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GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

By

FIDELIS AGHAMELU

Introduction:

Good governance refers to the political character of the society or the state in the attainment of the moral objectives of human sociality. This moral end which is generally articulated within the context of the common good of the society plays an indispensable role in ascertaining the "good life" of members of the society. Good governance, therefore, refers to the political will of the society or a state in the achievement of its moral objective as such. Bad governance becomes the contrary.

Human sociality specifies that individuals and groups aspire towards realization within the framework of the political society. Good governance therefore exists as the art and process for this realization.

...It is also clear that all members or sectors that make up the society have not only stakes, but more importantly roles to play to ensure a better society by not only knowing about the ideals of good governance, but also imbibing and practicing those ideals.

The focus of this paper is to determine the ground for good governance, examine its principles, assess the level of its attainment in Nigeria within the context of a Christian social philosophy.

1.1 What Is Good Governance?

The definition of good governance may occasion conceptual relativism. However, such relativism may produce similarities and difference. Generally, it may depend on the definite philosophical, political, economic ideology and even religious outlook. However, ethical perspective upholds a universal standard, which forms the basis of a Christian outlook on governance.

Governance is both an art and process. This simply means that it has to be acquired as a skill and consequently sustained through goodwill and commitment towards the object of good governance. "The art and process has to do with exercising legitimate political authority or power." This authority or power is not of one who is mightier or stronger over another who is smaller or weaker, but it is one acquired through or on a representation basis. It is given to someone by others on their behalf and on trust and contract. Those who are given such power on representative basis, on trust and on contract are permitted to exercise it in the management of the affairs of the state, in such a way as to promote the enhancement of the welfare of the people on whose behalf the power is exercised. Seen from its ethical perspective then, this welfare of the community refers to the "common good" or the "general will" of the society, the standard and the basis for the assessment of good governance. Naturally, the exercise of such powers will cover the different areas of human life and endeavor, political, economic and social development.

According to the World Bank, good governance refers...to the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". It goes further to state that the,

Concept of good governance is directly concerned with the management of the development process...the functioning and capability of the public sector, as well as the rules and institutions that create the framework

which consists in the creation of the propositions for a prosperous development of the individual, smaller social circles, and society as a whole, in short the common good. And this, of course, has been the primary cause of bad governance, that is, abuse of power that manifests itself in many and various ways. The absence of or presence of these abuses, then are the indicators of the quality of governance, bad or good governance. Since our theme is good governance, what are some of the indicators of good governance? In spite of the many definitions that may be given of good governance and some being even conflicting, we think there is a general consensus as to the indicators of what good governance entails. These are accountability, participation, predictability and transparency.

1.2 Principles of Good Governance

a. Accountability:

This principle of good governance stipulates that those in government must accept that they are there to serve the interests of the people they govern and not vice-versa. They will therefore bring good governance into being only where they are responsive to the needs of their citizens. This will entail that public office holders are honest and open in the use of whatever structures, systems and resources that are in place in serving the citizens. They must be accountable to the people they represent.

b. Participation:

The participation principle of good governance follows necessarily from the principle of accountability. It suggests the active participation and involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. This is possible when there is correct and timely access to information.

c. Predictability:

The predictability principle of good governance means that people can trust and rely on the established institution, laws, rules, regulations and procedures which are meant to ensure that there is fairness to all when decisions are taken, equity to all when resources are shared or distributed and justice to all as far as matters of adjudication are concerned.

d. Transparency:

According to this principle, any government that is transparent will ensure that its rules and regulations, policy formulation and decision-making processes are known to the citizens, that there is no undue restriction to information or denial to information, that there is no shrouding of government activities in secrecy and whatever rules and regulations governing them are acceptable to the citizen.

It should be observed that the above four principles are inseparably related. One can even say that to struggle to realize one will necessarily and inevitably lead to the realization of the others. So, it is worth the while to pursue the agenda of governance, which represents the efforts to revive the agenda of governance, and strengthen trust in governmental authority, political leaders and institutions, private sectors and civil societies.

