



The Jewish Harvest Legislation Of The Holiness Code And Its Significance To Economic Empowerment Of The Less-Privileged In African Society/ Gombe State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Scholarly works have been produced on economic management by scholars using various approaches. But this study is an attempt to consider the Ancient Israelite Harvest Legislation in which the needy in society were treated; a significant event which African Society (Gombe state as a home front) could adopt in her treatment of the Less-privileged in society. The Less-privileged in society are common in the State; hence this research examines the factors responsible for the situation of this group of persons in society with the aim of identifying their conceptions and treatment. The research focuses on the Harvest Legislation of the Holiness Code, the conceptions and treatment of the less-privileged and their empowerment. The work made use of electronic/ library sources and empiricism/ oral interview with the less-privileged in Gombe; as a means of data collection. The approach adopted for analyses is the descriptive approach which describes and analyzes facts concerning the conceptions and treatment of the less-privileged in society. The literature reviewed and interaction with certain less-privileged persons in Gombe revealed that there were many widows, orphans, aged and the poor in Ancient Israel who were not given much attention; so also in African Society (Gombe State) there are such less-privileged persons who include the blind, the crippled, aged, widows,

the fatherless and the orphans that are not given much attention. The study recommends that there are ample ways of empowering such group of persons by the Government of Gombe State to alleviate their deplorable situation. The Ancient Near East legislation of provision for such people and the Harvest Legislation in Ancient Israel are methods worth emulation by African society/Gombe...

Key Words: *Holiness code, Harvest legislation, Less-privileged, Empowerment, Conceptions Treatment,*

Introduction

The conditions of governance of every nation or society as spelt out in their various constitutions are supposed to take care of every citizen of a nation without disparity as to whether a person is a male or female; white or black; fit or disabled, etc. History has shown that certain cultures have tried to live by their constitutions, temporal or spiritual in order to satisfy their societies. Others have over looked and wilfully neglected such guidelines (constitutions) for selfish ends and greediness, to the extent that such societies or nations remained devastated and identified as “under developed”, “developing” or “third world” nations. The good God made and placed every nation and people in their appropriate environments, endowed with every opportunity for successful living (Gen 2:8-17). To be poor and undeveloped therefore is like

to accuse God of selfishness in his attributes of love and providence to man. God created man in his image and likeness, endowed with creativity and knowledge to make provisions for any requirement of his society. This should have been the legacy adopted by leaders in their societies. The economic position of every nation determines her strength and weakness; for it is the backbone of every Nations and societies all over the world. Where this is not obtainable, it is clear that leadership has failed in her operation.

It is a fact that each society also has her own approach to economic management. However, not all approaches usually served well for the purpose for which they are meant for. It is also true that no society is free from economic huddles since all societies are managed globally by

humans who are fallible. No nation or society is as well free from the existence of the less-privileged among her populace. Nations and societies alike are free to try the implementation of any suitable approach that can bring satisfactory result in the management of her resources. Literature reviewed revealed that the Ancient Near Eastern Cultures experienced certain insensitivity to the situation of the less-privileged before the period of their great Kings (Hammurabi, Lipit-Ishtar and Ur-Namu) of the 1700 BC (Baker 1992).These kings legislated provisions for the less-privileged including widows, orphans, the fatherless and even harlots, to justify fair leadership as directed by their gods. Such practice spread all over the Ancient Near East as the cradle of human society. The less privileged in Israel had socio-economic needs of protection, provisions and marital love. They had no husband, parents and relations that would care for them. Some of the people who were aged could not be able to provide for themselves. The poor needed more provisions for their families. The situation of women was pathetic in Israel. The Old Testament reveals that the daughters of Zelophehad were denied inheritance of their father's assets (Num 27).

