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The Dynamic Leadership Role of Nehemiah in Ancient Israel and its Implication for Political Leaders in Nigeria

Komolafe, Hezekiah Deji, PhD

Abstract

One of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria is political leadership. Although, it is a truism that, corruption, fraud, lawlessness, and injustice, have eaten deep into the fabric of many leaders, be it civic or religious, it is however, a known fact that poor political leadership have been the major causes of all evils bedeviling Nigeria as a nation. Many political leaders have impoverished the nation to the point that majority of Nigerians live in abject penury. This paper examines the dynamic leadership roles of Nehemiah in ancient Israel and its implication for the Nigerian Political leaders. To dig deep into this research, historical and descriptive methods are used. The findings indicated that Nehemiah was a political leader who served the Persian Empire and Israel faithfully. Although, he was in a comfortable position in a foreign land, he had great concern for his people who were in deplorable condition. He therefore, took appropriate steps to salvage his people. He was patriotic and accountable. He provided security for the nation by ensuring that wall was built round the city of Jerusalem and more importantly, resolute in making the people have the concept of new citizenship and uphold the Law of Yahweh. While, it is recommended that the dynamic leadership roles of Nehemiah should be embraced by Nigeria Political Leaders in the path of developing the nation, the paper concluded that all efforts to unite as one nation in respect of ethnic, language and religious background must be paramount in the heart of all citizens.

Keywords: Nigeria, political leaders, Nehemiah, leadership roles, patriotism

Introduction

LEADERSHIP IS REQUIRED IN ALL SPHERES OF LIFE AND THAT IS WHY FROM THE creation of the world till date, mankind has never been left without leadership. The leadership of a particular country will determine the level of the development of such country. According to William Gottfried, Africa nations have refused to develop today because of poor leadership at all sectors regardless of the overwhelming resources that the continent has been blessed with.[1] A fact that cannot be disputed is that many of the western worlds that are classified as developed countries today are so, not because they have better resources than African Nations but because they have good leaders that help to manage their meager resources.

Many definitions have been given as to what leadership means. According to Robert Greenleaf, leadership is the act of showing the way for others, stating the goal and thereby giving certainty and purpose to others who may have difficulty in achieving

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it for themselves.[2] Anthony D'souza sees leadership as the process of directing the behaviour of another person or persons towards the accomplishment of some objective.[3] To him, leadership is the ability to get others to work enthusiastically and competently toward accepted objectives.[4] The most precise and appealing among these definitions was given by Oswald Sanders and recently advanced by John .C. Maxwell that "leadership is influence.[5] It is the ability to influence people towards some specific goals and direction.

The most critical problem confronting Nigeria is leadership.[6] The present and past leaders of Nigeria seem to have failed to provide quality leadership capable of addressing numerous challenges confronting the country These leadership challenges are evidenced in political, social and economic instability and the prevalence of ethnic, communal and religious crises, which have bedeviled Nigeria socio-economic development. The reverberation effects of the failure of political leadership, corruption and bad governance are visible and being felt across all sectors and segment of the Nigerian society. [7]

.Olusegun Obasanjo says, Nigeria cannot be good except all citizens would join hands for nation building. But they cannot be united unless they are mobilized by patriotic leaders like Nehemiah.[8] However, Dino Melaye argues that "Nigerian political leaders cannot mobilize Nigerians to be in unity unless they put aside the sentiments of tribalism, sectionalism, nepotism, all forms of segregation and religious discriminations. To him, there are many ethnic groups, and members of a particular ethnic group who tend to be loyal to their own people in government or other exalted positions. This act threatens the unity of the nation.[9] Joe Igbokwe attests that, a dangerous practice in Nigeria which jeopardizes the unity of the nation is that when a Nigerian president is appointed from the North, he allocates most of the key government offices to northerners who are mostly Muslims, and when a president is appointed in the South, most of the key government offices are allocated to the Southerners who are mostly Christians. So, geographical divisions and religious diversity have constitute barriers that could not give room for the unity of the nation.[10]

At an interview, Buba Galadima submitted that "Nigerian political leaders cannot unite their followers or subjects to be one if they themselves are divided against one another and partial in their undertakings. A leader who says "do what I say, not what I do" cannot be respected by his followers."[11] Agreeing with the opinion of Galadima above, Joe Ajaero says, the most powerful influence on an organization's culture is the example the boss lives out for the team to see. To him, leadership and good governance are crucial to realizing any giant stride taken in pursuit of development anywhere in the world, Nigeria is not an exception. Nigeria needs sound ethical political leadership like Nehemiah that was rooted in respect, selfless service, justice, honesty and community bond. Leaders who place fairness at the center of decision making, including the challenging task of being fair to individuals as well as to the common interest of the community they serve.[12]