1.3. Advantages of Good Governance:

The effects or advantages of good governance cannot be gainsaid. These among others are the following:

1. There will be trust in the government
2. Institutions and public services will function efficiently
3. Rule of law will exist
4. There will be judicial independence
5. There will be an empowered and vibrant civil society
6. There will be an empowered and productive private sector

These and many others will come to reign where good governance exists because a good government will practice transparency, accountability, and will enlist the participation of all its citizens appropriately. The judiciary and law enforcement agencies will be independent and free; there will be free media and free expression. Free and open elections will be obtainable; corruption will not be condoned because the practice of the rule of law in the conduct of public business and human rights will be respected.

Naturally, the effects of bad governance will be the total absence of the above mentioned highly priced values which can be summed up in the prevalence of the breakdown of law and most times leading to civil unrest under many guise: in family breakdown, brain drain, the retardation or truncation of development with its problems of unemployment, armed robbery and prostitution. Thus, lack of good governance will result in the triple woes of political instability, economic degeneration and human insecurity.

1.4. The Purpose of Good Governance:

The purpose of good governance is to foster the common good. This is understood as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as a group or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (Vatican 11, *The Church in the modern World* N0.26). It presupposes respect for the sublime dignity and fundamental rights of the human person. It promotes integral human development. Good governance is a major pillar in the development of every nation. It must be accountable, transparent, participatory and inclusive. It is founded on the rule of law. Good governance must be sensitive to and respectful of our ethnic and religious diversities.

The need for people to carry out many human achievements is as a result of political communities. People achieve more by living in communities than in isolation. It enables them to work to achieve a

common ideal of temporal well being. In pursuance of this objective, means are adopted to maintain internal order while non-members take measures to safeguard attacks. Structures are set up for general coordination and cooperation. This enables them to live freely with the rights and privileges of individuals safeguarded.

These become possible when there is a political authority or government. These are made of members of the community (state) who unify and direct the energies of all the members as they pursue their ends together. Without authority, a community is subject to disorder and weakness. From its function of directing energies in a coordinated way, the government derives its power to command, and when it is necessary, to use force to back up its commands. And if a government has the right to guide and to command those who come under this command and benefit from this guidance, they are obliged to obey its just directives. Political obedience is a serious duty for citizens. St. Paul wrote to the first Christians: "Everyone must obey state authorities, because no authority exists without God's permission and the existing authority has been put there by God. 'Whoever opposes the existing authority opposes what God has ordered and anyone who does so will bring judgment on himself... for this reason you must obey the authorities not just because of God's punishment, but also as a matter of conscience. That is also why you pay taxes, because the authorities are working for God when they fulfill their duties. Pay them what you owe them; pay them your personal and property taxes and show respect and honour for them all (Romans 13:1-7)"

From the foregoing, it is clear that government exists for people to live fuller lives and carry out many human achievements. Government must exercise such powers that will promote the general welfare of the people while respecting the functions of legitimate societies such as the family and the church. Apart from safeguarding law, order and property, it has to adopt other means to ensure that its members live together in a properly human way. People rightly expect from their nation good governance, justice and fair play,

protection from internal and external aggression, provision of essential needs and social amenities which are more easily provided when people live in large communities rather than in small unviable units.

1.5 Good Governance: The Nigerian Case:

The attempt here is not to give a step-by-step historical overview of the performance of the Nigerian government since independence. We shall rather take a global stand point and pick out certain elements or aspects of how Nigeria has fared in good governance.

In this quest, the obvious judgment will, in all fairness, be that of failure. This is not being unmindful of the individual political office holders who have impacted positively on the lives of their subjects while they were or are in office. The reference is made here to the global picture of governance in the country. In the first place, the constitution has been contentious and far from being acceptable by all for good governance, justice, equality and fair play. Even though the idea of such exercise is a positive one, how much of the processes have been good enough to produce a constitution that all citizens have contributed to and can call their own constitution? As to policies and programmes, fair enough, we have had quite a number of them that are laudable and commendable, but again, their translation into effectiveness and for the benefits of all citizens is a far cry from reality.

We will at this juncture turn to specific areas where the absence of good governance is felt in Nigeria.

