

Community Life System of Consecrated Persons: Implications for Public Administration in Nigeria

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Abstract: Public administration generally involves organizing men and material in view of achieving set goals geared towards the happiness of the masses. Nigeria as a nation since birth has deployed several systems of governance to power its administration, but failed to achieve this happiness in its citizens. The paper reviewed the present democratic system of governance in Nigeria as well as the practice of Religious Community Life system of the consecrated persons in the Catholic Church. This review resulted in generating a governance model involving features of both Democracy and Religious Community Life systems. To arrive at this model, the paper deployed data collection methodologies of book consultation, participatory observation and interviews. The paper nevertheless notes that in as much as the efficacy of this model is guaranteed if deployed, leaders as well as the entire masses must equally brace up for absolute disciplined life and frugality in spending. The paper strongly argues that with this mixed systems of Religious Community Life and Democracy in place as administrative model for Nigeria, insecurity, unemployment, non salary payment that causes incessant strike action by workers, corruption of all kinds will give way to rapid development of the nation and happiness of the citizenry, which constitute the default goal of any administration.

Keywords: Democracy; Community Life; Public Administration; Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

It was the Greek philosopher, Plato that is credited with the statement that “the society or government exists for the happiness of the masses”. That is to say, the government is a failure where the citizens lack happiness. Therefore, that public administration is an exercise geared towards achieving a set goal in line with the satisfaction and happiness of the masses is non negotiable. Good governance is expected to generate happiness in both the leader(s) and the led/masses in any society. The reverse however, becomes the case when it is characterized with bad features. No one can undermine the speed of progress and magnitude of prosperity experiential in a society whose leadership and masses beam with joy as a result of its prevailing good governance.

There are several kinds of administrative or governance systems including democracy, theocracy, oligarchy, monarchy, communism, etc. Nigeria presently practices democracy which Abraham Lincoln a former American president defined as “the government of the people, by the people and for the people”. [1] The primary goal in the practice of democracy is to govern through fair representation and prevent abuses of power.

Experience has nevertheless shown the shortcomings in the practice of democracy in Nigeria. It is indeed far from achieving the goal of governance in terms of satisfaction and happiness in both its drivers (the leadership) and the masses. Nigeria has continued to grow in division along ethnic, religious and tribal inclinations. Injustice in sharing the common patrimony, nepotism in appointments and lopsidedness in electing those at the highest echelon of governance in Nigeria have also been

the order of the day.[2] All these abuses have not only brought dissatisfaction and unhappiness to the citizenry but equally impacted negatively on the development of the nation.

The community life as practiced by the consecrated persons in the Catholic Church has some laudable features which the Nigerian government can adopt to complement the present democratic system to produce a model of governance that will achieve this supposed default goal of any administration – satisfaction and happiness of the entire masses in the society. This mix of Community Life practice and Democratic system of governance according to this study will to a considerable extent become a panacea or antidote to the shortcomings inherent in the present practice of ordinary democracy.

II. CONCEPT OF CONSECRATED LIFE/PERSON

Consecrated person is one who totally dedicated one's life to God. In particular to Catholic Church, "Consecrated Life is the state of life in the Catholic Church lived by those faithful who are called to follow Jesus Christ in a more exacting way".[3] Consecrated persons include those in institute of consecrated life (religious and secular), societies of apostolic life, as well as those living as hermits or consecrated virgins/widows.

In responding to a special call by God, some men and women join religious communities in order to consecrate to God their lives as a way of seeking holiness. When a person accepts this call to leave everything for a more radical way of following Christ, the person will make vows to live like Jesus in poverty, chastity and obedience.[4/5] The person will promise to live the rest of his or her life dedicated exclusively to Christ. The vows will make the person to live simply, to be more open with God and to depend totally on Him.[6] Due to the exacting nature of the consecrated life, many describe it as a life similar to 'swimming against the current of a flowing river'.[7] Consecrated life can alternatively be referred to as Religious Life.