In an interview with Wole Soyinka, he avers that Nigeria has been polarized along

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party lines since it is a multi-party nation. Members of a political party, both ruling and opposition no longer have the interest of the nation at heart but their own party interest. General elections have become a do-or-die affair. All sorts of nefarious acts are perpetrated by political parties to make sure they win elections. Losers of elections result to violence, thus creating divisions among the masses and party supporters. To him, leaders should have good moral conduct and ethical responsibilities to enable them attend to the demands, concerns, needs, and problems of the citizens in the country. [13]

According to James White, Nehemiah was an agent of change that liberated his nation out of her deplorable condition. For many years things stood still in Jerusalem, his father's land. Her wall (security) fell and her gates were burnt by their enemies. The Jews accepted their helplessness until Nehemiah took it upon himself to lead the transformation of the deplorable situation. He threw off all the pleasure he was enjoying as a governor in Babylon and chose to identify with his people at Jerusalem in rebuilding the broken wall and restoring true Yahwahism. His patriotism and dynamic leadership style can never be overemphasized.[14]

The present and past political leaders in Nigeria seem to have failed to provide quality leadership capable of addressing numerous challenges confronting the country. Many of them are unable to set in place transparent and accountable institutions capable of securing economic progress, governing effectively, and protecting their citizens. If the political leaders in Nigeria would lean from the leadership style of Nehemiah and be patriotic, only then can Nigeria be great again.

The Man Nehemiah: His Background

Nehemiah was a Jew, a layman, not a priest like Ezra nor a Prophet like Malaci. He was born and brought up in the land of captivity. His father's name was Hachaliah (Neh. 1:1). He was a trusted and faithful servant of king Artexerxes. He was the king's cup bearer and his name means'Yahaweh comforts.' Nehemiah was a younger contemporary of Ezra. He was the writer of the Book named after him, The Book of Nehemiah. The mention of King Darius, the Second of Persia in Nehemiah 12:22 indicated that Nehemiah must have lived around 5th century B.C.[15]

It was evident that in about 445BC the Jews had already being in Jerusalem for about ninety years. However, a number of them had remained in Babylon and Persia. One of these Jews still living in Persia was Nehemiah who was born in the land. Nehemiah was a dynamic man who was in the service of the royal house in Persia. He was elevated to the position of cup bearer to the king. Henry Willmington has referred to this position as personal press secretary and Valet to king Artaxerxes, the monarch of Persian Empire.[16]

Most scholars believe that Nehemiah was a real historical figure and that the Nehemiah memoir, is historically reliable.[17] Upon been saddened and challenged by the desperate need about Jerusalem's wall-less and defenseless city, Nehemiah left his comfortable seat and got appropriate permission from the Persian king to lead in the

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rebuilding of the broken wall of his father land. He had great burden to rescue his father land from total destruction. He practically led his people not only to restore his country's lost glory but to reform the nation.

The end of the work according to Turnbull 'marked a transition period in the life and work of the city of Jerusalem and for Nehemiah.[18] Nehemiah is venerated today as a Catholic saint, where his feast day is 13th July. He is also considered a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church, where his feast day is 17th December .[19]

Nehemiah's Dynamic Leadership Role in Ancient Israel: A Model for Nigeria's Political Leaders

In Nigeria, many political leaders have failed to harness the resources and the ingenuity of the people for national development. The nature of political leadership became a problem as most of them lost or lacked control of effective leadership. This led to the scramble for state resources to suit their personal desires. Femi Falana attests that, corruption and lack of vision among past and present leaders of Nigeria culminate to hamper any meaningful effort in the quest for good governance in the country. It is often said that no country can develop beyond the level of its leadership. Nigeria needs committed leaders who will govern with integrity and doggedly influence its human and natural resources toward the actualization of sustainable national development.[20] The 'walls' of Nigeria could be said to have broken down and therefore, rebuilt are grossly needed.

Nehemiah as passion and patriot

The opening verse of Nehemiah indicate the passion and concern Nehemiah had for his beloved country because it reflected in the sober mood that he put up when he got the bad news of the deplorable condition in his country. The prominent position that he was occupying in the foreign land became nothing to him. He left the comfortable position to identify with his people who were in problems. What a good quality expected of a leader. Most political leaders in Nigeria are neither willing to serve nor patriotic but interested in looting the public treasury. For example, on Chanel Telivision of June, 2018, list of political leaders alleged for money looters from Nigeria was read by Lai Mohammed at a press conference in Lagos.[21] The affection and passion of these people for the welfare of their subjects cannot be seen as paramount but rather a selfishness attitude.

