

Dr Samuel Odunaike Memorial Lecture, 2001.

Nigeria: Restoring The Glory - Reflections by Bunmi Oni

My contribution in this discussion will be in four tracks:

1. Studies of the history of nations and their development reveal a very consistent pattern
 - When a people willingly acknowledge God, they prosper. Conversely, they suffer tremendously when they don't
 - The leader is usually in a very unique position. He can either attract the glory of God or repel it. That is why people rejoice when the righteous rule, and they mourn when the unrighteous are in power. There will always be willing support for a visionary leader. Also the leader must understand that he cannot lead the people beyond where he has been; and he cannot demand from the people what he is unwilling to subject himself to. God will raise support for a willing leader who truly desires to lead his people aright, as He did with Moses. Even when Moses was weary, God provided people to keep his hands lifted up all through a battle until the nation of Israel won the battle.
 - The glory of God is borne by people, not by machines or hi-tech devices. That is the lesson David learnt in bringing the Ark of God back to Jerusalem. The Ark was the manifestation of the presence or the glory of God. Things did not go right until people who had been specially prepared for that purpose carried the Ark.
2. Since the success of the nation depends so much on the people, leaders must examine the development model they adopt for their nation. Our development in Nigeria appears to have been based only on building physical infrastructure, building things. True development must be based on investment in the human capital, and that is why development today is measured in terms of Human Development Indices, HDI, or quality of life indices. I believe that one of the major reasons we have failed in our development effort is that we have not invested in the Nigerian people. I have often heard it said that implementation is our problem in Nigeria. Of course it will continue to be. We have not prepared the people who have the capability to design a strategy for the development of society and implement such strategy. Our HDIs compare very badly with those of our peers around

the world. Perhaps one of the vivid demonstrations of the defect in our development model is that the people for whom they are meant destroy all the structures we have built over the years. We can recount examples of Festac Village, 1004 housing estate, the high-rise buildings in the cities, which all become slums or are rendered dysfunctional within a very short time after people have been moved into them. We have not invested in growing the quality of life of our people, and yet they are the bearers of the Glory of God. We will start the journey to restoring the glory when we start investing seriously in the people. Investment in the people means investment in education, health, and social security. We all know that the standards in these areas have fallen so badly.

3. Bringing the leadership and the people together, I believe that each has its responsibilities.

- a. Leadership.

I believe it is time for the leadership to make a concerted effort to return the nation back to God. The leadership of the country can begin this by calling a national day of repentance with fasting. Since we are conscious of the religious plurality in the nation, this is not necessarily asking everyone to do this the Christian way or in Church. It is simply calling attention to the need to repent of the wrongs that we have done in neglecting God and going our own ways over the years. It will also NOT require people to gather together in any particular format. Each PERSON simply reflects in his own way and prays to God for forgiveness. Such a day of repentance can precede our National Thanksgiving Day.

Secondly, leadership must invest like never before in education and health. That is why privatization and deregulation is so critical, because the sale of State-owned enterprises releases resources for investment in people. Moreover, the cumulative effect of the decadence in education is that graduates of our Colleges have not been educated. If I had my way, I would turn the NYSC programme into a finishing school for the next ten years, while the educational curriculum and standards of tuition are being upgraded. In the current NYSC scheme, youths who have not learnt very much on account of the poor educational standards are being deployed to teach our kids in schools!!!. Converting the NYSC year into a finishing school will enable us to make up the deficiencies in the current education we offer them, and update

them on Nigerian history, issues of social engineering, IT skills, modern global trends, etc.

The people

Restoring the glory will require individuals to make up their minds not to be a part of the decadence in the society. Each person must resolve to do the right thing at all times even if it hurts, and to shun corruption.

Secondly, people need to realize that their choice of leaders is a very important duty, as leaders determine their future. We must not mortgage the future of the country for temporary monetary gain. Our politicians have perfected the art of buying votes with small amounts of money. Our future cannot be for sale.

The parable of the trees told in Judges 9: 8-15 describes vividly our experience. The parable tells of a time the trees decided they wanted to appoint one of them king. They approached first the olive tree, then the fig tree and then the vine to be king. One after the other they declined the offer, preferring to stay in the role they were best suited for. Then they approached the bramble tree, which immediately accepted, promising what he could not deliver. The bramble tree gave the condition that if the trees wanted him to be king, they should all come and take shelter in his shadow, otherwise fire would break forth from the bramble and consume many things in its path. The truth is that the bramble tree has no shadow to offer, since it hardly has any leaves. Does it occur to us that those who have offered themselves for leadership positions in our country are people who, like the bramble tree, have nothing to offer?

Thirdly, we must learn that we can achieve much when we collaborate, and foster the unity of the country and the Church. President Truman said: "It is amazing how much you can achieve if you do not care who gets the credit".

4. Restoring the glory will require that we rebuild our economy, and adopt the necessary reform measures to release the energy of the people create economic activity. Government must vacate the commanding heights of the economy, and leave the private sector to be the engine of growth. The primary role of Government is to provide the enabling environment for entrepreneurs to thrive, since they are the creators of wealth.

Poverty alleviation is not distributing money. We increase poverty when we distribute money. Poverty alleviation is wealth creation, powered by job creation. There is no shortage on God's earth, and our people need not wallow in abject poverty as we have seen.

5. This lecture series is in memory of a man whom I knew and worked with fairly closely in the last twelve years of his life. Dr Odunaike understood the imperatives of building a nation. He recognized the context of national development and he worked tirelessly towards that purpose until his death. He was a man with fire in his belly.

Bunmi Oni
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