadership. It has come to the point of identifying and unearthing the misplaced moral ingredients that shroud sustainable leadership and sustainable transformation. The deplorable situation in South Africa has made it very apparent that moral virtues are indispensable to sustainable leadership in all spheres of life be it in politics with government leadership, in society with social leadership, in enterprise with business leadership, in education with professional leadership or in religion with clerical leadership. Sadly, South African leaders in all these spheres and more have marred any form of transformation; their lack of ethical performances have tarnished and harmed the entire society and every single government department.

It is a known fact that sustainable leadership systems know how to take care of their stakeholders and the holistic upkeep of persons in leadership, and how to establish a climate where ethical leadership can thrive. Corruption, violence, exploitation, dishonesty, poverty and injustices are among the forces that render sustainable leadership valueless. In the words of Duke (2020), who states that 'morals, ethics, and leadership are explained in support of a call for higher levels of ethical awareness, and more ethical living'. Dishonesty, material greed and corruption have become the downfall of South African leadership, especially political leadership and society as a whole. It is very apparent that South African leaders are not sustained by ethical conduct, their unethical behaviour does not 'ensure that they can work and live in an environment where they are inspired by one another and respected' by those they are meant to lead (Duke 2020). This includes the entire South African society, which has become demoralised to the point that there exist no awareness of ethical behaviour and the differences between right and wrong have become completely blurred. An ethical level of civilisation will become possible only as told by Duke (2020) 'if each and every *person* actively promotes ethical awareness and ethical behaviour, by making ethics real and visible to all stakeholders, individually and commonly, internally and externally'.

Reversing the reckless movement of moral decay in leadership

As presented by Duke (2020) with the current situation in South Africa, the population are facing serious political and economic uncertainty as well as precarious living conditions caused by unsustainable leadership. This serves as a dire constraint towards political and social transformation in the country. He recommends that people at all levels of society

should take matters in hand to influence and educate those around them to make better choices and to do what is right, and the chances of this actually happening would be considerably better if there were higher levels of ethical awareness prevalent among the general public in South Africa. He states that: 'morals are principles upon which our judgements regarding right and wrong are mostly shaped by our social, cultural, or religious beliefs' (Duke 2020). It is known fact that our personal notions of right and wrong are often inherited and accepted without question and 'subject to diversity, ethics are however more practical than morals' (Duke 2020). They are a set of values and principles of conduct that tell us how to behave or act in a social system, in the workplace, in organisations or in professional settings. While they are mostly consistent in the same context, they can vary depending on the social system to which they apply (Duke 2020).

The advantages of sustainable leadership are, among many, that it benefits everyone and not just a few at the expense of the many. It is sensitive to the needs of all and hence functions with interconnectivity. Sustainability and sustainable leadership are inextricably tied up with issues of social justice (Hargreaves & Fink 2004:17) in the sense that it does not cause unnecessary hardships to people because of immoral practices. In contrast sustainable leadership is positive because it develops rather than depletes human and material resources; it advances environmental diversity and capacity and engages actively with the environment. Hargreaves and Fink (2004:8) state that those who endorse sustainability advance and nurture a holistic environment that creates a capacity to facilitate constant progress on a broad front. Sustainable leadership recognises and cultivates many kinds of excellence and thus counteracts that which is harmful and destructive to people and the environment.

Sustainable leaders in need of divine inspirational values

Fry (2003) proposes 'spiritual leadership as a predictor of ethical and spiritual well-being as well as corporate social responsibility'. This calls for a living spirituality and to distinguish between what is religion and spirituality. Religion and religious practices as an ideology can be most vicious and destructive, and thus can produce unsustainable leadership and living. Ethics and value-based leadership call on Christian leaders to 'get in touch with their core gospel beliefs and communicate them to followers through vision and personal actions' so as to create a sense of spiritual subsistence through vocation and membership (Fry 2003). According to Fry (2003), spiritually instilled leadership is generally inclusive of other major extant motivation-based theories of leadership; it is also more conceptually distinct and less academically confounded. He continues by stating that leadership that is imbued by spiritual values is all-encompassing of the religious, moral and value-based approaches to governance.

Delbecq (2008:486) is also convinced that inner spiritual growth is of importance for leaders when they are in service of those entrusted to them. He claims that the enriching

aspect of the spiritual dimension of leadership is there to prevent the leader go astray. When spiritual intelligence and moral maturity accompany the sustainability of leadership the ethical dimension of that leadership will remain an indispensable support factor.

This article therefore presents the gospel values as the divine component that would inspire a leader (and in particular a Christian leader) to sustain his or her leadership practices. For spiritual sustainability, leaders who are Christians may follow the directives of Jesus Christ, while being influenced by the work of the Holy Spirit and achieving the Father's purposes. In this way, sustainable Christian leadership is wider than just being leaders within a Christian context or community (Malphurs 2003:14).

When Christian leaders in particular embrace gospel values they are equipped to equalise and to align all people by eradicating oppression, domination and hardship. As put by Ncube (2010:77) a critical function of sustainable leaders is that they facilitate transformation and they remove injustices and negative societal attitudes. This enables them to bring their subjects along to become actively involved in the process of development and transformation. It is a proven fact that leadership without an ethic of spirituality easily becomes victim to altercations, violence, persecutions, malfunctions and corruptions. Leadership that is committed to and live by Gospel values equip themselves morally to resist the traps of corruption and evil practices. As echoed by Koesterbaum (2002:xii) to embrace responsibility and free will wisely as prime values facilitates in putting integrity back into leadership.

Koesterbaum (2002:8) advocates that to take up the task of leadership implies 'understanding the consequence of one's action or inaction'. To lead therefore, is to serve and the leader will have to draw on personal inner strength and the innovative power of freedom and this often implies that the leader has to compromise by changing how she or he thinks and acts at will. The leader may have to be prepared to render emotional support and spiritual connections (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee 2013:5). Sustainable leaders often require resonance as a quality to draw the best out of their followers, but when leaders drive the adverse and unethical they spawn dissonance. Kouzes and Posner (2010:xxxii) are of the opinion that authentic leaders lead with the heart as well as with the head. Sustainable leaders are positive in attitude and make co-workers feel valued and they also energise those in leadership with them to give as much to others and are faithful to the integrity of the mission and vision they spiritually observe.

Conclusion

Astute leaders whose mind-set and heart-set are informed by the notion of sustainability realise the value of morality and ethics and that sustainable leadership is nurtured by principled and holistic living that is interrelated with self, others and the environment. Sustainable leadership is a

vocation, a calling; it is not informed by the motivation factor for self-gain. It is completely other-centred. Moral deficiencies undermine sustainable leadership and provide many pitfalls and restrain the potential for transformation and growth. As argued here because of the iterative nature of both morality and sustainability, both notions are in need of revitalisation so as to become positively functional. Sustainable leadership is not a self-reliant gift, but requires the support of a principled life style imbued by a divine component that nourishes collective well-being. Sustainable leadership is maintained by strong ethical components, which guide leaders into well rounded and altruistic service. It involves commitment and spiritual strength, which embrace all forms of leadership that engender a morally sustainable environment for holistic living, especially for countries such as South Africa where leaders have become morally unconscious. Further research needs to focus on how to restore and promote into action ethical and moral observances that cultivate sustainable leadership practices.

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