

# **NIGERIA'S**

**60 Tumultuous Years (1960-2020)**

**Which Way Forward?**

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# NIGERIA—THE DWARFED GIANT OF AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

## Nigeria, We Wail Thee...

My late wife, Olawanle, and I relocated to the US in the fall of 1996, for personal, not political or economic reasons. We both had gainful, respectable employment and were making our marks in our respective fields. Out of the blue, she won the US Green Card Visa Lottery. Her sister, living in the US had applied for several family members, but Olawanle was the only successful candidate. Wow! We saw that as a green light to enable us to visit legally, reside briefly or naturalize in the US. We finally decided to make the US our home.

I now live in Albany, NY, the state capital. People detect my accent and ask me, “Where are you from?” Most times I play games with them. I tell them, “I’m from Brooklyn”. I had lived and worked in Brooklyn for 18 years. Usually, their next response is, “I mean where you came from originally.” I say, “Oh, originally, I came from God.” Now, with a laughter or chuckle, they say, “I know that; I mean your country of birth.” “Nigeria. Born and bred in Nigeria.” Sometimes I see a glow on their faces. When that happens, they say something like, “Nigeria. That’s a great country. Oil-rich nation. The giant of Africa. I was in Nigeria in year so-and-so... I know a Nigerian family... I have some Nigerian friends... We have some Nigerian couples in my church...” Back in the late 90s, before the turn of the century, I heard some ridiculous comments when I mentioned Nigeria. The person would respond with excitement, “Nigeria! Nelson Mandela!! Great leader!!!” I never took time to correct such comments; I just smiled and went ahead and basked in the good association of Nigeria with a great African leader. Most times, these days, I don’t see a glow on their faces when I mention Nigeria. Rather, they drop their heads; shake their heads and ask, “What’s going on in your country? You’ve been in the news a lot lately, and it’s all negative and bad news; a lot of horrible things are happening in Nigeria. Unheard-of violence, whole communities and villages savagely ravaged, Christians are being massacred and churches are burnt down on a regular basis. Looks like you are heading for another civil war or a large-scale genocide.”

It's so sad that the incessant problem of Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda and other extremist Islamic fundamentalist groups that have devastated communities, murdered Christians and burned churches have continued for years and the federal and state governments seemed overtly powerless to curb their activities. Covertly, however, the powers that be have been supportive and traceable as the ones clandestinely supplying the groups with arms and weapons because their vandalism was helping to advance the authority's Islamic agenda. Boko Haram members that had been arrested were treated as victims and declared cured and released back to society after a brief time of rehabilitation. Consequently, nothing was ever done to compensate or afford a sense of justice to the victims of their crimes. One after another, substantiated sources had reported the mysterious disappearance of imported crates and steel containers of arms, weapons, armored tanks, and explosives from army barracks where they were stored to be reported "stolen" by Boko Haram. In some instances, these arsenals of weapons were en-route to storage only to be captured by the Boko Haram insurgent groups. It was always synonymous to a suicide mission when any group of Nigerian soldiers was deployed to counter any Boko Haram group. Many Nigerian soldiers who had been sent to quell Boko Haram invasion had lost their lives because the Nigerian soldiers' ammunitions could not match those of Boko Haram.

## **The Dawn of Independence**

Nigeria gained independence from the British Empire on October 1, 1960. Born in October 12, 1952, I was 8 years old at the time. I didn't fully understand what was going on, but a sense of national pride was in the air. The teachers in the village elementary school I attended were very excited. Even the illiterate adults in the villages beamed with smiles. The British flag came down and the Nigerian flag was hoisted in its place. School was fun that day; it was festivity all day long until the close of school. We ate specially prepared and paid for festival meals—different from regular school meals. The school band played, we marched, we sang, we danced, and we waved our little flags. Professionals beat the local drums while village entertainers chanted, and dancers danced. I can't remember if we were taught the national anthem on that day, or before it. We

went home with tokens and emblems of our country: specifically free plastic cups and small, handheld flags in Nigerian colors: green, white, green. With pride our parents preserved or displayed these mementoes in special places. That day, the word, independence, however I pronounced or mispronounced it, was added to my vocabulary as a learner of English Language as a second language in elementary class. We didn't have any TV<sup>2</sup> set, and probably no one in the village ever heard of one. In the evening, as they drank palm wine and chewed cola nuts, the adults gathered around the one transistor radio owned by the headmaster. He had bought new batteries and was busy turning the knobs to find good band waves and adjusting the antennae back and forth to pick up signals so they could listen to whatever news and entertainment the set could receive from around the world.

Nigeria's first leaders were true statesmen, patriots, and visionary nation builders. The lines of the first stanza of our first (or former) national anthem go like this: "Nigeria, we hail thee; our own dear native land; though tribes and tongues may differ, in brotherhood we stand. Nigerians all, are proud to serve our sovereign Motherland." The potentials were great; the stakes were high. As a newly independent nation, the momentum was on our side on every angle to be great in every arena: economics, banking, academics, business, international relations, medicine, and technological advancement. How a promising nation with religious freedom like Nigeria could descend into a depleted, ghost country is beyond comprehension.

When I was growing up, primary or elementary school education was universally free. Many high schools (Grammar or Secondary schools as they were called) were started and run by communities, religious institutions or individual proprietors and were fee-paying. I attended Ilora Baptist Grammar School—meaning, a Baptist mission school in Ilora. Most secondary schools were subsidized or tuition-free, with highly subsidized boarding, too. Government-owned secondary schools were virtually free. Tertiary education institutions were mostly owned and run by Federal, Regional or State governments, and had free or subsidized cafeteria meals and boarding. Many university and college students had full scholarships or State bursaries or some form of financial assistance from the local

government of the student's origin. To enlist or ensure a free flow of qualified teachers state-owned and federal government-owned Teacher Training Colleges provided free tuition, boarding and textbooks. In addition, as an incentive, students who enrolled in the department of education in universities were offered the same benefit of free tuition, boarding and books. Some banks and booming businesses such as United African Company (UAC), Unilever, Coca-Cola, and Cadbury also provided full or partial scholarships to boost their recruitment of new, highly skilled staff.

The 70s, which many historians regarded as the golden age of Nigeria, saw many changes in education, agriculture, civil service, military, and other sectors aimed at unifying the country in the post civil war era. Federal and State governments took over all schools, including the religious or community owned high schools and made them tuition free, and free supply of textbooks. Tertiary education was tuition-free with highly subsidized boarding and cafeterias. Student loans were available to those who failed to get full scholarships. The Federal government also took over the Regional Television stations and established Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), in 1977. Originally known as Nigerian Television (NTV), it served supposedly to be a unifying and authentic voice. Even though I had a federal government scholarship, I also took student loan, for one year or two, with which I bought a used Kawasaki motorcycle. [Hey; I thought I told you some said it was Nigeria's golden age! Gbenga Ewejobi (of blessed memory, my buddy!], who at that time owned a bike, was instrumental to my purchasing one. However, I sold the bike after the excitement waned and repairs became necessary.)

