

Governance and Challenges of Development in Nigeria: Religious Perspective

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Abstract

A cursory look at Nigerian situation shows that despite the enormity of the resources needed for any country's development which Nigeria has in abundance, sustainable development has eluded the nation. This is as a result of Nigerian leaders' inability to account to the led despite government's efforts to arrest the situation. Consequently an attempt is made by this paper to highlight biblical principles as they concern governance with the view that its application will help tackle the challenging situation. Data for this work is mainly derived from the bible and other scholarly materials and internet. The analysis of data collected involves detailed description and interpretation of observed events. The findings suggested that for a sustainable development to be achieved in Nigeria, application of biblical principles such as love, good shepherding, justice and integrity in governance are crucial.

Keywords: Governance, Development, Religious Perspective and Biblical Principles.

Introduction

Since Nigeria gained her independence in 1960, there has not been good governance for any meaningful development to take place. Achebe (1983) argues that the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership, the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility (p.1). Okolo (1994) also observes that; “there can be no serious change in the country unless it occurs in the leadership. If people see their political leaders as little more than “robbers” of the state, what prevents them from developing the same instinct in their lives?” (p.90). The burden of translating dreams of true progress and independence to reality lies on the Nigerian leaders.

Where the problem comes from, one may ask. The problem comes from neglecting God's principles in the governance. In earlier societies of which Israel is one, political power was often accompanied by superior force (God) who was the real ruler, ruling through those whom he placed in position of power and authority.

However, Nigerian government has for sometime been controlled by leaders who have taken power by force and therefore governed illegally and

lorded it over her citizens whereas the proper or legal government should be those to which the consent of the governed has been freely given, usually through free and fair elections. These elected leaders are expected to take into account, the economic, political, social and religious needs of the people as well as their customs and traditions. When a government reflects these needs and traditions, the implication is that there will be progress and development and the governed will have faith in it and abide by its dictates.

According to Paul in Romans 13: 1 – 6; 'government should be obeyed for God is the one who puts it there'. The bible therefore portrays that all governments have been instituted by God so that those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God and will face the wrath of God. In this thesis, Paul pointed out that no authority exists except from God, and all authority that exists has been instituted by God. Paul therefore appealed to Roman believers (Christians) to submit to the rulers of Rome, to respect and obey them. Not only because the authorities were instituted by God, but also for reasons of conscience and their possible wrath. The same applies also to those who are put in authority of power. They are to see themselves as leaders and shepherds of the people. In Jeremiah 23:1, 30:6, Ezekiel 34:11-24, Matthew 9:36 and John 10:15, it is worthy to note that often sheep and shepherds are used as metaphors to communicate some very important truths about the governed and the governors. The governed are like sheep-helpless, dependent and easily led astray. Though the leaders are provided for, to shepherd the people, however too often these shepherds thought only of themselves and failed to take proper care of the flock, which is God's given responsibilities to those who see themselves in the helms of affair, starting from home to other spheres of life.

The above biblical exposition on negligence of leaders' responsibilities readily describes Nigerian situation where poor governance had been an impediment to national development. It does not take a careful observer much time to discover that after fifty years of independence from colonial masters, Nigeria which is enormously provided for has largely remained underdeveloped. "Nigeria is indeed, socially and morally and terribly sick" (Ekwunife, 1995:96). The main thrust of this paper therefore is to examine the concept of good governance in the context of development. The paper also examines various biblical principles that can be put in place for effective governance for meaningful development and suggested recommendations for implementations

Conceptual Clarification

Governance nowadays occupies a central stage in the development discourse. The word Governance is "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises of mechanism, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences"

(A UNDP Policy Paper 1997). Kettl (2002) also describes governance “as an outcome of the interaction of government, the public service, citizens throughout the political process, policy development, program design, and service delivery”

Development on the other hand, means to grow. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1995) describes development to mean “to grow or cause something to grow gradually..., to start or cause something to start to exist and then become greater...” (p.318). In a more comprehensive form, Rodney (2005) observes that:

Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Some of these are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate depending` as they do on the age in which one lives, one's class origins, and one's personal code of what is right and what is wrong. However what is indisputable is that the achievement of any of these aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole... (p.1)

In the light of Nigerian context, Ekwunife (2007) also defines development: as that natural growth within societal cultural experiences through which resilient traditional values of the people are brought to bear on the present environmental experiences through the processes of continuities and discontinuities for coping with the realities of existential living (p.106).