David Oyedepo was reported to have said "many of our political leaders are exposed to conducive environment and good governance in some western worlds but instead of using their exposure to develop Nigeria, some have been arrested by the Economic and Finance Crime Control (EFCC) for embezzlements and for money laundry in foreign nations. Nehemiah did not do that but made use of the opportunity he had properly in the foreign land to develop his father's land. He took advantage of it and acted appropriately. He gave in all he had by using his influence and power not only to get the wall of his country rebuilt, but reforming the religion of his people."[22]

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This character is worthy of emulation for Nigeria political leaders. They must use their exposures and influences to develop Nigeria, not to impoverish them.

Identification with his people

Although, Nehemiah was not personally responsible for the downfall of his country, he identified with his people in the deplorable condition they found themselves. His expression in his prayers to God was "we have acted very wickedly towards you (God), We have not obeyed thy commands.... (Neh.1:7). Primate Ayodele remarked that it has been a common practice in Nigeria, for incumbent political leaders to point accusing fingers to past leaders such as President, Governor or even a political party to have been responsible for the deplorable condition of the nation. This type of attitude is not accepted because the purpose of choosing another leader is to correct or improve what is on the ground in the state or nation. Nehemiah neither exonerates himself nor point accusing finger to any one or group of people who must have caused the downfall of his country.[23] This virtue is worthy of emulation for Nigeria political leaders. It is very wrong for our leaders to be apportioning blames on past leaders that they are responsible for the destruction of the nation's economy and yet everyone can see clearly that they themselves are living in luxury while the ruled are living in abject penury.

A strategist

More so, Henry Rowley has identified Nehemiah as a great strategist leader in the way that he handled the circumstances that he found himself.[28] He was proactive in managing the situation. As a good leader, he personally took an adequate inspection and survey of the level of the damage done to his father land in the night to avoid any unnecessary alarm. He desired to plan without any possible leakage of his plan to the enemy. Not only that, he did the survey of the Southern part where the wall was still standing as well. This act of leadership is highly recommended for Nigeria political leaders. Serious planning and monitoring of projects must be done at all levels.[24]

Mover and planner

Nehemiah was a leader that carried his subject along in the planning of the rebuilding of the wall. This was why Mic Breneman described him as a mover and a doer.[25] In agreement with this, Henry Campbell identified twenty-one principles of Nehemiah's servant- leadership qualities in his book: *Nehemiah: Man in Charge*. Among them are:

> He established a reasonable and attainable goal. He had a sense of mission. He was willing to get involved. He rearranged his priority in order to accomplish his goal. He patiently waited for God's timing. He showed respect to his superior. He prayed at the crucial time and made his request with facts and graciousness. He was well prepared and thought of his needs in advance. He went through proper channel. He prayed and planed.[26]

It is unfortunate that many political leaders in Nigeria neither plan well nor carry peo-

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ple along in their planning. For instance, Femi Falana, describe the issue of oil subsidy removal by President Tinubu as one that is still generating problems today in Nigeria. Many citizens are of the view that not much planning, consultation and discussions with the Nigerians was done and hence the wrong approach to the removal. [27] Peter Obi, assert that in Nigeria, most of the policy makers as well as those involved in decision making are engaged in bribery, egoism, power, and trade liberalization. These are not the type of leaders Nigeria will love to have but a committed and those who respect the opinions of the people before taking decisions. [28]

Organizer and motivator

The third chapter which is devoted to the building of the walls is very instructive. The order of listing the people in chapter 2:16 is the priest first, the nobles, officials and the rest of the people. It was the High priest who rose first and build his portion and by his example, he led others to build. This motivated the people and some built double portions (3,11,21,24, 30). According to Adeboye, Nehemiah's active participation in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem is noteworthy. This is unlike many Nigeria leaders who would only give directive without thorough supervision of the task to be done; Nehemiah was actively involved in the project. He joined the team he organized to get the job done. The advantage of such active participation was enormous. He gave directive and led by example in the rebuilding the wall. The job was completed in good time.[29] If Nigeria political leaders would emulate this, this will put an end to embezzlement and diversion of projects' fund to private accounts. It will also help in fighting against using fake materials for carrying out public projects. Also, abandonment or incomplete projects will be a thing of the past in our land.

Provider of security and facilitator of political stability

Nehemiah 7:1-14 provide the desire of Nehemiah to see his state properly cared for. With the walls built, he felt that the city should be guarded not only by guards whom he had set but that the people themselves should be a part of the security of the state. In order to ensure the safety of persons and property, each citizen became part of the security system of the state. Apostle Suleiman avers "what Nehemiah did was similar to what many Nigerian citizens have been clamouring for such as having state police and vigilante groups to assist in solving the security challenges in Nigeria. The request for state police have neither been approved by political leaders nor vigilante groups considered for monthly salary to curb security problems in Nigeria. It might be well for leaders if the masses were so mobilized to be part of the security of the state." [30]

