

GENUINE PATRIOTISM AND GOOD LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

A good citizen loves his or her country and wants to see good leaders who will promote justice, peace, development and tranquility in the country. At this stage of the history of Nigeria, it is good to reflect with readers of the *Encounter Journal* on how this can be translated into reality. Thus, the following reflections will begin with a consideration of the social nature of the human person. There follows the importance of the political community with its relationship to the human person. Patriotism naturally presents itself. The individual has therefore to engage in political participation. This demands the action of good leadership if the best results are to be achieved.

Man's Social Nature

The human being is created with a social nature. The newborn child absolutely needs other human beings in order to survive and to grow. The mother is the first immediate person who helps the child to live, to breathe, eat and drink and eventually to see, to talk, to walk and to begin to behave as a member of the family. The father, the brothers and sisters if any, the relatives and other people come in as helpers on the pilgrimage that is life on earth. This social nature is a quality inbuilt in human nature by God the Creator. It is not something added on. Every human being needs other human beings in order to grow, to develop one's talents and potentialities, to become all that the person can become, to reach the height of one's potential. It follows that society is natural to humans. Society begins in the family and spreads to the kindred, the village, the city and eventually the political community that is the state. There are also other societies which cater for other dimensions of life such as religion, cultural interests, science and technology, the arts and professions, work and leisure.

The Political Community and the Human Person

The existence of the political community and its proper functioning are basic needs for proper human development. There are some fundamental services which are expected from the political community or the state. Examples are water,

electricity supply, roads, schools, hospitals, communications facilities and especially social security which enables citizens to live in peace and reasonable calm. The individual will find it difficult to carry out professional engagements in agriculture, medicine, law, trade, commerce and politics if these fundamental requirements are not in place. The state is needed in order to guarantee their provision in a sufficient and stable way. That is why the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* says that “the political community, a reality inherent in mankind, exists to achieve an end otherwise unobtainable: the full growth of each of its members, called to cooperate steadfastly for the attainment of the common good, under the impulse of their natural inclinations towards what is good and true” (384).

Patriotism

Here arises the importance of the virtue of patriotism. This is the love of one’s own country and consequent readiness to contribute to its welfare. It is one’s country that gives to that person birth, nurture, conditions and possibilities for growth, education, association with other citizens and, even more basically, soil in which to live and move about. The virtue of piety includes love of one’s own country.

In the Lord’s Prayer, the *Our Father*, Jesus teaches us to pray that God’s will may be done on earth as it is in heaven (cf. Mt. 6:10). The psalmist prays: “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God” (Ps. 143:10). The longest Psalm, 119 (118) is punctuated in every verse with an expressed desire of the soul to do the will of God. This love of the order established by God is vocalized in such concepts as God’s law, ways, precepts, will, word, statutes, testimonies or commandments. “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart”, prays the psalmist in Psalm 40:8. The point being made here is that the psalmist shows a readiness to do God’s will. The citizen who wants to respect the order established by God in creating humans with a social nature will not fail to love his or her country.

The virtue of patriotism, however, has limits. While one should love one’s country, it should not be forgotten that other countries also exist. Nationalism is often applied to that excessive love of one’s own country which does not leave the necessary room for the rights of other countries. The Second Vatican Council, while appreciating the importance of patriotism, advises against excesses of this attitude: “Citizens should develop a generous and loyal devotion to their country, but without any narrowing of mind. In other words, they must always look simultaneously to the welfare of the whole human family, which is tied together by the manifold bonds linking races, peoples, and nations” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 75). “As good citizens, they should practice true and effective patriotism. At the same time, let them altogether avoid racial prejudice and bitter nationalism, fostering instead a universal love

for man” (*Ad Gentes*, 15), so the Vatican Council Decree insists in its directive on missionary activity.

Healthy patriotism also directs that no matter how convinced a citizen may be about his or her views on what the state should do or not do, that citizen should not deny other citizens the right to have their own opinions which could be different. It is the mark of a good patriot to be flexible and to be ready to cooperate with people who have other views. The Second Vatican Council stresses this point: “Christians should recognize that various legitimate though conflicting views can be held concerning the regulation of temporal affairs. They should respect their fellow citizens when they promote such views honourably even by group action. Political parties should foster whatever they judge necessary for the common good. But they should never prefer their own advantage over this same common good” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 75).