In the context of this paper, development also involves greater human dignity, security, justice, equity, transparency and accountability on the part of the government to achieve the desirable economic, social and political growth and development. At the millennium summit General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2000, world leaders committed to the United Nations that set key objectives for the 21st century, the declaration among other things includes Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015 that focused on several key areas of human being:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

Debates abound on how the above could be actualized, but none is as effective as application of good governance in achieving the stated goals. It has become a common saying that good governance is essential for successful development. Our interest here is to stress the fact that Nigeria as a nation may seem to be developing considering the import of artificial or engrafting growth as a result of contact with foreign cultures, but the governance still lacks core characteristics of good governance as stipulated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its report which summarily are:

- Participation of all men and women in decision making
- Enforcement of rule of law on every person
- Transparency built on the free flow of information
- Responsiveness of institutions to serve all stakeholders
- Consensus orientation on what is in the best interest of the group on policies and procedures
- Equal opportunities for men and women to improve or maintain their wellbeing
- Effectiveness and Efficiency while making the best use of resources
- Accountancy of decision makers in government to the public.

(UNDP Report, Governance for Sustainable Human Development, 1997)

From the above, one can say that the concept of growth and development in Nigeria has been pinned on the ability of the government to address these key characteristics of good governance.

Governance and Challenges of Development in Nigeria

The relationship between governance and development is a contemporary issue in our national dailies. A look at the following submissions from cross-country analysis buttresses this:

- Good governance is perhaps the most single important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development. (UN Secretary, General Kofi Annan 1998.)
- Of all the ills that kill the poor, none is as lethal as bad government. (The Economist, 1999)
- The issue of good governance and capacity-building is what we believe lies at the core of all of Africa's problems. (Commission for Africa, 2005).
- There is no excuse for any country no matter how poor to

abuse its citizens, deny them equal protection of the law or leave them victims of corruption, mismanagement or economic irrationality. (UN Millennium Project 2005).

The above submissions indicate that there is substantial literature on governance and each one agrees on some key points that good governance is a gateway to meaningful development. And without it, poverty, illiteracy, corruption and other social vices will continue to undermine our development. It has been identified that the following core principles widely accepted by governance stake holders: participation; fairness, decency, accountability, transparency and efficiency are all lacking in Nigeria thus making development in the nation a very big challenge.

The problem, the writer observes lies on our one sided horizontal relationship where human nature composed of selfishness, greed, nepotism, corruption, covetousness and other vices take its course. This one sided relationship excludes the vertical aspect that involves the Ultimate Reality under which all aspects of life, political, social and religious have their bearing. Not until the biblical principles as instituted by the Ultimate Reality come into play in the national governance, Nigeria may not experience true development. Another problem of our governance could be traced to the refusal of our political leaders to allow Nigeria function as a democratic society; where:

- Individual freedom and personal liberties are guaranteed by the rule of law.
- The government is to protect the safety, well being, economic and human rights of the citizens.
- A sense of equity, social justice and equality in the mindset and lifestyle of both leaders and citizens is a fundamental requirement for democracy.
- The quality of the democratic process including transparent and accountable government, and equality of all before the law is critical.