1.5.2 Political Instability:

This has been a national garb of Nigeria since independence. It was introduced by a military coup just a couple of years after independence, and there have been a number of them, with attempted coups and alleged or phantom coups welcome

or unwelcome. This intrusion of militarism into politics shows that there was something amiss about governance. A civil war, which we have also fought in this country, is another evidence of political instability. Then, there is the phenomenon of wars and conflicts on religious, ethnic and political levels that have left political climate the cloudiest. The persistent breakdown of law and order has come to characterize our national psyche. Those who are supposed to be the guardians of law and order themselves have not known or have forgotten that the essence of the rule of law is that political power itself must be exercised within the constraints of legal provisions. Having failed in this respect, they cannot guarantee any political stability, state and human security. The country has had a good number of its leaders who have been or are proud and arrogant, operating oppressive and insensitive regimes.

1.5.2 Economic Degeneration:

The grave human condition for the majority of Nigerians does not need any great argument. The GDP per capita is low. Poverty as a result is evident. Inflation is steadily on the increase. The citizens are mainly pauperized. Their health is being impaired and they cannot afford the cost of repair. They are being sacked because companies are folding up. Those who are working and getting some income are surrounded by too many jobless dependents for their income to be meaningful. The general populace is therefore depressed, disillusioned and hopeless. Nigeria is the only country where increasing wealth has translated into poverty for the people. This is as a result of bad management of resources by those that exercise political power on behalf of the rest and the self-aggrandizing and kleptomaniac tendencies of leaders.

1.5.3. Human Insecurity:

From the above, human security suffers because the conditions, which ensure living in peace without fear or threat of being deprived of life and its basic necessities, are lacking. Once again, the poor educational, health and social services just mentioned above are the proofs of human insecurity. The courts and law enforcement agencies, which are poor persons' last resort, are instead oppressive instruments. Therefore, with the crop of politicians that we have who are unable to establish and sustain a stable political climate and economic development, the weak state that comes in its wake cannot protect its citizens against fear or the threat to peaceful living.

The thesis, therefore, is that all the above stated problems are symptomatic of the absence of good governance. The over-all situation owing to bad governance is captured by Reuben Abati as follows: "The truth of the situation today is that the average Nigerian is unhappy with his personal lot, and the nation's circumstances. We are not just a poor nation in spite of our wealth; Nigeria is one of the saddest places in which anyone can live in the world. The quality of life continues to depreciate daily as a number of macro-economic distortions... You would wake up one morning, and your life would have been further devalued, on account of an illogical state policy, on which neither your opinion was sought nor your feelings considered". This is the situation vis-à-vis the question of good governance in Nigeria today and indeed has been for a long time. This is the context in which the Christian, finds himself or herself. It is the context in which he/she is called to live his/her vocation, to be a "light of the world and salt of the earth", to give witness to his/her conviction that Christ Jesus died and rose from the dead, not only to save souls, but also to make the world (nay Nigeria) a better place to live in. This witness, he/she can give by doing and avoiding everything appropriately and in proportion to his or her position, rank or status, that is, either as a political office holder, player in the private sector or as a member of the civil society or ordinary citizen. This brings us to the third and

final part of this paper, the part the Christian can play in brining about and sustaining good governance.

1.6 The Role of Christians in Good Governance:

May we begin with this long quotation from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of United States, issued on November 13, 1990, on the occasion of the commemoration of the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*"

The human person is not only sacred, but social. We realize our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. No community is more central than the family; it needs to be supported, not undermined. It is the basic cell of society, and the state has an obligation to support the family. The family has major contributions to make in addressing questions of social justice. It is where we learn and act on our values. We also have the right and responsibility to participate in and contribute to the broader communities in society. The state and other institutions of political and economic life, with both their limitations and obligations, are instruments to protect the life, dignity, and life of the person; promote the well being of our families and communities, and pursue the common good. Catholic social teaching does offer clear guideline on the role of government. When basic human needs are not being met by private initiative, then people must work through their government, at appropriate levels, to meet these needs. A central test of political, legal and economic institutions is what they do to people, what they do for people and how people participate in them.