By and large, towards the end of the second half of the 70s, some reversals were taking place on campuses. These led to several students' demonstrations and boycotts, but the government still had its way. For example, only the tuition remained free in tertiary institutions, the students had to fend for their boarding (no more subsidized meals) and find ways to buy books or rely on borrowed library books—that is, if that was possible. The on-campus cafeteria services were scrapped. In their place, some institutions provided spaces on their campuses for vetted local food vendors to sell to

students. Besides, local restaurants and “bukas” sprang up in and around university campuses providing low cost African dishes for indigent students.

## **Oil Boom or Oil Doom**

The Udoji Public Service Review Commission, headed by renowned lawyer and economist, Chief Jerome Udoji, restructured the post-colonial and post-civil war bureaucracy in Nigeria. The Udoji Salary Review Commission in 1974 proposed an enhanced salary structure for civil servants, which, for the first time, enhanced the purchasing power of the civil servants, parastatals and private sector employees. General Yakubu Gowon, the then military leader and head of the federal government was quoted to have said that the salary review was done to reward the workers for their support and dedication during the difficult period of the Nigerian civil war<sup>3</sup>. The best part was that the salary increase was retroactive for many months, which meant a lump sum amount—a windfall of a magnitude never seen before—was paid to the struggling workers. As much as a 100 percent increase in wages, made nine months retroactive. The Udoji Award—as it was called—put smiles on public and private sector employees. Many hardworking Nigerians who never thought they could ever own a radio, television set, a refrigerator, bicycle, motorcycle, a car, or find initial capital to start a personal business, or even become a homeowner, were suddenly able to do so. For once, most every Nigerian had a slice of the national cake, the result of the high price of oil. It was public knowledge that one of our top national leaders, who would remain nameless, was quoted as saying that money was “not our problem but how to spend it.”

Petroleum Oil refineries, petrochemical plants and industries and filling stations were springing up in many areas as well as other gigantic multinational industries. International trade was booming, and, in many ways, the foreign companies, expatriates and skilled foreigners were as corrupt as their Nigerian counterparts. Many have said that Lord Frederick Lugard<sup>4</sup>, was the villain and that the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates which he instituted over a century ago was the root of Nigerian problems.

Growth and development were evident everywhere. Springing up here and there were industrial estates, multinational corporations, research institutes, universities, dual carriage, four lane highways and expressways, bridges, overhead bridges/flyovers, tunnels, airports of international standards, and many infrastructural projects that had become the order of the day. Some of these became the pipelines for money to be corruptly diverted into private banks and personal accounts. Notably, such projects as the Ajaokuta steel company, local and international airports and several railroad projects, that were later abandoned due to corruption, after guzzling trillions and trillions of dollars. The development of a central national capital in Abuja, (Federal Capital Territory, FCT) was another avenue for many fake contractors, phony construction and supply companies to siphon money into their pockets. If these looters—these bogus company directors and corrupt emergency contractors, had spent the stolen money to develop their communities, build hospitals, schools, factories, businesses or companies or establish farms and industries that provided employment for teeming graduates of the country's schools, one might have reasons to overlook their greed. However, they stashed the money in foreign banks and septic tanks.

In the late 70s I was privileged to come across a staggering statistic of how our petroleum money was being shared. For every dollar of crude oil only few miserable pennies stayed in Nigeria. The bulk went overseas into the multinational corporations. Shortly after that, as fresh graduate, I attended a symposium hosted by many international oil companies where many of the experts, foreigners and nationals, gleefully presented the benefit of the oil in Nigeria and in other oil-producing countries, and how the nations had developed overnight and moved from being a third world nation to an industrialized nation. During the question-and-answer time, I addressed my question to a Nigerian high official and expert on the subject because, to him, the best thing that had happened to our great country was the discovery of oil. We both speak Yoruba as a first language. In my misguided youthful exuberance, I cited the statistic from the source on which I had recently stumbled. I insinuated that we were being robbed of our wealth, and asked why only a pittance stayed in Nigeria while the bulk of our so-called oil wealth went abroad to the multinational corporations.

He did not argue with me or disagreed with my point but he circumvented the question. He said I should worry less about how much got siphoned out of the country and be more concerned about what was happening to the pittance. He said, “Let’s say only few pennies out of every dollar stayed in Nigerian and let’s also remember that the few pennies ran to millions and billions daily, day in, day out. Where were the billions going and what’s the effect of those billions, no matter how incomparable they were to the oil wealth?” His point was that even the little—the crumbs from our oil wealth—could have done much more to transform our nation if it had been well managed for the benefit of all. He was saying in essence, what’s the use? If we had had a bigger share it would have gone into the same bottomless drainage. In true Yoruba idiom fashion, he said the thief inside the house was the real culprit, because he’s the one who opened the door and disclosed the secret code to the safe to the thief on the outside. I should first worry about the thief in-house, if I was concerned about solving the problem. I wanted to scream, “If this is what independence means, please give me back colonialism!” but I was mute and sat down sheepishly.

Greed, selfishness, tribalism and nepotism turned the oil boom into oil doom and national cake into shameless looters’ booty. For more than half a century, politicians, our elected civilian officials and military leaders sat around the table—the only time they ever agreed—and shared the national cake amongst themselves. When national and foreign banks were over-flooded with their booties, many Nigerians in high offices and posts, senators, legislators, local chiefs, and governors, literally buried foreign currencies in septic tanks and soakaway pits.

Lord Lugard was the colonial governor of both the Northern Nigeria Protectorate and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. He signed a document consolidating the two, thereby creating the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria on January 1, 1914. It’d been proposed that the unification was done for economic rather than political reasons. The Northern Nigeria Protectorate had a budget deficit, and the colonial administration sought to use the budget surpluses in Southern Nigeria to offset this deficit. Some would argue



that the colonialists deliberately institutionalized a lopsided Nigeria terribly lacking cohesive attributes as a nation and doomed to fail for inherent cracks in the system and that the later foreign expatriates tutored and mentored Nigerians in the art of corruption. Even if this were true it should no longer be acceptable or tenable for an independent nation at 20 years, let alone 60 years. What does the word “independence” mean if it does not include self-determinism?

Due to changes in political climates and world events, countries do split, break up, dissolve or no longer exist. Some countries no longer exist, such as Basutoland, Ceylon, Czechoslovakia, Abyssinia (also known as the Ethiopian Empire, split into the states of Eritrea and Ethiopia), Austria-Hungary (also known as the Austro-Hungarian Empire), Bengal (an independent kingdom in southern Asia; divided into the states of Bangladesh and India). Other countries also split, such as, West Germany and East Germany, North Vietnam and South Vietnam, North Yemen and South Yemen. Life goes on in all these places. Couples break up or divorce. Divorce is painful but it happens. Wounds of separation heal overtime. As painful as it may be, breakup is often the better choice or best option for unions that are not working or mutually beneficial. Only codependent individuals, or people lacking self-esteem, or people with demented thinking patterns continue to stay in an abusive and unhealthy unions. Besides, no human empire or kingdom lasts forever. Tyrants die, and despotic leaders fade away. The unfortunate part is that the bad seeds they sowed in their lifetime outlive them and often takes a long time to die off.