Reflecting on the above truths, it is obvious that Nigeria is not a democratic society that it ought to be. Talks about democracy rent the air but truthfully, Nigeria as a nation is yet to experience one. At all levels, Nigerians are confronted with the complex problems of social, economic and political instability. Social services such as education, health care, water supply and electricity which are basic essentials and necessities for every citizen are slightly provided. For instance, education which is supposed to be the harbinger of national development seems to be a privilege for the haves. Health-care delivery

here is too bad and poor because our leaders instead of improving that sector, loot the national treasury for their medical treatment abroad. In Nigeria the epileptic supply of electricity has become part of us that when there is constant power supply for two days, it seems abnormal. Water supply is equally expensive.

Nigerian leaders as one can see are very uncommitted in the affairs of the led. Politically, many people rush into governance not necessarily for being patriotic but rather politics is seen as the gateway to wealth acquisition. It becomes therefore clear that Nigerian's underdevelopment is basically due to the criminal dishonesty of the leadership. This type of attitude causes discontentment to all and sundry, the implication is that, there are too many vices in form of bribery and corruption, violence, rigging, cultism, assassination, deformation by the governed and their leaders.

From the words of our late General Sani Abacha, on the occasion of the swearing in of members of the Federal Executive Council on 27 November (1998), he said;

The problem of development in Nigeria has its roots in good leadership. We must change the old way of doing things which have done more harm than good to the system. There is an intrinsic relationship between leadership and national development (p.8).

As pointed out before, the talk about national development in Nigeria makes no meaning without good governance. Against this background, biblical principles for good governance which are embedded in God's moral or ethical standards become inevitable.

Biblical Principles as Guide for good Governance

A society does not exist in a vacuum; someone or some groups make important decisions about how to use resources and how to allocate goods to everybody in the society. What is common to all societies then is the exercise of power and authority. Unfortunately, in the world today many people believe that there is no real connection between the Bible and the government. Therefore the former in most cases is either neglected or relegated to the background.

However, Theologians have discovered that while approximately 29% of the Bible deals with our personal lives, 71% deals with social, political and national issues (Kerby: 1999). In the same vein, Barker (2009) posited that biblical principles have a lot to do with studying the word of God, that because God is eternal, his requirements are eternal and his word is eternal, the Bible therefore presents valuable principles from living.

As earlier said, human government derives authority from God, this could be seen right from the first book of the Bible – 'Genesis'. In the account of 1st and 2nd chapters of Genesis, males and females were given authority by God to

subdue and dominate the earth. Other books in the Old Testament have litany of leaders that governed the Israelites at one time or the other. It started with the first patriarch Abraham then Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Aaron and later Joshua, there were also the judges and Kings of Israel. In each case, it was God who really rules through those put in power and authority. That is why this injunction, to support and respect those in authority, not to curse them for cursing them is like cursing God is apt. (Exodus 22: 28). The book of Romans 13: 1 states clearly that government should be obeyed for it is God that put it there.

The question that readily comes to mind is: Is the government of Nigeria fair and responsible enough for its citizens to keep to God's injunction to them? Unfortunately no, from the look of things, those at the helms of affairs are not living up to expectation. A look at the attributes of good governance that entails transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation and responsiveness are all lacking among our leaders. Human rights are not respected and protected. In fact in most law court, justice are delayed and denied. This is against God's injunction in Exodus 23:6 where Leaders are warned not to deny justice in law court, that, "By justice a king gives country stability but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down" (Proverbs 29:4). Incidentally, Psalm 106:3 places blessings to those who maintain justice, thus; "Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right".

Furthermore, a look at a service delivery indicates scanty provision of social amenities and at the same time, impoverishment of the people. Okwueze (2004) rightly observes that Nigeria is a society where the president would rather pay millions of Naira to procure a new presidential jet than repair dilapidated roads that have become death traps for the led. The led for him will be told to be patient and make sacrifices to enable the leader to travel in comfort of the world's latest presidential jet (p.58). He also sees Nigerian society as a place where the legislature will like to be "settled" rather than have certain social amenities being located amongst the people he represents. Agha (2003) identifies this problem as "a disordered value which he says produces all form of pathology in human behavior" (p.70).