These sum up the Christian social teaching regarding our theme: "Good Governance" and the role of the Christian in realizing it. There has been a misunderstanding and misrepresentation that the Christian has no business with politics and economics. That his or her preoccupation is to save the soul only and not meddle in or get contaminated with the world's affairs. This has come about admittedly, from both within and without the church. Gnosticism (a philosophical and religious system) had robbed off on Christianity in the early years of the church. It be believed that the world made of matter is evil and so worldly affairs, which would include political and economic activities, must be shunned if man is to liberate himself and gain salvation. Some philosophers have also taught that politics occupies itself, not with morality, but with the mysteries of the art of creating power, consolidating it. If the Christian takes this seriously, the result most certainly is one of discouragement from involvement in and indifference to politics. Yes, indeed, the question of the relationship of man to the state as an embodiment of power has always been filled with tension. But it is equally true that the question of the state, its meaning and what part man and Christian particularly should play in it has an important place in Christian thought from the beginning. The New Testament itself is replete with important and insightful injunctions and teachings from Jesus and the writers of the Epistles on what man should do and how he should relate in matters of politics, to rules and governance in general. (cf. Rom. 12, 8:1 Cor. 12, 18; Rom. 13, 1-7; Peter 2:13-17; 2Peter 2:10; Titus 3:1).

Down through the ages, there has been no shortage of directives and guidelines on how christians should carry out their responsibilities and obligations to the state and society through the church's large body and obligations to the state and society of social teaching. "Led by the goal of grounding the moral idea of the state, Christian social teaching discusses questions concerning the origin and tasks of the state, governmental authority and forms of the state, as well as the particular relationship of the Christian and the church to the state".

The Second Vatican Council urges Christians to “cultivate a generous and loyal spirit of patriotism”. This is not to be understood to mean mere feeling and less chauvinism. Neither is it mere obedience and loyalty. It is above all a “live participation in the weal and woe of the people and is embedded in love for all peoples, which means being open to the whole human family”. Still establishing that the Christian has a moral responsibility to the state in ensuring good governance, the Church teaches that he/she is obliged in two principal ways. Positively in the fulfillment of civic duties and negatively in the rejection of interest groups. Thus, shall now state the role of the Christian of Nigeria in relation to good governance by dwelling on these two ways:

- a. **The Fulfillment of Civic Duties:-** There is developing now an attitude by modern man to emphasise more his family ties and the struggle to acquire and maintain a means of livelihood which has led to a conspicuous lack of involvement with the claims of society as a whole. Apathy and indifference especially towards political matters (especially elections), are greatly noticeable, especially because of the failure of many governments. This is true of Nigerians today. But this must not be the case. The Christian in Nigeria today is called more than ever to exercise two kinds of civic duties. Firstly, it is in the obedient of duties e.g. taxation, military service where there is one, etc. secondly, over and above this loyalty and obedience, is the task of sharing in political direction. In a democracy like ours, the Christian is responsible for the common good at all levels, federal, state and local government. The common good can be achieved in this direction by exercising the “right and duty to vote freely”, collaboration in self-government, and the exercise of the right to criticism and control (through public opinion). We have noted above the apathy and indifference of most Nigerians when it comes to elections. It is argued that it is due to

frustration caused by the sad experiences of election rigging and manipulation. But, if we stop doing the right thing, the wrong will always remain with us. As to criticism and control of bad government, many Christians have preferred not to rock the boat for fear of losing their daily bread and their lives. Some, though a minority, have collaborated actively in perpetuating, encouraging and supporting bad regimes. The pathetic figure of Pontius Pilate seems to be the disease or problem with many Christians today in Nigeria. They are driven by political necessity (i.e. to remain in the ruling measure of store-away e.t.c) and the fear to betray goodness and justice and so sit on the fence or shy away from confronting bad governance and government. This, for us is tantamount to supporting the bad system and makes one culpable. The Christian, who wishes to live his/her faith cannot without contradicting himself or herself, adhere to ideological systems and/or policies, which are radically opposed to his/her faith, the concept of man and the generally agreed standards of good governance. The renewal of the temporal order, which goes well with the practice of piety, is the proper task of the Nigerian Christians.

- b. **The Rejection of Interest Groups:-** Here, we are referring to organizations not provided for by the Constitution and whose interests are not for the common good. They are strong, persuasive; they exact a lot of pressure on public opinion, government, parliaments, e.t.c., but all for selfish reasons. They can sponsor and influence people into power and hold them hostage, all to the detriment of the majority of citizens. Nigerian Christians must not be part and parcel of such groups that pervert the true principles of justice and fair play and institutions of the free democratic state.