## **To Do Justly, To Love Mercy, And To Walk Humbly**

“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8).

Nigeria’s national motto since 1978 is: “Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress” (formerly “Peace, Unity, Freedom”). This should be turned to Nigeria’s national prayer because more than ever before, Nigeria needs unity, faith, peace, progress and freedom. I have made them the focus of my prayer. I have pondered on two baffling things:

(1), I wonder why the word *justice* was never included in the motto? “Motto” by definition is a short sentence or phrase chosen as encapsulating the beliefs or ideals guiding an individual, family, or institution. Didn’t we desire justice as a guiding principle in society? The last line of the current anthem is a prayer, “To build a nation where peace and justice shall reign.” From my experience, compatriots *do* justice while victims *pray* for justice! The Bible instructs, “To DO RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice,” (Prov. 21:3; emphasis mine), and, (2), I’m worried the word *courage* didn’t make it into the previous and present national anthems. Shouldn’t we aspire to have courage as a national virtue inculcated into our boys and girls who would become men and women who could take the bull by the horns? If we had had courage and justice ingrained into our national psyche from the onset at every level of life, Nigeria might be a different place today.

By far, the woes that befell Nigeria from the oil boom were not limited to the greed it awakened in us, but also included the things, the practices and alternative sources of national wealth prior to the oil boom that it took away from us, or that we neglected. How it devastated the ecosystem in the oil producing states! Agriculture was a backbone of our national economy before the oil era. The regional and national cash crops (or sources of foreign income) then included cocoa, coffee, and palm oil in the south; peanuts (or groundnuts) and hides and skins in the north. However, we turned our backs on those. It was public knowledge that the University of Ife in Ile-Ife (established in 1962), a 26-story building, Cocoa house in Ibadan (built in 1965), which was then the tallest building in the Region, and many other great edifices and estates in the 60s in the then Western Region came from money from cocoa farming. Farmers in the West derived their revenue and instant lump-sum cash for roofing their houses, paying their children’s school fees, getting married, buying a bicycle/motorcycle or a sewing machine for their brides from cash crops such as cocoa, coffee and palm oil. Nigeria was also the leading producer of palm oil. Malaysia came to Nigeria to procure oil palm seedlings to establish her oil palm plantations. However, Malaysia soon took over and became the number one world palm oil

producer. Nigeria and Ghana were leading producers of cocoa and coffee. However, we abandoned the agricultural sector.

Go to the coastal villages of Port Harcourt, Calabar, Delta state and other riverine areas where crude oil mining had been going on and witness the disruption of the social life. Before the oil pipes were laid and the ecosystem disrupted, the men were deep-sea fishermen and women were farmers. Men would cut down the bush, clear the rubble and/or burn the debris, till and turn the ground. Thereafter, the women took over; they planted cassava, corn, yams, tomatoes, and other arable crops. However, now, with the water polluted and fishing gone, the women could be seen from early in the morning until late in the night working on the farms, and the men? Please don't say I told you this. You would find most men in these coastal villages loitering around, drunk or getting drunk from the early hours of the day until sundown, because their source of livelihood, fishing, which hitherto had made them real men economically and physically, was gone.

Socio-culturally, many men in those areas considered farming a woman's job and yet, they had no way of getting back to their deep-sea fishing. And, many men did not want to be seen doing a woman's job, such as hoeing, weeding, tending, and tilling cassava or corn farms, or harvesting and hawking such farm produce. Yet, when you think about it, these are the hands—or the locales of the Earth—that are feeding Nigerian. While indigenes from non-oil producing parts of the nation who live in the cities are overfed, overstuffed and prodigal with the national cake, the natives of the place where the oil came from and their lands are depleted. Only the heavens know how many outspoken “sons of the soil” in those devastated delta areas have been murdered or mysteriously disappeared because they dared to raise the issue of this injustice before the powers that be.

In the heydays of Nigeria, on completion of studies abroad no Nigerian graduate abroad wanted to take a job in a foreign nation/country especially one with wintry cold seasons. With pride he or she returned immediately to Nigeria. This reechoed the sentiment of Dr. Aggrey<sup>5</sup>. One of the famous sayings of Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyir Aggrey, known as “Aggrey of Africa,” was, “In

the whole wide world, Africa, my Africa, comes first.” Any Nigerian graduate from a foreign university could have said the same. At that time, a university graduate was assured of a job, a car loan, and/or house loan in lieu of a housing. That was the 70s and probably the early 80s too. The late 80s and early 90s witnessed an era of brain drain; a mass exodus of professionals and academics from Nigeria in search of greener pastures in other nations for short or permanent stays.

Sadly, now, a Nigerian graduate with a master’s degree in engineering or science could be happy to be employed as a messenger or cleaner in a business organization, or consider himself lucky to find job as an “okada” cyclist, that is, someone who ferries people and their wares on a motorcycle. Few Nigerian graduates who fare well and are gainfully employed are usually those who are well connected to politicians, senators, the Obas, bank and company directors, community leaders, important chiefs, and high elected officials. You are especially “blessed and highly favored” if you know one or two individuals who have been invited (or if you know those who are close to those who’ve been invited) to the tables where the national cake is being shared. In few words, you’ve made it in Nigeria today if you know or are related to a senator, governor, or even an aide to a top politician. Your destiny—I don’t normally use that word because it’s been abused, but it’s the right word—your destiny (or fortune) is tied to “who you know” rather than what academic and professional degrees or qualifications you possess or skills you bring to table. “How are the mighty fallen!”

Because human nature was rife with carnality and selfishness, those days—the 70s—were not perfect or even spiritual. Church growth was phenomenal, and revival was in the air. The youth on campuses were on fire for the Lord. Without a doubt, the Spirit of God was moving. However, we have many things of which to repent. Especially, some Christian leaders might need repenting of their excessive emphasis on the spectacular and phenomenal in God’s name with unverified, exaggerated and embellished stories that scored very high on manipulations and very low on integrity. But hope, optimism, potentiality, opportunity and possibility—essential ingredients in individual and national life—were in good supply in

the air. As a nation, with those ingredients and the wind of revival that was blowing we could have conquered discrimination, sectarianism, tribalism and nepotism that were already showing their ugly heads. We could, yes, we could have surmounted the ugly isms except that no one factored in the power and influence of Mammon, the devil of covetousness. ABBA's most-celebrated heartbreak breakup song title, "The Winner Takes It All" never meant much until the emerging era of the Nigerian oil boom. In the era of the Nigerian oil boom, Mammon, the demon of covetousness, was the winner that took it all, and it left the rest bleeding, breathless, and lifeless. Jesus had warned, "*You cannot serve God and mammon,*" (Matt. 6:24d). Mammon got in the way and the rest is a sad and sordid history.

## **October 2020: Shooting and Killing of Unarmed Civil Protesters**

Tuesday, October 20, 2020 witnessed the shooting of peaceful #EndSARS protesters by soldiers at the Lekki Tollgate Plaza in Lagos State. What did this signal in our national history? A footnote? A new paragraph? Or, a new chapter? Or, the beginning of the end? Or, a statement that the darker days are here!