The Bible however recommends that for a people to be responsible, children upbringing should be taken seriously. A look at most families which form the nucleus of the larger society indicate that most parents have failed in their responsibility to bring up their children properly as God's injunction to them. Most of them have forgotten that one of the principal responsibilities is to provide their children with a living example of good life. Success in this task will however depend on the maturity and morals of parents themselves. In this role of child upbringing, parents are expected to discipline their children and serve as models to them. This they should do by allowing their children enjoy their presence and exhibit virtues like sincerity, honesty, self control, hardworking, forgiveness and so on for their children to emulate.

The book of Proverbs 22:6 states, “teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older they will remain upon it”. Unfortunately, most parents are very busy with the physical needs of their families without taking care of the social and spiritual well being of their children. Most often, the children are left in the hands of their maids or peer groups and without the knowledge of their parents, these children derail, while the boys go into drugs, alcoholism and other social vices, the girls may end up into prostitution, drugs and the like. Gana in Onuora (2002) blaming the Nigerian parents has this to say:

When a child has no father to show him or her how to do the right things, he is unable to become who society says he should be. He is susceptible to a life spent searching for an identity based on a template he never saw. When all a child hears are negative things that his good for nothing father did, It is difficult for that child to grow up to become a responsible citizen.

That is to say that in family government, emphasis is usually laid on the father's roles as it affects the family's development. This is because the good products from families where parents are responsible will definitely be a good influence on the governance for our development.

Munroe (2001) also observes that, “a father in disciplining his children should be an example himself; he should encourage steady, consistent, and progressive growth in his family” (p.131). As parents carefully observe and fulfill these divine obligations of proper child upbringing, children will grow and develop into responsible citizens. For children are greater tomorrow and future leaders of both the families and the society at large. If they come out successfully in life, their lives definitely will bear in our leadership, governance and development positively.

Other biblical principles that could promote good governance could be traced from the inherent moral values and ethics found in the Bible. These are to be taught in homes, schools, churches and social gathering. Among them is “the fear of God,” “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follows his precepts have good understanding” (Psalm 111:10). Proverbs 14:27 also states, “the fear of God as a fountain of life turns man from the snares of death”. From all indications, one will see that the fear of God comes with life and wisdom. King Solomon in 1king 3:7-15 was a typical example of what wisdom epitomizes. When King Solomon who had the interest of his subjects asks for wisdom to govern his people rightly God not only gave him wisdom, but all other good things of life. Solomon thus became the most famous leader of his time. Even in our contemporary society, there is no gain saying that those who are God fearing make good names for themselves in the governance and they are cherished by the people.

Most of these biblical principles could be derived from the written constitution of God to the Israelites in the form of Decalogue (Ten

Commandments). From that constitution humans derived what is right and wrong. Thus any government that is worth its salt would not overlook these commandments to be able to provide protection, leadership and order, without these God's provision there will be chaos and disorderliness in our governance.

In the area of protection, the Old Testament teaching points out that 'Governments are responsible to execute justice and defend the weak'. Thus:

How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked...

Give justice to the weak and fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hands of the wicked (Ps. 82:2-4).

A look at the above quotation shows that:

- Rulers must judge with fairness and righteousness, and not show partiality but judge only according to the law and the facts in the case
- They also must pay special attention to defending the 'weak and the fatherless' and by implication others who have little power to defend themselves
- They are to use their power to stop 'the wicked' from harming others, particularly those who are 'weak' and needy.

For orderliness, government is to punish wrongdoers as a deterrent to crime. "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of men is fully set to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). Genesis 9:6 also puts it thus "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image". In other words, God has authorized government officials to execute his wrath on wrongdoers and thereby carry out retribution.

Since civil government is necessary and divinely ordained by God (Rom. 13: 1-7), it is ultimately under God's control. "It has been given three political responsibilities; the sword of justice (to punish criminals), the sword of order (to thwart rebellion) and the sword of war (to defend the state) (Kerby 1999). The aforementioned law and its proper execution should be the foundation of any government. In a Christian view of government, law is based upon God's revealed will. Law is not based upon human opinion or sociological convention as it is often observed rather law is rooted in God's unchangeable character and derived from biblical principles of morality.

