

Nigeria's Holy Romance with Ignorance

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(Random musings on an internet exchange between two compatriots on “The Power of Science”)

Ours is a tragic case. We are the most unscientific people on earth.

- Bunmi Fatoye-Matory

A ton of thanks to Bunmi Fatoye-Matory and Omowumi Ayodele for their insightful, provocative observations on the Ekitipanupo Internet Forum of January. 10, 2022.

Like these two compatriots, I too have been both saddened and bewildered by the way our people so characteristically throw science and rationality out of the window in their daily lives as well as their deliberations on matters of grave national importance. In all things domestic and public, personal and political, our dealings are dominated by a disregard for scientific reasoning, and a preference for ostentatious, and often venal religiosity. And how truly ubiquitous our piety has been! Our rulers pray before they pillage the nation's treasury; they pray before rigging the electoral polls; they pray while perpetrating these acts; they pray when the deeds are done. Then they “give thanks to the Lord” for aiding their exploits and prospering their schemes. And we, the people, chorus a sheepish “Amen” while praying to the Good Lord to keep blessing them with renewed strength. Do

you still wonder why the vehicle of Nigeria's progress is in reverse gear, throttled, top-speed, towards the Middle Ages by "leaders" who prey while the people pray; leaders whose grand superstition has become the alternative science of a country famous for its aversion to logic?

Here are the bare, bleeding facts: Nigeria (like all its African counterparts, alas) is still in a **prescientific** age: blissfully mis/uninformed, untouched by, even hostile to, the edifying powers of Science. We are a people who "believe" too lazily, too unquestioningly, and, therefore, too dangerously. The so-called school education has not been able to save us from this calamitous malaise. In fact, the more college degrees we acquire, the farther we tend to be from rational, independent thinking, critical cogitation, clarity of thought, and creative skepticism. This is why we are ruled by "leaders" who are busy looking for 19th century cattle grazing routes at a time their counterparts in saner climes are set on the routes to Mars and Saturn.

Nigeria's underdevelopment is no surprise, for we do not seem to possess the mindset, vision, values, behavior, actions, and practices of a people who understand what development really is, the way it is achieved, and how it is sustained. It should have been clear to us by now that miracles never build a nation nor are citizens ever elevated above their dehumanizing poverty through a mindless reliance on magic and accidental fiat.

I have no doubt that the God so frenetically invoked by Nigerians must be tired of a bunch of thoughtless, corrupt, chaotic, disorganized miracle-seekers ever so averse to a positive, creative deployment of their brains, all too ready to surrender their precious HUMAN agency to the whims of a distant, unaccountable supernatural. Our loud prayers must already be a source of noise pollution in God's kingdom and a menace to the serenity of the Creative Ideal.

Human civilization is propelled by the dynamics of Science, not superstition; it is enabled by a keen, purposive Spirit of Inquiry, not a regimen of untested/unverifiable Belief

Miracles do not build bridges or erect skyscrapers; miracles will not build and secure our National Power Grid and rescue us from incapacitating outages that have turned Nigeria into a land of interminable darkness; miracles do not build oil refineries and keep them in regular, unfailing repair; miracles will not construct the network of roads and rails and air routes Nigeria so sorely needs to become a mobile, enterprising, and infrastructurally connected country with wheels on the path to modernity and progress; miracles will not accomplish the fundamental equitable restructuring that is needed to correct Nigeria's presently fated "federalism"; miracles do not create a buoyant, sustainable economy unburdened by debilitating debts, domestic and foreign; miracles will not save us from the murderous traffic jams in our lawless, planless cities; miracles have no place in the classroom and the laboratory where Science in ALL its ramifications is busy shaping Humanity's future and turning formerly awe-inspiring "miracles" into risible sleight of hand. To bring the case painfully close to the here and now, only Science can clip the claws of the rapacious virus that has turned our world upside down in the past two years and littered the global landscape with mass graves and empty homesteads. As History has shown and human experience has vindicated, Humanity owes its future to the possibilities of Science (though it is our vital responsibility to make sure that this good servant does not transform into a bad (*qua* deadly) servant).

The Unforgettable Tai Solarin must be wincing in his grave. That brave man invited the nation to a dialogue about these and related matters some six decades ago. He did all he could to teach us and our rulers how to THINK, rationally and reasonably. He never won the war, though he invested his lofty best in the battle. Ever since, our faith has only become more fickle, our belief more recalcitrantly absurd. We lost the 20th Century to ignorance and allied disabilities, and we are about three short years to the end of the first quarter of the 21st. Shall we end this century too, still

striving heroically to trace ancient cattle grazing routes across impossible distances, still feeling so smug, so secure behind our shield of ignorance and medieval darkness? Shall we continue to beg God to build our country for us while we the people lie chloroformed by excessive supplication and mindless expectation of illusional miracles?

God must be tired of the bunch of delinquent supplicants called Nigerians. S/he has provided us with a land of incredible fecundity, but we have shunned the knowledge needed to transform it into a land of plenty and beneficence, begging him/her, instead, for miracles and specious “breakthroughs”. The fertile brains in our skulls have turned mushy from underuse. Given all our pious proclamations and loud prayer jamborees, given our dangerously illogical habit of “leaving it to God” while doing little or nothing to transform our parlous situation, it can be justifiably concluded that we are not YET a people in any hurry for development.

Oh, let me end this short piece with that much-quoted but never deeply considered Nigerian saying: **God helps those who help themselves.**

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