At this time of writing, October 2020, sixty-year-old Nigeria is burning. Youth are protesting and demanding a change and many of them have lost and are losing their lives due to police brutality and the government sponsored security agency that's known for extortion, abduction, kidnapping and murdering targeted innocent citizens. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) had been known for profiling black males with dreadlocks and young men driving flashy cars—harassing them and questioning how they could afford such expensive cars, seizing and impounding the vehicles. Thereafter, many young men had disappeared mysteriously; some were reported kidnapped with their abductors demanding a heavy ransom. Others were jailed without trial.

For years since 2015, Nigerian citizens and their international supporters have called for an end to police brutality and police abuse amid many reported cases of kidnapping, harassment and extortion

by the rogue unit called SARS, a group of soldiers and police units. Time and again, educated and well-intentioned youth have protested peacefully and called on the government to abolish SARS. Time and again, the government would promise to dismantle the group but would not as soon as the protests died down. In response to peaceful protesters singing the national anthem and waving Nigerian flag, the government sent their agents to disable or remove the cameras. Later, soldiers arrived on the scene, turned off lights, and opened fire on the crowd, leaving behind dead bodies of unarmed young people. How do you justify this?

This Lekki Toll Gate shooting was happening in addition to the systemic incursion of the fully armed nomadic Fulani herdsmen from the arid North into the farms and farmlands of the grassland South. With some herdsmen perched on limbs of trees with their assault rifles and AK-47 caliber guns as lookouts, they brazenly turned their livestock loose to graze and devastate the farms and, in the process, ruin the economic prospects of the farmers. Many protesting farmers have lost their lives in the process and several farming communities in the South that put up a coordinated resistance, with no weapons or arms and ammunitions that matched the attack and no support from the government, have been displaced or massacred in the process. Why was the government silent, or powerless, or why had it turned a blind eye to this atrocity and would not help the Southern farmers? According to the grapevine, the short answer is that the Fulani herdsmen have their patrons in the high places and amongst them is the Nigerian president, Buhari. President Muhammadu Buhari is a Fulaniman, a descendant from nomadic Fulani tribe, who, like his forebears, took great pride in reckoning his investment portfolios in numbers of herds of cattle.

Even before Nigeria changed her national anthem to “Arise O Compatriots...” in 1978 singing “Nigeria we hail thee” was becoming empty and meaningless and many with foreboding insight were already lamenting, “Nigeria we wail thee,” *“How are the mighty fallen!”* (2 Sam. 1:19b; KJV). Yet, back then, no one knew there was no bottom or a rock bottom to our pathetic situation. No one suspected that the so-called checks and balances put in place to break a freefall could be so brazenly swept aside and dismantled. We now know

Nigeria is in a freefall in a bottomless pit. For a long while we've been crying our "Hosanna!" meaning, Lord rescue us; Lord save us; Lord help us (Psa. 118:25; Matt. 21:9). We humbly acknowledge that only Powers out of this world could bring salvation and deliverance when the freefall is happening in a dark abyss, a bottomless chasm. "*Hosanna to the Son of David! ... Hosanna in the highest!*" Lord, help us now; help us swiftly. Save, Lord, we pray.

I've been living outside Nigeria for over 20 years and I am the first to admit that I have not been in touch with reality on the ground, as I should. To be honest, I sometimes blocked my ears to negative reports from Nigeria so I could go to bed without nightmarish dreams. If, after reading this piece you are disappointed because you feel I have toned down the reports, I sympathize with you and agree with you. If your heart is burning with questions such as, "How can you fail to mention the Chibok girls<sup>6</sup>, Dele Giwa<sup>7</sup>, Ken Saro-Wiwa<sup>8</sup>, or so and so and so?" I hear you. Those are specifics and they are uncountable. They are etcetera, etcetera, and etcetera to infinity. I tried to steer away from specifics because, even though they are hot topics, they are SYMPTOMS of a sick nation.

In the opening verses of his prophecies, the OT prophet Isaiah said of the nation of Israel a lament of God, "*The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints,*" (Isa. 1:5c). Can anything be more descriptive of Nigeria? If "*The whole head is sick,*" then everything else is rotten. As long as we deal with the symptoms and not the root problem, we will always get back to square one. Even if I knew more gruesome stories, I would still tone down my comments because, by nature, I am not an alarmist. However, if after reading this you think I have hyped the accounts, it can only suggest that you've been shielded from man's inhumanity against fellowmen all your life, or it could be the result of a preferred or chosen state of ignorance or denial on your part, or that you are so much part of the oppression that you are blind and deaf to the truth and choose to only believe the narratives from your cabal. Besides, anyone who has been following news from Nigeria knows that I have not said anything new or bizarre.

## Just for the Record: 12 History-Making Days in Nigeria

Let it be on record, after sifting through the various sources available to me, that the end-SARS protest in October 2020, had been going on for 12 days without vandalism of any kind.

12 days they rejected bribes.

12 days they cared and looked out for each other.

12 days they gave free medical care and legal services to those who needed such services.

For 12 days, both national and international celebrities, and churches all protested. At the protest grounds, the Christians gave room for the Muslims to have their Jumat prayers. And the Christians had their service on Sunday. Some organized prayer walks. A candlelight service was held all over the nation for fallen heroes. Despite the hard economy the youth spent their personal money cooking for each other. No one knew who was a Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa, or Edo. They ate together and danced together.

For 12 days, these events were organized without a formal leader, with just social media tweets, re-tweets, posts, shares with a hashtag.

For 12 days they built and witnessed the Nigeria of their dreams.

The government sponsored hoodlums to disrupt the protest but they overpowered these hoodlums. They got their own private security guards and security dogs to protest grounds.

And while all these were going on, Mr. President did not address the nation or appeared to be aware of anything in his yard. One could surmise that the mere fact that these youth were organized, peaceful, persistent, resilient and united was a threat to the powers that be. They were baffled that the youth could go on for so many days while they resisted and rebuffed all attempts to infiltrate their group. The government had no wisdom to provide an answer, no strategy to initiate dialogue. Nothing other than to recourse to violence, which is the language of tyrants and bullies.

At that time the soldiers were sent and many innocent lives were lost. The military claimed they were ordered by “powers beyond their control” to shoot. When the guns were fired, they didn’t care who was a Muslim or Christian; they didn’t care who was Yoruba, Igbo,



Hausa, Calabar or Urhobo. They killed unarmed people sitting down and singing the anthem.

Consequently, the ghost of Martin Luther King Jr. loomed into limelight. His words were proven true again, when he said, **“A riot is the voice of the unheard.”** That statement by MLK is worth repeating in bold caps, because history has proven it that indeed, **“A RIOT IS THE VOICE OF THE UNHEARD.”**

The unheard—and unseen except through the barrels of guns—responded in a justified anger to the senseless murder, execution style, of innocent citizens. Some unscrupulous hoodlums also took advantage. Many buildings and businesses were targeted, burnt and destroyed.

In the process some—probably government sponsored hoodlums, hooligans, ruffians and thugs—took advantage to loot stores.