III. THE CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Broadly speaking, a religious community constitutes a group of people who practice the same religion. They worship together in a religious venue such as church, mosque, temple etc. Instances of a religious community in this broad sense include Christian, Moslem, Hindu, etc religious communities.[8] On the other hand, religious community in a narrower sense refers to a group of people of the same religion living together specifically for religious purposes, often subject to formal commitment such as religious vows as in convent or monastery. [9] Similarly, religious community in the Catholic Church consists of men and women who live a common life and pronounce the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience (the evangelical counsels). Members of a religious community generally accept a rule of life that emphasizes humility and renunciation of worldly goods and pleasure. [10]

It is this latter sense of understanding a religious community that this paper focuses on. It is the level or unit of existence in a congregation or order in the Catholic Church that provides the opportunity of closer relationship among members of a particular congregation or order. A congregation or order here refers to an institute of consecrated men and women with specific charism and apostolate in the Catholic Church. It is usually founded by a particular member of the Church whether clergy or layperson known as the founder or foundress as the case may be. It is this founder or foundress that stipulates the charism and apostolate of the particular congregation in the Church as inspired by the Holy Spirit. A congregation is ordinarily organized in terms of administration and operation following this hierarchy in a descending order. The General Government headed by the Superior General; the Provincial Government, headed by the Provincial Superior; the Local Community Government, headed by Local Superior.[11] The members of a congregation are distributed to different communities which serve as the nuclear or last level of congregational existence in numbers not less than two or three. The community provides its members the opportunity of close relationship with one another as well as the environment of sharing the life of the congregation according to the provisions of their constitution or rule of life.

The community is usually led by a mini executive headed by the local superior. While the superior guides and oversees the workings of the community based on the constitutional provisions, the members owe him/her their obedience. Members are to plan their personal programmes in adaptation to that of the community overseen by the superior. Meanwhile, the origin of religious community life practice is traceable to the scripture during the early Church formation. The disciples gathered together in a room after the ascension of Jesus Christ, praying and breaking the bread and in addition mustered their individual wealth together and shared among themselves according to their individual needs (Acts 4-5).

IV. CONCEPT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Administration generally is an everyday activity which is pervasive of all organizations especially with definite purposes. In the church, corporate organizations, political parties, army, institutions of learning, market organizations trade unions and so on, there is some form of administration because they are made up of people in a hierarchical arrangement, using tools, equipment, human and material resources, to achieve the objectives of their organizations.[12]

However, public administration as a concept has been defined by scholars in various ways. According to the father of modern public administration, Woodrow Wilson (1889), public administration is detailed and systematic application of law. Every particular application of law is an act of administration.[13] For L.D White (1955), public administration consists of all those operations having for their purpose, the fulfillment and enforcement of public policy as declared by competent authority.[14] Max Weber on his part, defines public administration as determined action taken in pursuit of a conscious purpose. It is the systematic ordering of affairs and the calculated use of resources aimed at making those happen which one wants to happen.[14] Also for Fredrick K Lane, public administration is organizing and maintaining human and fiscal resources to attain a group's goal.[14]

Public administration in its strict sense according to [12] refers to “the practice of administration in the public sector of the society”. Its main concern is about the means of implementing political values. It is the machinery which operates for the single purpose of implementing government policies. The study of public administration for [12] therefore, focuses on the most efficient means of organizing and managing the executive organs of government, its institutions and its procedures. In essence public administration has the ultimate interest in delivering services to the citizens in the most efficient and effective manner. Therefore the masses or the public is the subject matter of public administration.

V. FEATURES OF COMMUNITY LIFE SYSTEM

One striking feature of a community as relating to consecrated persons is that, though its members could be heterogeneously oriented in backgrounds, they are nevertheless unreservedly united in purpose. A community could be formed by individuals (religious) who come from different cultural, ethnic, racial, lingual, age, academic, social, economic and even political backgrounds. Despite their different backgrounds, their unity of purpose remains non negotiable owing to not only for the kingdom's sake but for protection of their community values including their mission and individual life's integrity.

Again, by the members' vowed life of poverty, they muster their resources together to fund common interest. No member hoards any good – material or spiritual for himself or herself alone but submits whatever he or she received from any source to the community superior. These materials are in turn given to any member or even outsider who is need. (Acts 4:33-35).

The religious community is an institution where every member is satisfactorily employed and deployed. No community member is without work or remuneration which ensures respect and regard for everyone.

The positions in the community are considered as division of labour instead of hierarchical arrangement to give everyone a sense of belonging and ownership of the community. Everyone performs his or her responsibility in view of growing the community.

Furthermore, community members see themselves as brothers or sisters to one another. Preferential treatments based on any kind of prejudice on any member are not tenable and as a result opportunities are given and received based on merit.

