

Clouds Without Water

The “superstar syndrome” seduces leaders to become arrogant and greedy.

Pastor Henry Madava has experienced the power of God firsthand. Once when he was leading an evangelistic meeting in Pakistan he prayed for a boy’s clubbed foot and watched it become normal in an instant. The child’s Muslim parents saw the miracle and immediately decided to become Christians.

Seven people in Madava’s 6,500-member Victory Christian Church in Kiev, Ukraine, have been raised from the dead. Every Sunday dozens of people are healed at the altar while Madava prays from the stage.

“Lots of cancers are healed,” says Madava, a native of Zimbabwe who came to Kiev in 1986 to study aeronautical engineering at a communist university. He began his church in 1992 with three people. Today it is the one of the largest churches in a country where few Africans live.’

Victory is not the only large church in Kiev pastored by an African. A few miles away, Sunday Adelaja—a Nigerian who came to Russia to study journalism—leads a 25,000-member congregation, the Embassy of God. Both men are successful, but they define success differently than many Americans do.

Both Madava, 40, and Adelaja, 38, are concerned about what they call a “superstar syndrome” that is spreading from the United States to churches around the world. It seduces leaders to become arrogant and greedy. When Adelaja hears about the glamorous lifestyles of some American ministers, he gets a puzzled look on his face. “Is this a virus?” he asks.

Then he tells of one American minister who recently sent word that he must stay in the presidential suite in the most expensive hotel in Kiev when he visits. Adelaja can't understand why ministers should be pampered like rock stars. He measures New Testament faith not by the size of a preacher's personal jet but by how he loves and serves people.

Both Adelaja and Madava have endured persecution in a nation that still struggles with communism, racism and mafia control. Madava has received death threats, and the government has tried to deport Adelaja numerous times. Newspapers have run cartoons portraying both men as savages with bones through their noses.

Both men have built impressive ministries with little support from the West. Victory has planted 85 churches in Ukraine and another 23 in other parts of the world. The Embassy of God has spawned 450 autonomous congregations that do not tithe to the headquarters. Adelaja is opposed to starting a denomination, and he doesn't want his name on anyone's marquee.

"Everybody is busy building a big church. Let's build the kingdom," he says.

Madava was brutally honest when I asked him about the American church. "Many leaders in America have received the anointing but they have become clouds without water," he says. "Most of them seem to lose the anointing. I wish the American church could keep the water in the cloud."

Americans who visit Adelaja's cavernous church in Kiev are surprised when they see the modest lifestyle of this modern apostle. He and his Nigerian wife, Bosé, and their three children live in a three-bedroom apartment. He drives a 2002 Dodge Caravan. He also spends one week a month praying and

fasting.

Why is it that Americans whose churches are not even one-tenth the size of Adelaja's think they deserve five-star treatment?

Madava offered me the answer: "God asked me once whether I wanted to be (1) more powerful, or (2) more important. I decided I would rather be powerful in God than to be part of 'the club.'"

I wish Madava and Adelaja would spend some time in the United States. They need to give us a brotherly kick in the rear end. After listening to these guys for a few hours, it was obvious to me that God has anointed men and women from the developing world to lead the church into the 21st century. We need to emulate their radical humility.

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