That was when Mr. President came out to give a threatening speech, which was a great insult to all thinking Nigerians who had been following the protests. He called these well-meaning youth, university educated professionals, church and mosque leaders thugs and looters. There was no vandalism of any sort reported until the bullets from Nigerian army soldiers had killed, wounded and maimed innocent protesters.

It was too glaring to all and sundry that Mr. President and his cabal never cared about the nation called Nigeria. Why would they, or how could they? They see themselves as the monarchs and the rest as their subjects; they are the landowners of the plantation and the rest are their sharecroppers.

It was too glaring that Mr. President and his cabal never cared about the state of the hospitals. Why would they, or how could they? They get medical attention abroad.

More than ever before, it was evident that Mr. President and his cabal never cared about the educational system. Why would they, or how could they? Their kids go to schools abroad.

They do not care about electricity. Why would they, or how could they? They live in choice areas with constant electricity.

They do not care about the condition of roads. Why would they, or how could they? They travel with security forces, so they have no idea how our roads are.

They just do not care, period!

## Arise O Compatriots, Nigeria’s Call Obey

On a closer look, Nigeria’s national anthem is a clarion call to action. Two St. Augustine<sup>9</sup> quotes come to mind. **“Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not,”** suggesting that we must work in partnership with God. God is not devoid of power, but God has chosen to work through human agents. Human agents on their own and by themselves will fail in the task of nation building or any worthwhile project. Along the same line, St. Augustine also said, **“Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.”** Brothers and sisters, “To serve our fatherland: With love and strength and faith” as the national anthem goes, we need to work and pray. God is able, but God will not send angels to do what we can do for our own survival as partners with God. Yet, with all our efforts and good intentions, we are not guaranteed success without God’s divine intervention and enablement. It’s a Human-Divine Coalition.

The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah is an excellent case study on human-divine partnership. Even the detractors and enemies of the Jews acknowledged that Nehemiah’s Jerusalem wall rebuilding project was God’s doing. We read the account at the completion:

“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; FOR THEY PERCEIVED THAT THIS WORK WAS DONE BY OUR GOD.” (Neh. 6:15, 16; emphasis mine).

God moved in the heart of Nehemiah. Nehemiah in exile used the privilege of his political position to secure funding and supplies for the repairs of the walls of his native land. Nehemiah couldn’t do it alone; he mobilized and motivated other nationalists. Yet, the project couldn’t have been successful by human effort alone, in the light of all the oppositions. God did not send angels to repair the walls; men did the work. Yet, human’s effort alone would have failed woefully. Nehemiah was a praying leader. He epitomized the saying,

“Work and Pray.” At every stage we find him in prayer—in closet, before the king, before the people, and when under attack from within and without. The story had two sides on its ledger. One side of the ledger goes: “*So we built the wall... for the people had a mind to work,*” (Neh. 4:6). And, the other side of the ledger, equally true, “*For they [the enemies of the project] perceived that this work was done by our God,*” (6:16e). It was God and Judean Jews. Norman Vincent Peale, the guru of positive thinking said, **“Four things for success: work and pray, think and believe.”** How we desperately need those four things: Pray, Work, Think, and Believe. “Arise, O Compatriots... The labor of our heroes past: Shall never be in vain.”

Politics is Catch-22 in essence. No matter how you slice it, all of life is political. Because both actions and inactions, speeches and silences, protests and stay-at-homes, voiced and unvoiced opinions all have political connotations and denote a political position. When you say, “I’m not a politician,” or “I am not being political,” or “I don’t talk politics from the pulpit,” they are all political statements in themselves, and political expressions, which is to say that I am not worried to be termed political. We are all political, but we all do not necessarily play party politics. The “Black Lives Matter” protests are political. The “Me Too Movement” is political. The LGBTQ seeking to be seen, heard and validated is political. Other interest groups asking for their rights and fair share in life are political. The protests going on in Nigeria are political. By simple definition, politics encompasses the activities associated with the governance of a country or other area. We are all into politics because we care about the governance of our land, even when we might not aspire to hold any political office. A politician is a person active in party politics, or a person holding or seeking an office in government. Your politics are your beliefs about how a country ought to be governed.

Politics, not political parties, in its ramifications is larger than any one group and embraces all groups. And all—young and old, Jews and Gentiles, blue-collar worker and white-collar worker—must be willing to sit together at table for politics to work for the groups it encompasses. To any right-thinking person who can read between the lines, the peaceful protests on the streets of Nigeria are not defiant or rebellious in any shape or form. They are collective

invitations to the “fathers,” and “leaders,” (that’s hoping we do have fathers and leaders) and political office holders to pause, take a breather, listen, sit and dialogue. Although I am a naturalized US citizen, I care about the governance of my country of birth where I still have my friends and family, aunties, uncles, siblings, nephews and nieces.

We wave the Nigerian flag and we sing, “Arise O Compatriot.” And we put into practice what we sing: We arise because our national anthem demands it of us. We protest because that’s the first line of the national anthem: “Arise O Compatriot.” If “to arise” and “to protest” are not synonyms and do not evoke the same feelings in humans, what do they mean then? We arise; we protest. The youth arise; the youth protest. Compatriots arise; compatriots protest. Religious leaders arise; they protest. Grandmas and grandpas whose knees have been calcified by arthritis arise and register their protest by invoking God’s presence as they prayer walk, inching one step after another, on their streets or in their living rooms. We protest, in response to the clarion call of our national anthem, “Arise O Compatriots.” We protest because we do care about life, family, relationships, society, governance and the kingdom of “our own dear native land.”

Nigeria is like the parable of a wild tree growing by a mansion. The tree was beloved, tender and promising when it was transplanted. It bloomed effortlessly, providing shade and clean fresh air. However, it did not have competent and committed caretakers to look after it. It was taken for granted, presumed it would take care of itself by nature, and was unattended to for years until it has grown wild. Hidden, unnoticed below the surface, the rooting system is so deep and extensive underneath the foundation of the house so much that it is now compromising the stability of the mansion. Glaringly above the surface the branches have grown over and above the roof so that they endanger the house. If any fierce storm snaps off a branch, it can bring the house down. What everybody sees now is a wild tree that’s taking up space and has become a nuisance. The dilemma is that, while everybody knows something has to be done to avert the looming disaster, no one has the wisdom or the courage to

trim off the branches, or dig the tree up by its roots without a total collapse.

Nigerian's problems, like that tree, have branched off in many forms and taken new labels over the years. That's what people see—the ominous branches. But what's hidden below the surface and unobserved to anyone is the root system that has become more firmly established. It is a double-edged problem. First, no solution has been attempted to go to the roots and uproot the support and, second, no one has even bothered to prune, dress or trim the branches that are growing wilder and unchecked by the day. To initiate a change in the right direction, the managers will need a heavy dose of the four cardinal virtues—justice, prudence (or wisdom), temperance, and fortitude (or courage)—as defined by Plato and Aristotle and adopted by the Church Fathers. Yet who will bell the cat? At this time, definitely, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts.” I pitch my hope on one thing: “GOD IS ABLE,” (2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 3:20; Heb. 7:25; emphasis mine).

