

WHO WILL DELIVER NIGERIA?

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When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the nation was in a jubilant mood after years of subjugation by the British colonial masters. For many, colonialism was an albatross to the Nation's growth and development. To them, there was no way Nigeria could develop if she remained dominated by the colonial masters who were interested in Nigeria for selfish reasons. Hence, the only way Nigeria could attain the height of development and earn respect from the international community was to be independent and sovereign. Sovereignty meant Nigeria will be managed and governed by Nigerians. A Nigeria being ruled by Nigerians meant the end to oppression, discrimination, exploitation and inequality that obtained in Nigeria prior to independence.

However, contrary to expectations, oppression and inequality have worsened in post-colonial Nigeria. As a result, the nation is plagued by many tragedies without any panacea in sight. With these tragedies, the Nation has been reduced to a theater of the ridiculous climaxing into a tragic-comic drama. But first, what are the tragedies in this drama?

It is a tragedy that we cannot boast of modern health facilities in our hospitals. Majority of the citizens lack access to proper health care, but our leaders run to the best hospitals in Europe and America to be treated for minor headaches caused by mathematical calculations and equations in arriving at a formula for sharing the nation's wealth.

Is it not a tragedy that in the 21st century our roads are synonymous with death traps? There are no concrete plans to rehabilitate bad roads or construct new ones to ease the burden of traffic and vehicular congestion. Is it not a tragedy that 54 years after Independence, Nigeria struggles to generate 4,000 megawatts of electricity? It is a tragedy that Nigeria cannot produce a University amongst the best 500 Universities in

the world. In the recent release of the annual Shanghai Jiao listing of the global top 500 Universities, no Nigeria University was ranked. On that same list were four South African Universities; Universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand, KwaZulu-Natal and Stellenbosch. Also listed was the University of Cairo in Egypt. Obviously, this is a blot on Nigeria as the self-acclaimed giant of Africa.

Is it not a tragedy that innocent citizens lose their lives in a bid to secure employment? Have we forgotten the disastrous nationwide test conducted by the Nigeria Immigration Service? It is a tragedy that rigging and other electoral malpractices still hold sway in Nigeria. Election is neither free nor fair; intimidation from touts hired by opposing parties is a common attribute, snatching of ballot boxes and the use of security forces by incumbent administration to oppress opposing candidates and their supporters are common features. Is it not a tragedy that the activities of Boko Haram have become a norm? Our leaders whom we have given the mandate to ensure the security of lives and properties seem to have no concrete strategies on how the nation can overcome this debacle.

Is it not a tragedy that bad leadership is a Nigerian problem? This is the greatest of all the tragedies because it created all the aforementioned tragedies including corruption. Corruption has become an inescapable part of our daily lives in Nigeria. Yet, our dear president made the infamous statement that "corruption is not our problem". Mr. President needs to be informed that corruption is a serious business in Nigeria. Take the Boko Haram menace as an example, the Nigeria Army lacks sophisticated artilleries to combat and counter the activities of Boko Haram. Whatever happened to the trillions of naira budgeted for security over the years, only "corruption" can explain. Boko Haram has not only exposed the deficiencies in the Nigeria Army but also the height corruption has attained in Nigeria.

Now, what makes the Nigerian drama tragi-comic? In the face of these tragedies, we (Nigerians) are perplexed and overwhelmed that we have no clue or answers to lead us

out of these political, economic and social quagmires. Interestingly or comically if you will reason, most Nigerians have turned to religion to placate their difficulties in this harsh and obviously difficult times. At any gathering of religious zealots, after discussing the tragedies in Nigeria and without any concrete attempt to proffer solutions, we hear them conclude with the statement "God will deliver Nigeria".

The big question I ask such religious zealots is this: Is God to blame for the failing Nigerian state? No! they often retort. Therefore, I wonder why they think God will help solve our tragedies. God will not deliver Nigeria from her many problems. The creator has endowed human beings with the wisdom and ability to discern that which is good from bad. Thus, the choice is left to humans to apply their discretion in choosing between what is 'right' or 'wrong'. Unfortunately, in this part of our world, most people have chosen to follow the wicked path. The attitude of corruption amongst our leaders is a reflection of our society. Corruption remains popular under every political administration with different rulers and leaders. Does this not translate to the fact that the average Nigerian is corrupt? And if we must admit as we should, most people who condemn our leaders do so out of envy and being left out from sharing in the "national cake".

We have seen situations where those who criticized the government were handed portfolios by same government and they didn't blink an eyelid before accepting such compromising offers. Is it not an irony that the deeper we get involved with religion the deeper our tragedies? Have we asked ourselves why western countries do not emphasise on religion the way Nigerians do and yet their societies are far developed, margins apart from Nigeria. The answer is simple; their leaders think positively and take positive actions. I must add that the thoughts and actions of their leaders are the reflections of the civility in their larger society. Civility is a noble culture. Until we imbibe such culture in Nigeria, we will remain far behind in growth and development.

The bottom line is this; there is no divine solution to Nigeria's woes. Let's imagine God answers the prayers of the zealots and the present set of corrupt leaders are wiped out. What about those who will replace them? Will they come from the moon or mars? Have they not been infected with the virus of corruption, self-aggrandizement and naked lust for power? At this point, I dare say our problem is fundamental; born out of our orientation, perception and way of life as a people. Most Nigerians condemn the corruption in the political class while in their own little way they are involved in the same act. To such people, corruption is limited to stealing billions of naira from government funds. To make it clear, Corruption is an act defined by wrong doing and not the magnitude of the wrong exhibited nor where such act was committed; either public or private sphere. As such, there is no small or big corruption; neither is there good or bad corruption. Corruption cannot be justified. It is what it is.

Nigerians are quick to condemn the police for receiving bribes forgetting that police officers do not indulge in this act in isolation. What about the giver of the bribe? What about those employers who demand more than the qualified certificates from female applicants before they are employed? What about directors in various organizations that receive kickbacks as the basis for awarding contracts. Some years back, a disheartening level of corruption was exposed in the banking sector. Who would have ever imagined that corruption was deeply entrenched in the banking sector? What about artisans who tell chronic lies to reap-off clients? What about corruption within Ngos and religious bodies set up to fulfill the selfish desires and financial satisfaction of their founders and cohorts?

The list is endless and it is a whole circle of corruption scripted and interpreted by Nigerians who call on God day and night to deliver Nigeria from troubles. If religion and prayers were the yardstick to measure development and the progress of a nation, Nigeria will rank number one. Ineptitude, corruption and avarice have been systematically injected into our body metabolism. Sadly, if we do not act urgently and as

required the next generation will be infected. Genuine change can only begin by admitting that we all are actors in this protracted drama.

Positively, we need to amend our ways by building a sincere foundation laid on integrity, honesty and discipline. There is a need for Nigerians to be holistically re-orientated. Certainly, this calls for a "mental revolution", meaning changing our perception and the way we think. Until then, this avalanche of tragedies will remain unabated.