“In their patriotism and in their fidelity to their civic duties Christians will feel themselves bound to promote the true common good; the civil authority will be justly exercised and laws will accord with the moral concepts and the common good”. The Council goes on to say that Christians versed in politics should not decline from participating, but they should be so armed with the Christian faith and conviction for a proper discharge of their duties; so we say here, bring about good governance whose goal is the common good. The Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, in their Joint Pastoral letter on the “eve” of the elections for return to civilian democratic rule that ushered in the 2nd Republic addressed the “whole Christian community and (to) all Nigerians of goodwill” that “there is neither insider nor outsider. All are in the nation granted playing different but vital roles” in ensuring the establishment and sustenance of good governance. The Christian was reminded in these words: “God wants you to be good citizens, so as to silence what fools are saying in their ignorance...Have respect for everyone and love our community; fear God honour the emperor (1st Peter 2:15-17). The good Christian normally is a good citizen precisely in his Christian goodness. It is as a member of the electorate and government that the Christian citizen should show he could contribute equitably to the common good and manifest simultaneously both civic and religious virtue”

The Christian, aware that he/she is on pilgrimage to the heaven, should direct thought and work to those things that will guarantee the attainment of heaven. But he/she is nonetheless called to work with all men and women in constructing a more humane world; yes, to see to the entrenchment of good governance. When Jesus replied to the malicious question of the Pharisees about tax payment: “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God”, he is not teaching a dichotomy of life between politics and religious practice. On the contrary, Jesus is teaching “that the political realm and the flesh and blood paraphernalia of the things that are Caesar’s must nevertheless be subject to God and to Justice”. The Christian should know that the mere acquisition and

consolidation of political power and its use for domination, discrimination and perpetuation of crimes can only lead to the misfortune and suffering of the governed. The Bishops in the above cited Joint Pastoral letter, recommended certain political virtues and vices that Christians must imbibe and shun. These include among many the following: the virtue of national justice in the allocation of resources, opportunities and burden, vigilance that will reflect concern for public welfare and well-being, constant testing of political leaders, and commitment to provide or proffer solutions to social problems and provision of welfare services, the exercise of discipline by both the political office holders and citizens; and avoidance of hypocrisy in politics, sectionalism and partiality, and bribery and corruption. All of the above listed political virtues and vices, which the Christian is called upon to practice and discard in relation to the issue of good governance can be topics in their own right that merit singular and elaborate treatment.

Conclusion:

We begin with an excerpt from a letter titled "The Dilemma of Voting Christians" by Patrick Labelle, OP. It goes like this:

Not long ago a distinguished emeritus professor approached me with a twinkle in his eye, placed his right hand across his chest with hand touching shoulder and announced that he could not vote for Senator Kerry for President of the United States because he was "pro-choice". He then placed the other arm and hand across his chest to touch the other shoulder and informed me that he could not vote for President Bush for re-election, because he was pro-war. He concluded then that he presumed that he must assume this posture and simply ask for a blessing rather than

receive communion. He smiled and walked into the church. He was, of course, speaking tongue-in-cheek and received the Eucharist as he does each week, and more. But the point was well taken.

What happened here was factual, but it is also a parable, which is double-edged: the dilemma of whom to elect into political office and the cynicism and/or indifference that can be embraced by many when it concerns politics and governance.

The question of Christian identity has come up in our age as one of pressing theological, pastoral and ecumenical importance. What we have engaged in above is not about defining Christianity narrowly as having to do with doctrines and selected moral teachings of the Magisterium concerning good governance, but of situating the Christian person in the 21st century Nigeria where he/she is challenged to respond to the vagaries, oddities and abuse that abound in the political, economic and social spheres, in the light of faith. These are the pastoral opportunities offered to him/her and the Christian is expected to and indeed must respond in collaboration with others: Christians and non-Christians alike-the exercise of the apostolate of like to like. The non-existence of good governance is obvious from the above borders on issues of social justice, human rights and peace. The Christians in our country and context must become more firmly committed to the quest for these. This is both a religious and political duty. It is evangelization, the infusion of religious and moral values into worldly affairs for the renewal of the temporal order; such is also God's will. The Christians are to be the country and context must become more firmly committed to the quest for these. This is both a religious and political duty. It is evangelization, the infusion of religious and moral values into worldly affairs for the renewal of the temporal order; such is also God's will. The Christians are to be the channels of Christians wisdom, which must be brought to bear on the mentality, behaviour, laws and structures of the community, nation and world order.

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