<sup>6</sup> So he [the angel of the Lord speaking to Zechariah, the prophet] answered and said to me:

“This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel:

‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’

Says the Lord of hosts.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Who are you, O great mountain?

Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!

And he shall bring forth the capstone

With shouts of “Grace, grace to it!” ’” (Zech. 4:6, 7).

## **Praying for Nigeria is My Hardest Spiritual Struggle**

I've had to be deliberate and intentional in pursuit of Christ-like-attitude in my prayer for Nigeria. It is not possible for me to be dispassionate but being passionate puts me more in the OT side of the Book. Elijah wouldn't hesitate to call down fire to consume the enemy army; Jesus—with all the angelic hosts of heaven at His command, would do none of such. It would be my choice any day to be possessed by the Spirit of Christ, the Suffering Messiah, than by

the spirit of Elijah, the fire and brimstone prophet. However, on some days when I prayed for Nigeria, and for most nations of the world, my spirit was more in the Psalms: *“Let God arise and His enemies be scattered,”* (Ps. 68:1). My language was more like the OT prophets, *“Woe to you who plunder, though you have not been plundered; and you who deal treacherously, though they have not dealt treacherously with you!”* (Isa. 33:1). But, as the Bible says, *“Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires,”* (Jam. 1:20; NLT).

When I had been in my right mind I had known that on this side of the cross for “a sinner saved by grace” it was not okay to pray imprecatory prayers such as we find in Psalms 69 or 109 (declaring judgment and raining curses on the enemy). There might not have been an Apostle Paul who wrote a third of the NT if the early church had prayed down hell on Saul of Tarsus, their erstwhile most sadistic persecutor. Yet, truth be told, it was not easy for me to always be in my right mind (how could I?) when I remembered the Nigeria of the glorious decade of the 70s compared to the Nigeria of today. It’s like the sharp contrast between day and night. That’s when, in the name of the Lord, I pronounced doom on the enemies of righteousness, and I asked God to be merciful but also to show His anger and justice against all injustices. I know the real enemy is Satan, and we are not fighting against flesh and blood.

I think it was MLK who said something like this: “You cannot fight fire with fire, you quench fire with water; and you cannot fight hate with hate, you conquer hate with love; otherwise you become like them—you become the evil you had set out to eradicate.” Painful as it is, I dare say we cannot stoop down to their methods, even in our prayers. Jesus said we should pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44), Paul said we should bless them (Rom. 12:14), and Peter said suffering was in the package as long as it was for doing the right things (1 Peter Chap. 3 and 4). More than ever before, we know it’s simple and easy to be a Christian, just believe on the Lord Jesus and accept Christ as your Savior. However, it is extremely difficult and taxing to live the Christian life, to live and love like Christ. How do you turn the other cheek when both cheeks have been smashed?

Sometimes, when that Elijah/OT anointing was on me, I would preface or end my prayer saying, “God, I want to be on Your side. I know You are a good God and You love everyone. I also know that by nature, You are not on the side of the oppressors, kidnapers, rapists and murderers. If I am wrong, please forgive me. But please don’t close your eyes to what’s going on as if it is okay, as if you were not a God with seeing eyes. How can all the flagrant injustices, looting, killing, persecutions, carnage, burning and corruption go unchecked by a Just God? Act God! Or, react! Do something! Don’t stand by watching them slaughtering your Blood-bought children like goats. Revenge because You said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.’ Do something that the world may know they are humans, and You are God; they are limited and You are the Sovereign God. Frustrate their plans; confuse their language. Let them no longer agree amongst themselves. Let there be deserters, dissenters and saboteurs in their midst. Let them turn their weapons against themselves. Let them make terrible mistakes and miscalculations that will expose their hypocrisy and lead to an arrest. Let their evil plans backfire against them.”

Poor me! Then, reflecting deeply on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, I become contrite and I’m forced to admit that in actual fact, below the skin, I am not better than them—whoever the “them” are. If I had been in their shoes, if I had lived their lives and shared their fears and their stories, if I had been broken and marred in the way they had been broken and marred, I might just have been them and act the same way—the same brutish ways. That’s when I find myself moved to praying for their salvation, for mercy and forgiveness for them and grace for a repentant heart, for the gospel of peace and love to reach them. In the end, I feel sorry for my self-righteous spirit. It is not unusual that after I rise from such prayers to wonder within myself if I had prayed aright. That’s when I take comfort in Romans 8:26, which says, *“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

Finally, I throw up my hands in surrender and pray, “Lord, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven; Your will be done in Nigeria as You see fit to hasten the coming of Your Kingdom on Earth. It’s

ugly, sad and heartbreaking but I trust that You have a program and that You are working things out on Your own schedule. Not my will but Yours be done. Have Your way, Lord, against all human planning and scheming, against all the devil's strategies and designs. Forgive our sins. Forgive the indifference and smugness of Your church. Heal our land. Send revival, and let it begin with me. Use me in whatever way to be a part of the solution." It's hard to know how to pray when you are beaten, bitter and broken and yet faintly consider that you could as well have been the victimizer, but for the grace of God. Tough and painful! Realistic? I want to believe it is realistic.

My prayers these days are more somber and less combative, more of what some term, prophetic prayers. I try to speak peace and positive words and declare the kind of future I desire for Nigeria, rather than dwell on the past or present mess. I still earnestly "plead my case and present my strong reasons," (Isa. 41:21)—which is what prayer or intercessory prayer is all about—before God the best way I can, based on my knowledge of who God is, but in the end I have to say, "Not my will but Yours be done." To be able to do this without losing my mind means that at the core of my being I have to believe the Sunday school rhyme, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hand." I must believe it's true that God's got the whole world, including Nigeria, in His hand. And, I have to admit to myself that the Sovereign God, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, is not an absent, passive and complacent Ruler and He's is able to run His Universe, His world—and Nigeria—to achieve God's end and fulfill God's eternal counsel and program (Eph. 1:9-11). I have to believe that in God, and with God, compassion and justice, truth and mercy are simultaneously being upheld.

I have to believe that praying as Jesus taught us to pray, "*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,*" is not a passive or resigned prayer but indeed, a warfare prayer because God's Kingdom cannot be established until all earthly kingdoms are vanquished or brought to their knees. I have to really, really believe that. In that spirit, believing it is one kingdom against another, the Kingdom of God and Light against the kingdom of Satan and darkness, I focus my attention and prayer energy against the kingdom of Satan, boldly commanding Satan in the name of Jesus to take off



his hands and release its grips on the nation. The Psalmist says that in God, *“Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed,”* (Ps. 85:10). So, on the positive side, I pray God to send us leaders, a core of leaders who will do God’s will and give God the glory. I pray for leaders who will consider themselves and their roles as shepherds and fathers of the nation who have been divinely entrusted with the care of God’s people and are accountable to God.