THE HOLINESS CODE

Before the establishment of the Holiness Code in Israel the Bible reveals to her readers that in the primeval period God made provisions for the first man in the Garden of Eden, to serve as a model for humans to copy in the management of societies. This was the basis from which every society learnt to care for the populace. The Holiness Code as God's guide for Israel was a collection of laws for governance. It comprised of secular, ritual, moral and festive regulations (Lev 17-26). It was meant for the separation, protection and regulation of religious and secular practices of the covenanted people of Yahweh. The Holiness Code could be considered as the Ancient Israelite national constitution, with provisions for religious and moral laws (Lev 19) which also had penalties for defaulters (Lev 20). The religious and moral laws helped in regulating the operations of the priests in offerings, religious festivals, sacrifices, food types, descent sexual love, priestly conduct and economic regulations (Lev 21-23). The Holiness Code presupposes the Biblical approach and response towards all human endeavours in life.

HARVEST LEGISLATION

An essential aspect of the Holiness Code which took care of socio-economic management in early Israel was the Harvest Legislation. It made provisions for the administration of food, justice, protection of the poor and religious leaders.

The Harvest Legislation law made it necessary for the people to bring their produce of various cereals produced and owned annually, to the Levites who were in charge of religious affairs to store them for the use of the priests and the empowerment of the needy in society. Collections included grains, fruits and animals; and these were used accordingly. In addition to the collections made, farmers were obliged to leave the edges of their farm and some fruits of their orchards un-harvested for the widows, orphan and the strangers to glean on; for they do not have husbands and relations that would provide them food (Lev 23.19-22;Num 28.26-31). This was the method of empowering the less-privileged in Ancient Israel; although insufficient, but it was a sign of fair treatment of the less-privileged in that society; for begging, looting or stealing was not common. The Old Testament also tells of the leadership style of Joseph the son of Jacob, 'how he played a great role in protecting and saving many lives when there was a famine in the land of Egypt. He used same method of pre-collection of grains to store for sale in the time of need (Gen 41:37-57)..

AFRICAN SOCIETY /GOMBE STATE

Before the European scramble for Africa (1885C.E), African states had their own way of managing their economy to the satisfaction of their citizens; for every member of the society struggled hard to earn a good living and community leaders managed their societies honestly. Their moral and just leadership was due to the fact that there was nothing like national or societal budgeting. But when Europe had contact with African communities, European desire to colonize them grew. European contact with West Africa at the coast increased to the point that various forms of trading activities ranging from slave-trade to raw materials developed. This was what led to the scramble for Africa and colonization. Having colonized African states, planning and budgeting became imperative in the colonies in order to construct rail lines and roads to ease movement to interior of Africa in order to encourage the production of raw materials for Europe (Olaniyan 210). This has been the legacy left for African societies to date. In West Africa for example, the colonial economic budgeting started immediately when Europeans discovered the fortunes of African societies which included hides, groundnuts, cocoa, and cotton, to name but few. Clearly observed, such budgets were largely beneficial to the colonial masters in developing their countries. For example in Nigeria, the stimulus to construct railroad to the North made series of survey work between 1890 and 1895. By

1913, construction of roads almost extended to almost all main areas of Nigeria; costing 6 -8,000,000 British pounds (Olaniyan 80-93)

After independence African leaders adopted a system of budgeting similar to that of the colonial masters with certain virus of economic infection that created a room for selfish ends that brought about the present predicaments of economic depression in African society, which led to the frequent loaning from International Monetary Fund and with such situation, only the privileged enjoy the proceeds from the nations' economy. The adoption of a new system of budgeting became the pit-fall of African economic decadence which most countries in African society are facing today. With this system of operation, the less=privileged including the aged, blind, crippled, the widows, orphans the unemployed youth, etc have suffered poverty since then to date; for the government has become insensitive to the cry of these group of people who are roaming the nooks and corners of the main cities of the society looking for what to eat.