Nigeria like any other contemporary society craves for good leaders for their development. However this cannot be without application of biblical principles of leadership for according to Blackaby and Blackaby (2001) "many of the 'modern' leadership principles currently, being expressed are in fact,

biblical principles that have been commanded by God throughout history” (p.5) They further pointed out that these principles are the principles of leaders loving their people, managers serving as servants, leaders showing their feelings to their people; leaders possessing integrity, that they must tell the truth (p.10).

In line with the biblical principles as they concern our leaders, Ajah (1996) listed some qualities of leaders to include: “empathy, accessibility, tact, friendliness, humility, integrity, peacefulness, faithfulness, patience, self control and emotional stability”. Amaowoh and Chinwokwu (2008) observe that, “many nations, institutions and professional bodies derive their code of conduct or ethics from Biblical ethics... Although men may not be able to strictly comply with such ethics, they have always regarded God's moral or ethical standards as normative for the common good of any nation or institution” (p.196-197) It has also been observed by Dickson (2011) that:

1. Human government was established by God to bring multiple benefit to human society
2. Government cannot save people or fundamentally change human heart but can influence people's moral convictions and behavior.
3. The rule of law must apply even to the rulers in a nation.
4. The purpose of government is to serve the people, not to be served by people
5. The bible gives indirect but significant support to the idea that government should be chosen by the people (some kind of democracy).

The above citations therefore show that civil government is an establishment of God himself for his creation and that inwardly transformed people are necessary for a transformed society. Because of equality of all people in the image of God, the rule of law must be applied to all and more importantly, accountability of the leaders to the people helps prevent a misuse of their power. From the foregoing, it has become obvious that Nigeria is not governed by leaders with the right governing principles otherwise one would have experienced noticeable development in the nation.

Recommendations

Having seen that the problem of national development today is caused by poor leadership the following recommendations are very crucial:

- Religious leaders in this country need to teach their followers the true nature of God, and his teachings in building a stable society.
- There should be application of democratic process so as to create opportunity for proven men of integrity that have the fear of God in them to be elected to hold the mantle of leadership.

- Christians should be encouraged by the church to take their role in politics, and in so doing be encouraged to carry biblical principles into politics.
- The Church should begin early enough to embark on moral education so as to mould the character of its members. This is based on the fact that private morality can be influenced by social or national morality.
- Anarchy is a highly destructive evil therefore evil-doing must be punished by the government and the church as a deterrent to crime.
- Provision of social amenities must be made by the government to keep the masses from rebelling against the constituted authority.
- Good deeds should be approved, praised and rewarded as an encouragement to others.
- Transparency and accountability should be required from everybody.
- Government should safeguard human liberty.

Conclusion

Biblical principles and good governance have been discovered to be the bedrock for national development. For Nigeria to experience true development, there must be application of biblical principles more importantly on this virtue “true love”. This type of love is not selective. The teaching of Paul in Romans 13:9 summarized this thus; “... and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbour as yourself”. Love has a lot to do with selfless service. The leaders who are the shepherds are required therefore to tend the flocks under them. For the fact that civil governments are established by God to bring many benefits to human societies, the government of Nigeria is expected to be responsible in areas of provision of social amenities, execution of justice, accountability, rendering selfless services and so on. The led on the other hand are to obey and respect the constituted authority by paying their taxes and living in peace with one another.

According to Amaowoh and Chinwokwu (2008), “our contemporary society needs love to be practiced and modeled by our leaders at all levels. True love emphasizes the love of one's neighbor as oneself and walking according to the Golden Rule” (p.223). A role model of a leader begets good governance and good governance ushers in true development. If Nigerian leaders could imbibe biblical principles as they concern governance, there will be significant development in the nation.

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