Nehemiah as a mover of a new concept for citizenship

Nehemiah was able to make people see themselves as belonging to their community, not because of religion, birth or any other qualification, but because they were citizens of their towns and cities. It is recorded that those who returned from Exile in the book of Extra, those whose names were not found in the geology of their families

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were excluded (2:59, 62, Neh. 7). The registration according to Ezra, was by fathers' houses. By this, a new concept of citizenship seems to have began by Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was able to unite his country because he was a man of integrity and he had confidence in himself; he was transparent and sincere. He meant what he said and he said what he meant. Many Nigerian political leaders lack attributes. They lack confidence in themselves, and this affects the confidence in their followers in their leadership. The confidence of leaders permeates the led. Hence, John Onaiyekan remarked that "some Nigerian leaders verbally emphasize the unity of the nation but they have a wicked and secrete agenda behind the curtain; they speak positively but act negatively."[31] The statement of Jesus which says "if a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit" (Matt. 15:14) comes true on such leaders. Nigerian leaders have to cooperate with one another before they will be able to unite the nation.

Nehemiah as resolute upholder of the law of Yahweh

Nehemiah made the people accepted the Torah as the guiding spirit of the community. The people saw the Torah as the means that each person accepted that they are related to the other. They were to be a community of the Torah just as the Quamranites came to regard themselves as a community of the Torah. They further agreed that on the basis of the Torah, they recognised their obligations to each other as coming from the Torah (5:12). The people agreed to care for the temple priests, Levites and sacrifices, to forgo debts owed them and above all, to have nothing to do with foreigners either to marry their daughters or give their daughters to them (13:25). Primate Ayodele says, though we have either Christians or Muslims in Nigeria who claim to know God, yet there seems to be no reflection of that in their character when it comes to running the affairs of the country. Words in the religious book by which they take oath of office do not seem to be regarded as soon as they get to office. Many political leaders in Nigeria have lost conscience and became occultic in their practices. Nigerian political leaders must be those who would lead their electorates in obeying the words of God.[32] As servant leaders, they must not only create enabling environment for the studying of God's word, but must also lead in obeying it.

Nehemiah's determination and focus to achieve his goal

A common trend in politics includes pulling and destroying opponents either with words, write-ups or physical attacks. For the few political leaders that are good in Nigeria, they must learn to become unstoppable like Nehemiah who was able to overcome the attack from his three arch enemies and that of Shemaiah's. They must be focused and forge ahead even in the face of great opposition that would certainly arise. Nehemiah did not allow the opposition of Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and Shemiah to deter him nor derail him (6:1-14). McConville has rightly noted that 'the real test of a leader is how he or she faces crises and react to opposition.[33] The ridicule and armed resistance used by these enemies of progress to stop the reconstruction work were

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unable to stop Nehemiah and his team. Nehemiah became unstoppable and so, the self-defense he led his people to achieve his goal is worthy of emulation.

Viewing all these and many others identified in this paper, it will not be out of place to recommend the dynamic leadership roles of Nehemiah for the political leaders in Nigeria. This will indeed go a long way to help in all ramifications.

Conclusion

In this paper, leadership is considered the major problem in Nigeria. Nehemiah style of leadership is taken as a model for political leaders in Nigeria. He was able to move the people to achieve political and economic independence for themselves when he made them see the need to build the wall of Jerusalem. It has been discovered through the leadership style of Nehemiah that nationalism is not the ability to shout at roof tops but in peoples demonstration of the same and devotion to the nation. Nehemiah taught the Jews what it were to be private citizens, who though their wealth serve the nation, and thus made their nation happier and richer, It was not a nation of grabbers but of suppliers of her needs and those who are at every point , were willing to die for the good of the state.

Nehemiah 6:15-16 describes the consummation of the whole task of Nehemiah; he came to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. It was not an easy task; enemies from inside and outside tried to stop the work, serious internal economic problems developed. In spite of all these attacks and setbacks the wall was finished. His leadership style followed the pattern of Christ. Jesus declared in Mark 10:45 that he came to serve and not to be served. Paul corroborated this in Philippians 1:4 when he pointed out that "each of you should be concerned not only about your own interest, but in the interest of others as well." All these and many more are the qualities displayed by Nehemiah as discussed in this paper. He emptied himself like Jesus did (Phil. 2:6). Though, being a governor took the position of a servant in leading his people to rebuild the broken wall of his fatherland, Jerusalem.

These and many more qualities are revealed in this paper and are expected of Nigerian political leaders if Nigeria will be liberated. While the paper recommends that our political leaders must stop becoming 'Lord' over their subjects but servants that occupy their time with serving their people, it concluded that the problem of oppression of the masses, exploitation and corruption, looting of public treasury, misuse of position and power would all be over if Nigerian political leaders emulate the servant-leadership style of Nehemiah.

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