



Features: HOPING AND FEARING FOR NIGERIA

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

Hope and fear are emotional forces that determine the present and future of a person. The absence of hope could lead either to a healthy or unhealthy fear. Many people fear sickness, war, death, failure, hunger, poverty, recession and whatever causes trauma. Normal people pray against these fears and hope for health, peace, life, success, wealth, affluence and comfort. The fear of future makes some people to amass wealth and this could lead to greed and all forms of corruption that Jesus warns against. He says: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Jesus illustrates this with a parable of a farmer who had a rich harvest. The farmer said: "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to my soul, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you" (Luke: 16-23).

Nigeria as a nation was gripped with fear before the 2015 Presidential elections. Many feared that Nigeria would disintegrate. Some fear that there would be ethnic, religious or political war that would soak "the dogs and the baboons" in human blood akin to a deep ocean that flows with malevolent waves. There was fear of anarchy and the nation would be made ungovernable. Some Christians feared that the Sharia law would be fully implemented in every corner of Nigeria. These fears made some people to relocate from North to South and from South to North. The

light of hope dazzled the eyes of Nigerian citizens with the Presidential victory over the incumbent who accepted defeat and congratulated the winner of the election. The hope was marked with joyous contents of the change that dawned upon the nation. People rejoiced that very soon a naira would be equal to a dollar, that every unemployed youth in the land would receive a stipend of five thousand naira a month, that the new responsible government would beam every corner of the nation with constant power supply, that the potholes would vanish from the federal highways, that terrorism would be history in every part of the nation, that unemployment would forever go on vacation and everybody rejoiced in the hope of change.

In 2017, this hope appears too deep with terrible consequences that some people purportedly fabricated a rumour that has gripped the nation to unstable marrow. Traditionally, no one should rejoice at the death even of an enemy. Besides, according to William Shakespeare, death is a necessary end which will come when it will come. CAESAR told his wife CALPURNIA, "Cowards die many times before their deaths. The valiant never taste of death but once. Of all the wonders that I yet have heard, it seems to me most strange that men should fear, seeing that death, a necessary end, will come when it will come" (Act 1, Scene 2). Should anyone question why the death of the president made so much echo, I refer the person to the statement of Caesar's First Lady Calpurnia: "When beggars die there are no comets seen, the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes" (Act 1, Scene 2). I hope and pray that the President would use the occasion of his rumoured obituary to do a deep reflection on the fears and hopes of the nation God has given to him to govern. I hope and pray that he would take this obituary as a message from God akin to the obituary that changed the life of Nobel.

Alfred B. Nobel (1833-1896) was a man who amassed his fortune by producing explosives. He actually invented dynamite. When Nobel's brother died, a newspaper ran a long obituary of Alfred Nobel, believing that it was he who had passed away. Thus, Nobel had an opportunity to read his obituary while still alive. What he read horrified him. The newspaper described him as a man who had made it possible to kill more people more quickly than anyone else who had ever lived. Nobel realized that he was going to be remembered for evil whereas he thought he was a great scientist. He decided to make his life useful to humanity by sustaining life. He established the Nobel Prizes that is

now presented for outstanding achievement in literature, peace, economics, medicine and the sciences. How many people have the opportunity to read their Obituary before they die? Only those God wants to change for the best to meet him in heaven. (http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/271383).

It appears that hope has become the nature of Nigeria since independence. The Citizens expect so much from their leaders. They want the natural and human resources of the nation utilized in a way and manner that no Nigerian would long to run away from the fatherland except when duty calls and there is absolute need to travel outside the shores of the native land. This high level of hope in leadership is the reason why Nigerians are not very patient with their leaders. In less than two years of governance, some Nigerians feel that a change is necessary to usher in a messiah akin to the messianic expectation of the Jews. From the many calls I have received from our Muslims partners in dialogue and the messages of phobia for religious revolution, it is very clear that Nigeria urgently need to respond to the genocide of Southern Kaduna and other parts of Nigeria where blood keep flowing like a river. The present condition of the nation is so bad that some religious leaders are being pursued for inflammatory statements.

In the view of the International Community, every Nigerian is perceived as chronically corrupt except each individual has to prove his innocence and be cleared. It now appears that every Nigerian is a suspected thief, Boko Haram member, Herdsman and kidnapper until the person is proven innocent. The Green Passport is gradually become a burden of shame to those who carry it. The Green Card of Nigerians is being threatened in the United States of America. The card for Automated Teller Machine (ATM) has been rendered useless outside Nigeria. It is no longer possible to do online transaction with Nigerian ATM card. No one has predicted yet the end to the fear of the continuous fall of oil price that had been the main source of national income. Instead of these fears to be addressed by technocrats and scientists, Religious adherents are suspecting each other amidst the killings that have refused to abate. The terrorists and herdsmen are gradually dismantling Nigeria given the agitation for secession from some regions.

Nigeria is presently living under the fear of suspicions. Everything in Nigeria is now given a religious interpretation.

For instance, the Nigerian army's Logo has existed for many years and no attention of any Christian has been drawn to the **Arabic script in the logo**: The transliteration of the Arabic script on the Nigerian Army logo is: *Nasrunminallah* which means "Victory Comes from God Alone". If not for the religious sentiments of the nation, the meaning of this Arabic inscription does not contradict the Christian faith. Because of *islamophobia*, Some Christians are worried why it is written in Arabic. Ordinarily, the "Lord's prayer" and the "Hail Mary" can be written in Arabic which does not necessarily mean Islam. It is possible to be an Arab without being a Muslim. I am afraid that if these fears are not controlled, the unity of the nation is under threat. These notwithstanding, I am hoping that if the good Christians and Muslims in Nigeria can come together to address the fears of the Nation, Nigeria will survive. It is my hope that if the Nigerian Inter-religious Executive Council (NIREC) is resuscitated, the Christians and Muslims would have a forum to honestly put their cards on the table and draw a better road map for the survival of the nation. May God make Nigeria flourish again with good leadership! May the perpetrators of the obituary of Nigeria have a change of heart! Nigeria shall survive with God on our side.

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