DISCUSSION

The pre-colonial conceptions and treatment of the less-privileged was that in which each community or society took care of her invalid citizens. The aged were seen as weary from long existence planed by God; the crippled and the blind were seen caused by evil or accident and the widows and the orphans were seen as people who have been attacked by evil people or enemies. Most of them were considered as persons whose situations were due to misfortune in life. The society then was sensitive to the problems of the less-privileged either individually, family or community wise. With the inception of colonialism, African societies became insensitive to the empowerment needs of the less privileged in society. This group of persons need empowerment of various types including social and psychological empowerment (self actualization, employment, interaction with the able ones, encouragement, life partners, sexual satisfaction, etc); they need economic empowerment (food, dressing, shelter, good health, protection); they as well need literal empowerment (education, knowledge, mental development,) and they need recognition and legislation by government

The less-privileged in African society are found mostly in countries south of the Sahara; in Nigeria for instance this group of persons are usually found begging in the state capital cities. In Gombe state, they are usually found in the motor

parks, along the major streets, at the hospital gates, in the market places, etc. The researcher in discussing with some aged beggars at the hospital gate one early morning as he went to see his doctor discovered that they came from far distance to beg for alms. The beggars' justification for begging is that through begging they earn their living. Asking if they have no children, the beggars said they have but no attention is given them by the children. Again, along one major street of the city, the researcher met a young man whose legs are paralyzed and his friends held him by the legs while he walked with his hands begging (a similar scenario was seen along Terminus street in Jos, Plateau State). These and many empirical cases are found in our state capitals and major towns. The questions that border the researcher are whether such people have relations; and if they do have, why do the relations allow them to beg with all the hardship? Is the government aware of their existence as part of the economy; if they are, what constitutional right do these less-privileged persons have? What provision has the government legislated for them? It is very clear that government has neglected the less-privileged in society (Odufowokan 6, 10). According to the Third World Quarterly, the contemporary state of Sub-Saharan Africa is not African because it descends from arbitrary colonial administrative units designed as instruments of domination, oppression and exploitation (1-3) But even though Nigeria and other African societies are experiencing economic depression in the 21st century as a result of economic mismanagement, this does not mean that the human economy has to suffer for in place of certain unnecessary government pursuance like the exuberant salaries of legislators, In summary the less-privileged in African society have suffered negligence for long when compared to the Ancient Near Eastern Cultures. Colonial system of governance .has precipitated the insensitivity of the society to the plight of the needy in the modern period than in past generations. Perhaps this is due to the fact that leaders have preoccupied themselves with a strange cultural change without assessment. The researcher recommends that the government can consider the actualization of human rights to all citizens regardless of conditions of disability. Government can also encourage the communities to revive the old type of African communal life where people cared or relations. To succeed in doing so the government has to take lead of such humanitarian attitude as an example for communities to follow. Government can provide certain percentage of the annual employment of civil servants to the widows, fatherless and orphans who are young. The aged persons can have the privilege of receiving

token amount of money as allowance monthly from the Local Government Areas by improving the grants given them.. The orphans and the fatherless children can be given scholarship to enable them go for further education. Widows who have interest in business and farming can obtain loans and fertilizer at a subsidized rate to empower them. To reduce the sporadic flow of beggars in our streets, government can categorically provide them with centres where they can be cared for. It has been observed by the researcher that some of the beggars are richer than those who give them alms in the pretence of disability. To discourage this practice, the government can collect revenue from them monthly. Some of the causes of disability are caused by the affected persons through substance taking and civil crisis. To curtail this government can promulgate laws that can include banning of the sale of such substances and also a law that which can de-turban community leaders who allow their societies engage in community crises.

CONCLUSION

The factors responsible for the growing population of the less-privileged are many (sickness, accidents, unemployment, air pollution, food types, et) and economic recession due to corrupt attitude of the society. To minimize the number of the less-privileged in society, the society herself (people) should support their poor relations first before government legislate provisions for them. The Harvest Legislation began with the in gathering of produce before they were shared to the needy; The Egyptians contributed or gathered grains before Joseph sold it to the people. Leaving the solution to the government alone may not be the fastest and prompt solution.

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