

Appendix 8:

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MONDAY DISCOURSE WITH DR. ALIYU TILDE

Religion and Nigerians

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The Ramadan fasting has just ended three weeks ago, and the festival marking its end – *Eid el-Fitr* – was celebrated with durbars, resorts, visits and parties. Nothing was new. Christians will soon mark Christmas in the same way, though with the durbar conspicuously absent.

During the Ramadan, the Devil who pushes us to commit sins, it is said, was hounded in chains. I have seen many instances when a person will desist from using foul language or committing a sin out of respect for Ramadan. Meaning, as soon as it is over, the person will return to his bad habits. Presumably – if I have to offer him an alibi – the devil is let loose.

There is little wonder why Nigerians are generally rated the most religious people under the sun. We are never tired of public holidays at the slightest opportunity. *Eid el-Maulud*, *Eid el-Fitr*, *Eid el-Adha*, Easter, Christmas, etc, are annually declared public holidays. This is not to mention our Sunday services, mid-week fellowships, five daily prayers, *Jumu'ah* prayer, and now, *Tahajjud* or *Kiyam el-Lail* which are traditionally observed after midnight! On all these occasions, places of worship are flooded with worshipers at a frequency and quanta that captures the admiration of the eye. Without any contention, the world conceded the gold medal of religiousness to us.

Paradox

Unfortunately for this country, religiousness is not the same as piety. If the two were the same, this nation would have been the best of nations in socio-economic outlook. Foreign investors from Europe, America and Japan would be knocking at our doors, begging for opportunities. But here we are, in spite of the hundreds of Presidential trips, the world has kept a deaf ear to our invitation, exception for some gsm suckers and few wandering racist farmers. Evidently, the simple fact is that the world does not trust us. As a testimony, three years ago, the world gave us a silver medal for corruption; last year, we won the bronze, notwithstanding our religiousness.

To understand this paradox we need to examine the relationship between religiousness and piety. Sociologists judge religiousness by the outward expression of identity, like wearing the cross, turban or beard, and participation in worship like attending Sunday services and Friday congregation. Piety, on the other hand, is not the act of worship but the righteousness that is attained or improved upon by getting closer to God through

worship and numerous other means. As the pious leaves his place of worship, he remains conscious of God in all his worldly dealings. In his relationship with other people, his actions are characterized by affection and sympathy, the precursors of kindness, tolerance, honesty, dedication and communality, which are universal indices of mental health. While belief remains in the heart, these acts are the expressions of piety, the ultimate goal of religiousness.

The relationship between religiousness and piety, therefore, is supposed to be a positive one. Practically, in Nigeria, both the scale and dynamics of the relationship vary with individuals. For few, the relationship is very strong, when piety is motivated by strong events and ideas that make them to spontaneously break from their past, forever. For some it is simply linear, their piety increasing gradually as they worship over time. To both groups, worship is as important as it is beneficial. But for most, and unfortunately for this country, the relationship is a line running parallel to the axis of worship with no increment in piety no matter how distant we move on the axis of worship. And lastly, for many worshippers among those who believe they "found it", there is a negative correlation between worship and piety, or between religiousness and mental health. Though they are the most ardent worshippers and hardly do they engage in alcohol or adultery except on few occasions when they are "overcome by the devil", they exhibit some dangerous forms of mental illness, like xenophobia, which leads to the prevalence of hate and intolerance.

Evidence

The evidence supporting my claims is overwhelming. I often wonder if the church or mosque at Aso Rock has any importance if, as alleged, 56% of the corruption in the country takes place there. The remaining 44% is shared between Government Houses in States and other establishments of government, many of which also have places of worship in them. Few minutes ago some of these officials could break from duties for a prayer at a place of worship nearby. Just thereafter, they will return to their desks or meeting rooms to continue their corrupt practices and to formulate policies that will cause serious hardship to all Nigerians and deaths to hundreds on daily basis. Where is the God in the hearts of such officials? If there were any positive coefficient of correlation between our religiousness and our mental health, Nigeria would have been a different country.