Before I shift gears to something else, I like to repeat a rhetorical question that a Nigerian YouTube comedian, Dr. Damages (his YouTube name), currently residing in New York City often asks in bewilderment before signing off. After reviewing untold horrors of the week’s headlines in Nigerian newspapers and television stations, he would pose the question, “Who did this to us?” If Dr. Damages would permit me to repeat his phrase, “Who did this to us?” Just who?

<sup>7</sup>For God is the King of all the earth;  
Sing praises with understanding.

<sup>8</sup>God reigns over the nations;  
God sits on His holy throne.

<sup>9</sup>The princes of the people have gathered together,  
The people of the God of Abraham.  
For the shields of the earth belong to God;  
He is greatly exalted. (Ps. 47:7-9).

But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious,  
Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth. (Ps. 86:15).

<sup>6</sup>The Lord executes righteousness  
And justice for all who are oppressed.

<sup>7</sup>He made known His ways to Moses,  
His acts to the children of Israel.

<sup>8</sup>The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

<sup>9</sup>He will not always strive with us,  
Nor will He keep His anger forever.

<sup>10</sup>He has not dealt with us according to our sins,  
Nor punished us according to our iniquities. (Ps. 103:6-10).

“The Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses,” (Dan. 5:21f).

He has shown you, O man, what is good;  
And what does the Lord require of you  
But to do justly,  
To love mercy,  
And to walk humbly with your God? (Mic. 6:8).

<sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?”  
<sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is *the* first and great  
commandment. <sup>39</sup>And *the* second *is* like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as  
yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the Law and the  
Prophets,”  
(Matt. 22:36-40).

## **Do Black Lives Matter In Nigeria and to Affluent Nigerian Elites?**

About BLACK LIVES MATTER, when that phrase is hyped in US media and chanted in protest grounds, I sometimes have to pinch myself and ask myself again and again, “Do Nigerians believe black lives matter?” What do I mean? It may surprise you to know that I was not thinking of what you were thinking—even though what you had in mind was worth considering. What I really mean is: Do the elite, affluent or middle-class Nigerians and Nigerian Christians in particular believe black lives, all lives, matter? Is human dignity on a grading or continuum scale with some more worthy of the air they breathe and the space they occupy while others are less worthy? Are some lives so easily disposable and dispensable that no one should be concerned about their feelings or shed a tear for their demise? “Please explain what you mean,” you said. I’ll tell you.

When I consider how Nigerians treat house-helps—those unfortunate human beings, young boys and girls, whose parents (or mostly inhuman contractors) hire out to serve and help wealthy and well-to-do families—I have to ask myself, do they believe they are human beings with souls, feelings, emotions, hopes and dreams? Am I mistaken to think that human slavery had been abolished in all cultures of the world? To start with, every child working as house help, no matter how well he/she is treated by the employer, is a symbol of shattered dreams. It’s been shattered dreams for both biological parents and the child, because neither wanted things that way.

I shudder when I see and hear stories how these house helps are treated, maltreated, abused, used and misused. It is sad to see this amongst so-called wealthy Christian families. These hapless souls are maltreated and punished severely for every flimsy excuse and their meager wages garnished just because their employers could do so with impunity. I surmise that in their crooked minds, they rationalize that the child should not complain, because they were doing her a favor and however bad they treat her that her condition would have been worse if she had been with her parents. Please don’t tell me BLACK LIVES MATTER in such context and with that mindset. That innocent little girl or boy from the village is a child of God, sent to you for a purpose: to show who you really are. For some, it shows the real monsters that

they are with all their religiosity and speaking in tongues; and for others, it shows the humanity in them.

Thankfully, I know exceptional cases. I shouldn't tell their stories, but I will: The Bola Sanni family of the Advertisers of Jesus Christ (AJC) in Ilesha, and Chief Michael Olorunfemi family in Lagos are exceptional. (Please promise me you won't sue me for telling your story without your permission).

Brother Bola Sanni—of blessed memory—and his family treated every house girl or maid like part of the family. We all ate together, including the house-helps, sitting around the dining table. Initially, the house-helps were too shy and embarrassed, because they were not used to this, preferring rather to squat and eat their meals in a corner of the kitchen until they were forced to sit at the table with the family. After the meals, every man, woman, resident guest (that's me), head of the family and woman of the house, biological child-boy or girl would pick up his/her plate and carry it to the sink in the kitchen. That's when you knew who the housemaid(s) were, because they were responsible for washing the plates and tidying up the kitchen. Everyone who came into their house as house-help with partial or without education was afforded opportunity to continue his/her education. Bola Sannis would organize the housemaid's work schedule to enable her to complete her education and/or learn a trade. Anyone who was of age to learn a trade, such as sewing or auto-mechanic, leaned and graduated and celebrated "freedom" under their house.

I clearly remember a young girl, probably, nine years when she was brought to them. The Bola Sannis were informed by those who brought her to watch out and be careful, because the girl was a thief and had been reported stealing by prior "employers" of her service. After about two or three weeks and nothing was missing in the house, Mrs. Bola Sanni asked the girl why she had not been stealing as was reported to be her habit. In her childhood innocence, the girl said it was not necessary. She said in prior houses where she worked, she had been deprived of food—basic thing for human survival—so she was forced to steal food. If she stole money it was to buy food. Yet in the Sanni's house, she ate her fill like everyone else and without chiding, like a human being with dignity. When struggling families noticed how house maids in the Sanni

family turned out, many began to urge them to take their children as house-helps and not bother to pay them for their services.

While the Sannis were using young boys and girls as house-helps, the Chief Olorunfemi family would take older boys and girls who'd finished high school but had little to look forward to due to village and rural background, or family and financial handicaps. They would have them as house-helps and pay for their continued education. Literally, scores (meaning multiples of 20s) over the years of promising young high school graduates whose parents couldn't afford tertiary education for their children, have gone to university and earned bachelor's and master's degrees and other professional qualifications in the Olorunfemi house, while working as their house-helps. Yes, they were house-helps, but they were afforded the dignity and status of feeling a part of the Olorunfemi family. They did laundry, cleaning, car washing, running errands, manning the gate, maintaining the lawn and flowers in the yard, and *supervised* cooking, because Mrs. Olorunfemi put the finishing touches on meals prepared for her husband and their guests. There were some who were available to them only during vacation. How do you have a house-help who is only of service to you during vacation? That's the ministry of helps in action. The Olorunfemis regarded this as one of their callings in life and they took it seriously, believing that God had blessed them and was blessing them to be able to perform this particular ministry. They were always eager to find the next person to take under their wings and into their homes, who would someday look back, and say "they made me who I am today, but for them..." That's Christianity.

As for yours truly, I can say that Chief Olorunfemi almost single-handedly financed my MDiv./Ph.D studies in hard currency. I did not approach him for any help; he volunteered. He was a member of the chapel committee of the Protestant Chapel of Christ Our Light, University of Lagos, Akoka campus where I was chaplain. After I had shared my plans and the program of studies, which I had embarked on with the chapel committee, he called me aside after the meeting and said he would pay for my studies. I thought he probably didn't realize how costly that could be, but he did. He kept his word.