Given these features, there is little wonder why one of the fastest growing as well as spreading institutions in the world are the religious communities. For instance the Congregation of Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (the Claretians) founded by St. Anthony Mary Claret about 175 years ago in Barcelona, Spain can be found existing as communities in the five continents of the world including 70 countries.[15] Its body in Nigeria within it 50 years of existence has established communities in all the 36 states in Nigeria and the federal capital territory, Abuja and beyond. This rapid growth and expansion experience is not limited to the Claretian congregation alone but is also the experience of most of the other congregations on the globe which according to this paper are facilitated by these features inherent in a religious community.

VI. IMPLICATIONS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY LIFE SYSTEM TO NIGERIA'S ADMINISTRATION

Administration in Nigeria has been under serious criticism especially in the recent times. The administrators have been accused of fanning the embers of disunity among the citizenry. They have been clueless about the solution to insecurity situation in the country. Nepotistic and lopsided in appointments to high offices in the nation has been the characteristic

badge of this government. Corruption and embezzlement of public funds by government officials have ceased to make headline news in our country. [16/17] Unemployment and under or non payment of workers, resulting to demonstrations and restiveness by the unemployed youths and strike actions by the under and non paid workers is a recurrent experience in Nigeria.

With adaptation of Religious Community Lifestyle into its democratic system, the sense of unity of purpose that characterizes the religious community will kill division and disunity in Nigeria. Religious, ethnic, tribal and political affiliations that are at the roots of divisive tendencies in Nigeria will give way to harmony of purpose to achieving a one formidable Nigeria comparable to the United State of America with not much different background from that of Nigeria.

Sequel to achieving a formidable one Nigeria, all the segments making up Nigeria would muster all arsenals available in their domain to attack the nation's internal common enemies like the boko haram, bandits, kidnappers, etc. External aggressors would as well not be spared in the event of their rising up using the same arsenals. Given this sense of unity of purpose borrowed from the religious community life system, Nigeria's insecurity situation will definitely be taken care of.

Furthermore, following the way and manner offices and opportunities are given on the basis of merit, and occupiers and beneficiaries also seeing them as privileges and therefore return the dividends from these privileges to the community for its continued growth rather than aggrandize themselves with the dividends.

The issue of nepotism and lopsided appointments will no longer be at play in Nigerian politics. The mentality of 'winners take it all' that is the root cause of election abuses will die a natural death.

Corruption and embezzlement of public fund that have become endemic in Nigerian politics will be a bygone if public office holders will emulate the practice of 'community first before all else' principle of community life and be making fund returns to the government rather than stealing them from the government for selfish ends. This will enable the government have enough fund for provision of public goods and services for the masses, thereby eliciting happiness, being the aim of governance in them.

Youths' restiveness and workers' strike action owing to their unemployment and under or non salary payment respectively will equally cease as the greed and injustice that have led the national economy into few people's pockets will no longer be there, given the adoption of the religious community life's consciousness of the centre in Nigeria's governance. Willful and strict adherence to the law will become the delight of the citizens as it is experienced in the religious communities. Law breaking that is fuelled by selfish interest will be tamed by the fraternity the religious community life system will bring into the society. Or law breakers who feel they are neglected by the leaders will have reason to stop as the caring experience from the superior to the other members in the community will be replicated in the larger Nigerian society.

Finally, with every Nigerian seeing the other as a brother and a sister, fraternal love will outwit all forms of hatred and rancor brewed by religious sentiments, ethic and tribal chauvinism and political inclination. The nations' diversity in these areas will become source of strength for building and sustaining one formidable Nigeria, just as such diversity regarding the backgrounds of members of a particular religious community powers the community's growth, development and spread beyond imagination.

VII. CONCLUSION

It is undoubted that no one system of governance has been found to be satisfactory in all ramifications. Each system has its strengths and weaknesses coupled with the unwarranted excesses of their drivers in the particular societies of their practice. Nigeria has practised a number of administrative systems since emergence, which included colonial rule, parliamentary system, military rule and presently democratic rule. It is unfortunate Nigerians have never enjoyed a satisfactory administration under the periods any of these systems had been deployed for governance. Therefore, the world including Nigeria is still in search of a satisfactory governance system.

This paper presents the mix of Religious Community Life system and Democratic system as model for administration in Nigeria that will go a long way to satisfying the citizenry. This model promises restoration of discipline in both the political leaders and the citizens, generation of funds for the government, fast development of the Nigerian society, creation of employment opportunities and satisfactory and timely salary payments to workers. On the other hand, disunity, insecurity, corruption, unemployment etc. will be eradicated. And finally, the major goal of governance - the happiness of the masses, will be achieved given the adoption of this mixed systems of Religious Community Life and Democracy as the governance model for Nigeria.

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