Otherwise, how can we solve the riddle of an Alhaji in the position of a governor or Inspector General of Police stealing over N17 billion of public funds, or a JP (Jerusalem Pilgrim) Governor on the run from the M15 and another in British police custody? What did these people tell God in Mecca or Jerusalem when they go for annual pilgrimage? In another instance, how do we reconcile the "born-again" claim of a President who has increased the price of

fuel from N12.00 to N75.00 per liter in just six years?

At a lower level, how could some of our public servants who pray five times a day and attend every Wednesday fellowship and Sunday service divert the public resources under their custody? We have some medical directors and health personnel of public hospitals, for instance, who, in spite of their religiousness, steal important hospital equipment, drugs and reagents; many teachers who have perfected the commerce of examination malpractice; many drivers of hospital shuttle bus, meant to convey the sick, who use it to transport firewood and sacks of maize from the villages; traders who import and distribute fake drugs and spare parts, causing the deaths of thousands of Nigerians annually. The irony of all these is that part of the ill-gotten wealth is used in the building of mosques and churches! May God reject their offer as he rejected the sacrifice of Cain.

While the locusts of white-collar corruption are ravaging our economy at the national level, the termite of dishonesty and intolerance is devouring every bud of prosperity at the grassroots. Today, the commoner, who never misses a congregational prayer, exhibits the same degree of dishonesty as the corrupt official at the slightest opportunity. Make the mistake of appointing a villager the farm manager who will supervise your farm operations and you are sure to harvest bails of disappointment at the end of the season. Give another commoner a taxi to drive, or a commercial motorcycle to ride and he will pocket more than half of the returns daily. This is the principal reason why the transport sector in the North is dying rapidly. Or leave the village, find a Fulani man in the bush and entrust him with your herd of cattle and you will definitely receive fabricated report that *sammone* has killed a cow last month, *boru* has killed another this month, and so on. The Hausa, for instance, whom the Igbo once regarded as the epitome of honesty and whom he could lend without any collateral has squandered that trust. The Igbo will adduce all evidence to prove that the "Hausaman" of today is not the "Hausaman" of yesterday. He is no longer marginalized in the game of corruption. Thus, all attempts of the individual Nigerian to create wealth, as many of us have experienced, is consistently greeted with pervasive breach of trust that makes it impossible for wealth to multiply and provide more opportunities of survival to many. Consequently, and in spite of our abundant resources, poverty has become the destiny of over 70% of our population.

Reasons

Very few Nigerians will fail to share the same observations. The next thing is to probe the cause that severed the link between religiousness and piety or good conduct among Nigerians. First, I think many Nigerians have a misconstrued notion of our secularity. Many fail to see the extension of the mosque or the church beyond the premises of worship. To God is the worship, they think, and to the devil is the profane. They think public

treasury is an *alheri* or a booty that does not belong to anyone. At another level, we often underrate the effect that our mental sickness causes to the development of the country. Even where we are educated enough to foresee the consequences of criminal actions, we are so callous that we hardly give a damn. A medical director stealing an X-ray machine or a consignment of drugs knows exactly the consequences; A kleptomaniac principal or education officer knows very well the damage the contribution he is making to the falling standard of education when he steals textbooks, lab equipment. Yet on both accounts, these officials will go ahead to commit their crimes with the connivance of their superiors who will receive a share of the theft. Their belief in God and their prayer have both failed to restrain them from evil. The most important factor, however, is the increasing penchant of a good proportion of the clerics to acquire wealth through the same dubious practices as the laity. These are people who are regarded as the inheritors of the Prophets, the symbols of religion and all the values it preaches. The proliferation of churches and mosques and the manner in which many custodians of religion are competing with one another in the display of material wealth is unbecoming for custodians of religion. Their acts encourage the looting of public property. They praise corrupt public servants and merchants at ceremonies or when they pay them visits; they beg them for donations to complete the construction of a church or a mosque; they receive from them gifts of expensive cars; they annually lobby for allocation of hajj seat or tickets to the Vatican or Jerusalem. Once indebted by to this extent, the cleric loses his conscience and his intellect become reluctant to confront his benefactor with the unalloyed truth. Instead, the interpretation of verses from holy books will be twisted to justify the intentions and actions of the patron. As such, an opportunity that could be used to remind the leadership of its responsibility as practiced by egalitarian leaders like Umar bin al-Khattab, for example, is wasted in the praise of people whose indulgence is causing a untold hardship to millions of Nigerians.