Political Participation

From the preceding considerations, it follows that citizens have the duty and the right to participate in the running of the earthly city. All should take due interest in what has to do with the political community. Some people can write and make useful presentations on community needs and aspirations. Others can help people who have not done much schooling to appreciate the problems and challenges facing a country, to realize that there are many component groups or ethnic realities in the state, and to see the need of cooperation between the citizens. Parochialism and tribalism are easy temptations which do much damage.

Each country decides on the type of government that suits it. The choice of the people who are to be entrusted with political authority becomes very important. Political elections, therefore, deserve great attention. Wisdom is needed to help people to elect only the best of the honest and capable people available. If people allow themselves to be influenced by bribes or other selfish considerations, so that they elect unsuitable people, they should not be surprised later that the community is saddled with a dishonest or inefficient government.

The functioning of political parties has been found of help in many democracies. This is on condition that each party has a clearly thought-out policy and proposal for the betterment of society. People should join a political party because of their conviction that its manifesto is what attracts them. To adhere to a party because of what one hopes to gain, or to change party in the hope of some immediate profit, is to manifest a mean and selfish mentality. People should not vote such mercenaries into power because no one can give what he does not have.

Able and efficient people should be willing to serve the political community as elected officers. If good people do not stand election, the society should not

be surprised if its rulers are mediocres, or worse. Politics is not dirty, but some politicians could be dirty. The solution is not to condemn politics but to practise it with honour and efficiency.

The Second Vatican Council is very firm and clear in its encouragement of good political engagement. “The Church regards as worthy of praise and consideration the work of those who, as a service to others, dedicate themselves to the welfare of the state and undertake the burdens of this task...Let those who are suited for it, or can become so, prepare themselves for the difficult but most honourable art of politics. Let them work to exercise this art without thought of personal convenience and without benefit of bribery. Prudently and honourably let them fight against injustice and oppression, the arbitrary rule of one man or one party, and lack of tolerance. Let them devote themselves to the welfare of all sincerely and fairly, indeed with charity and political courage” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 75). Would we not have a new Nigeria if all politicians heeded this call?

While citizens have rights, such as the right to receive good and efficient services, to have social security and to live in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility, they also have responsibilities, such as to respect public authorities, to pay taxes and to discharge other social duties. Saint Peter tells the early Christians: “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right” (1Pet. 2:13-14). Civil obedience is insisted on by the Letter to the Hebrews: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will have to give an account” (Heb. 13:17). Saint Paul in his Letter to the Romans recognizes authority as coming from God and therefore shows the duty of obedience: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment” (Rm. 13:1-2). Saint Paul goes so far as to include the duty to pay taxes: “Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to who respect is due, honour to whom honour is due” (Rm. 13:7).

Good Leadership

If a society is to function well, good leadership is required, whether the society be political, religious, cultural or otherwise. Some of the qualities required in a good leader are the following:

- A good leader should have clear ideas on the needs of his or her society, together with a good plan on objectives to be aimed at, and in what stages. Readiness to

sacrifice time, treasure and talent in order to promote the aims of the society is needed. So is the preparedness to serve rather than to be served, to be available rather than to dominate, to listen to people who have contrary views rather than to surround oneself with sycophants and praise singers.

- A good leader does not seek to be the only capable leader. He or she builds up other leaders and possible successors and is happy when other people perform well. Words of praise and appreciation are not drowned out by selfishness, myopia, jealousy, envy, clannishness or tribalism.
- A good leader is honest and transparent in matters financial. He or she is aware of Saint Paul's warning to his disciple Timothy that "the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs" (1Tm 6:10). Many societies would function much better if all leaders and people in public office heeded this warning.
- A good leader does not concentrate attention on self and does not want to become an idol of the people. Rather he or she directs them to the aim of the society and rejoices when the society is functioning well, with or without him or her. Indeed one of the best proofs of a good leader is the proper functioning of the community when that leader is no longer in office.

As Nigeria moves forward on her pilgrim way, our prayer is that God may bless and continue to bless this country with genuine patriotism and dynamic leadership.