

Pathways to Survival in Nigeria

by Bishop F. O. Segun¹

A Review

Nothing can be said in criticism of anyone's attempt to find or show a pathway to survival for Nigeria today, for God and the rest of us all know that we find ourselves in a very critical stage of our development. And when I discover one who attempts to provide a solution with the help of the Word of God, I can only applaud such an intention, for it is not likely that a solution will be possible without input from that Source. So, thank you, Bishop Segun, for your timely attempt.

As to style, I find the booklet very pleasant reading. The reader is given many concrete stories, examples and various expressions to illustrate the various points the author is trying to get across. And though the Bishop could easily have used learned language, he chose to write simply so that all of us can understand him, as long as you know some English. Bishop Segun is a good writer and pleasant to read.

As over against those who like to blame either economic conditions or, even better, evil foreigners, for our predicament, the Bishop locates our problems in the spiritual realm. The first paragraph on p. 8 tells us that the "causes of our social ills ... result from spiritual disobedience. Because people's hearts are in the wrong places, the nation's life has gone astray." Right on. It is not our systems or organizations that are the basic problem, though problems do reside there as well. It is in our basic spiritual orientation that our problems must be solved. It is not that we cannot master the technicalities of building good roads or of running government departments and other institutions, but we invariably want to turn them into sources of private gain. *That's* where we must solve our predicament. The economic problems are there and so are the negatives caused by foreigners, but the question is whether those problems are not caused by the more basic spiritual one. Segun answers in the affirmative and I agree. We do not need new

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constitutions, new departments, constant re-organization or any other ameliorative; we need conversion, we need revival. Right on, Bishop.

Another aspect of the book I appreciate is the realization that religion and politics cannot be separated, contrary to the tradition of many denominations. "Religion and political institutions are intertwined," Segun asserts. There is or ought to be no "wall of separation" between the two. Political leaders are to obey God. The church needs to remind them of this obligation – as Segun does in this book. Mass evangelism is often looked upon as a non-political activity, but Segun recognizes that it can be a powerful tool to establish justice. The evangelism he favours is not one of merely spiritual pie in the sky. It must touch upon our problems and advance us towards a solution. Segun declares the church to be a "rebuke and a threat to every government" (p. 33). I affirm that such should be the case whenever a government becomes unjust.

There is so much wisdom here. Whereas we are constantly told that our solution lies in technology or in natural resources, Segun insists that our basic resource is people, particularly in good leaders. And that is so true. Take a country like The Netherlands. It is smaller than many Nigerian states. Its population is a mere 15 million and it has hardly any natural resources. Yet, it is a donor country to nations ten times larger than itself. Its secret? The character of its people. Nothing else. Segun's recognition of this is well taken.

One area to which the Bishop continually returns is that of leadership, leadership in home, church and government especially. He places his hope for the survival of Nigeria in the right kind of leadership. One can hardly argue against the need for good leadership in these areas or against the assertion that poor leadership, not to say wicked leadership, has done us in. Bad leadership has brought us to the brink of destruction and we are still hovering over the cliff, unsure as to whether we will stabilize or crash.

It is here that I am not so sure of Segun's solution. Good leadership can indeed help put us back on track, but the leadership solution strikes me as an elitist one. I believe that an awakened population is a greater guarantee than good leadership, for even good leadership, once entrenched, tends to degenerate into

a power game. That development can best be resisted by a population that knows its rights and power and is willing to resist anyone that would abuse his position. The problem in Nigeria is not first of all one of leadership; it is one of a peasantry that is too unsure of itself, too afraid, too enslaved in its soul, too beholden to the “big man.”

True, the revolution needed in the soul of the peasantry requires leaders willing to bring it about. However, the aim of that leadership is to end the dichotomy between leaders and led, between rulers and ruled, where the latter now merely bow to the whims of the former. I do not see any signs of such an approach in Segun’s book. It appears that his hopes are pinned on a perpetuation of the two classes of leaders and led. His is basically an elitist approach that would keep the peasantry dependent on the elite, but *Segun’s* type of elite, responsible, benign and godly. It is my conviction that even the most godly leader will degenerate unless restrained by the countervailing powers of a strong population.

One question plagued me throughout the reading of this book. The book is a fairly radical one, in spite of its elitist orientation. If the church were to apply Segun’s proposals, things would definitely be different in Nigeria – and, I dare say, better. **But why does Segun wait until after he retires?** Where was he or where were his ideas during his active ministry? Segun has held very influential positions in the church. He could have contributed greatly in terms of his book and if he had, his name would have become a household word in the country. As it is, apart from members of his own denomination, few Nigerians recognize his name. I can only wonder Too bad.