Before any Nigerian employer of house-helps or the so-called contractor (who profits from this business of snatching or deceiving

poor villagers to release their kids to work in the metropolis) shouts “black lives matter,” ask yourself this simple question: If the tables were turned and you find yourself in the shoes of those impoverished parents and your children in the shoes of their straggly, destitute, poor children, would you like any person, any human being for that matter, to treat your biological child the way you treat other parents’ children, just because they were underprivileged or had fallen on hard times? Or, a more embarrassing question: If you needed a kidney (or blood type) to save your life, would you shamelessly suggest or pressure the house-help to be tested and if she’s a match would you consider her organ (or blood) worthy enough to be placed into your body without degrading your humanity? The likes of Bola Sanni and Chief Olorunfemi would turn those disadvantaged, straggly and deprived children into human beings with inherent dignity; they would treat them in such a way that, without a shadow of doubt, they would know there’s a God above who loves them, and would help them realize that, indeed, they were children of God. (I suspect if the Olorunfemis read this they will blush—sorry, black people don’t blush. If Bola Sanni reads this he will do whatever saints do when the books of their works on earth are opened.)

Don’t tell me that BLACK LIVES MATTER when you treat an innocent orphan or the child whose impoverished parent are languishing in the village like a subhuman just because of your vantage point. I submit to you that if some employers of housemaids who dehumanize innocent little girls were in Police or Army uniform on the streets, they would have no qualms placing a knee on an unarmed, handcuffed black man.

The Bible says of God:

“But You [God] have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, to repay it by Your hand.

The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless,” (Ps. 10:14).

“A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation,” (Ps. 68:5).

Happily, I have listened to countless stories of successful women today who are disciplined, resilient and hard to crush, because of what they had been through in their childhood. Growing up, they were the

“inferior” or “lesser than” children doing adult chores as paid or unpaid house-helpers. They woke up from bed before anyone else, multitasking, cleaning and making breakfast for everyone. They were the last ones to go to bed after cleaning, tidying up, doing laundry and mopping the floors. They did not break; they toughened up. They learned early in life that nobody would help them if they didn’t stretch to help themselves. In their adult life, the early discipline and hardship are paying high dividends. They are a testimony to Psalm 27:10, which states, *“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.”* Unfortunately, many biological children from those homes who had been pampered, spoiled and shielded from real life are so useless to themselves today they could hardly boil eggs in the kitchen without setting off the smoke alarm. In some cases, the tables have been so turned that the paid or unpaid house-helpers who had been deprived of normative childhood fantasies, abused and maltreated in their childhood have grown up to be mature adults and are now playing the rescuer roles in the lives of the immature brat kids of their childhood tormentors.

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PS

For four decades or more, I’ve been publishing under the name Michael O. Ojewale. For some reasons, I consider this two-volume-work (Nigeria’s 60 Tumultuous Years, 1960-2020 & Pulpits, Pews and Political Parties in US), a duty, my civic duty and spiritual responsibility, and that’s why I choose Chaplain M. Ojewale.

Although the piece is not out of character, I want to understand it as my contribution and my duty to both my birth and adoptive countries—Nigeria and the USA.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> All I had wanted to do was to write an appendix of a half page to one page of information on the Auntie Wanle Memorial Foundation/Back to Basic Ministry. But it took a life of its own and took me down memory lane: musing and mulling on life, as it used to be in Nigeria. In the middle of it came the sad event of October 20 in Nigeria, the killing of unarmed protesters. It is not a piece I had set out to write; it is a piece that's destined to be birthed. All I can only say is, "I'm liking it," as Praise, my present wife, often says fondly of things she enjoys. "I'm liking it," if only for posterity, if only to lend my voice to and join the ongoing conversation in Nigeria and about Nigeria around the world. I pray it turns out a good read and a voice for those who'd been silenced by bullets from cowardly zombies in military uniform.

In the 90s, as the Prayer School Director for Every Home for Christ (Nigeria) and Protestant chaplain of the Chapel of Christ Our Light, University of Lagos, Akoka, I had published a booklet titled: *A CALL TO PRAYER FOR NIGERIA*. I was young then and a dreamer; now I am a senior citizen and pensive. Little did I know that I would again propose such a thing. If you are still dealing today with the same problem that you had dealt with 20 years ago, it can only mean you were stuck and not growing. Unfortunately, Nigeria has been battling with the same set of problems since independence.

<sup>2</sup> In 1959, the regional government of Western Nigeria established the 1st television station in Nigeria and in Africa, Western Nigeria Television Service (WNTS), by the regional premier, Obafemi Awolowo and the regional minister of Information, Anthony Enahoro. WNTV was a partnership between Overseas Rediffusion and the Western regional government. The station, located in Ibadan, the Regional capital, started broadcasting in October 31, 1959. In 1962, the government parted ways with its foreign partner, and WNTV solely came under the control of the regional government.

<sup>3</sup> The Nigerian Civil War (also known as the Biafran War and the Nigerian-Biafran War) was a civil war in Nigeria fought between the government of Nigeria headed by General Yakubu Gowon and the secessionist state of Biafra led by late Lt. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu (1933–2011) from 6 July 1967 to 15 January 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Lord Lugard was the colonial governor of both the Northern Nigeria Protectorate and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria who signed a document consolidating the two, thereby creating the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria on January 1, 1914.

<sup>5</sup> Born in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Aggrey became an accomplished missionary, educator, Pan-Africanist, and public intellectual. He received his early education in the Gold Coast. In 1898 Aggrey sailed to the United States to be trained as a missionary. He attended Livingstone College, a private HBCU, in Salisbury, North Carolina. He graduated in 1902 earning three academic degrees. Aggrey was fluent in both Ghanaian and European languages. James Aggrey earned his doctorate degree in Theology in 1912; followed by a doctorate in Osteopathy in 1914; he pursued further studies at



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Columbia University. He served on the Faculty and Administration at Livingstone College for two decades. After all these Dr. Aggrey returned to Ghana—with pride.

<sup>6</sup> On the night of 14–15 April 2014, 276 mostly Christian female students were kidnapped from the Secondary School in the town of Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria by Boko Haram, an Islamist extremist terrorist organization based in northeastern Nigeria.

<sup>7</sup> Dele Giwa was a journalist, editor and founder of *Newswatch* magazine. A mail bomb killed him in his Lagos home on 19 October 1986. The assassination occurred two days after being interviewed by State Security Service (SSS) officials.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Saro-Wiwa was a Nigerian writer, television producer, environmental activist and winner of the Right Livelihood Award for “exemplary courage in striving non-violently for civil, economic and environmental rights” and the Goldman Environmental Prize. He was a member of the Ogoni people, an ethnic minority whose land in the Niger Delta which has suffered extreme environmental degradation from indiscriminate petroleum waste dumping. Outspoken critic of the Nigerian government, at the peak of his non-violent campaign, he was tried by a special military tribunal and hanged in 1995 by the military dictatorship of Gen. Sani Abacha.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine of Hippo, also known as Saint Augustine, was a theologian, philosopher, and the bishop of Hippo Regius in Numidia, Roman North Africa. He was one of the pillars and founding fathers of our faith. He died in AD 430.