The two – the clerics and the ruling elite – are in partnership for the obvious. On the one hand, the cleric needs the wealth of the ruler. On the other, the ruler needs the political anesthesia which the cleric administers on his followers. Through the preaching of doctrines of predestination, the follower is consigned to God, as the alleged mastermind of his condition of ignorance, poverty and disease. Through the preaching of hate and intolerance against other religions and denominations, the population is too divided to fight against the injustice of the ruler. It becomes embroiled in one sectarian crisis after another. In the end of such crisis, not a single cleric do I know who has lost a son, nor a president, governor or senior government official. All those who lost their lives are masses. That is the price they pay for their gullibility. But as we have mentioned earlier, the mass himself cannot be trusted. He is only waiting for an opportunity to cheat, for an *alheri* to come his way. And any attempt to emancipate him by blunting the edges of differences and clearing his xenophobic

mind is greeted with the hostile language of heresy, blasphemy and hypocrisy coming from both the cleric and his pitiable followers.

The Future

What role does religion have in our future? Definitely, there will be in the near future many prayers to be said daily, many Ramadans or Christmas to observe annually. But for what benefit will they be? I am not an advocate of secularity in any sense. People must admit that God has a positive role in their day-to-day lives. It is the failure of the religious to excel in the worldly that has led to this separation which in turn is causing a lot of havoc to nations and the international community. Custodians of religion have declined in their contribution to discoveries since their great contributions in philosophy in the Middle Ages. Almost all advances in science and technology of the past 200 years have come from people who believe more in Darwinism than in Creation. That is why they are misapplied to the detriment of humanity. And it is saddening to predict with good degree of certainty that the next vaccine of AIDS or of malaria is unlikely to come from an ardent observer of Ramadan or a born-again Christian, neither will it come from an Imam or a pastor. Therefore, what we expect from our religious leaders is the role that their predecessors played, people like Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Averoes (Ibn Rushd), Thomas Aquinas, and many others. These were men of religion who played the roles of scientists, philosophers and clerics, at the same time. They did not separate between the divine and the profane and had a heart that embraced the whole humanity. Had they lived in our age, they would have been the first to discover atomic fission before Einstein and used it in a beneficial way instead of using it to destroy Horishima and Nagasaki.

In addition, religious leaders must live as leaders, setting the pace of piety for us, their followers. This will give them the moral locus, without fear of losing the lucrative opportunity of material acquisition, to correct the society right from Aso Rock down to the remotest village.

However, they will not succeed in their job without a firm commitment to this world as they have for the Hereafter. This will lead them to acquire and respect knowledge, labor, justice and humanity, ideals that will place them at a great distance from their present state of contempt for the fundamentals upon which any just and progressive society is built. God has decreed that his Earth be a commonwealth of different people from different backgrounds in ethnicity and belief. And so it must remain. Once the clerics fail to dedicate themselves to this world, it will be ruled by the lowly, people before whom nothing has value except the desires of their hearts.

So let Christmas and another Ramadan return and find a better

composition of worshippers among us. Let them meet Nigerians who are imbued with the fear of God and all what it engenders: the supremacy of God in belief and in action; the belief in the Hereafter and its reflection in whatever we do, belief in the universality of the human race nurtured by love and sympathy; and belief in dedication to duty and profession. The same fear of God dispels the ills of sin, crime, dishonesty, hate, bigotry, intolerance and laziness. God, the Most High, said: **"Whatever good you do, God knows it; and make provisions (for the Hereafter); and certainly, the best of (such) provisions is the fear of God."**