

The Gospel According to Jonathan

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By Okey Ndibe

A week ago, this newspaper carried a News Agency of Nigeria report under the caption, "We are a vain nation". The quoted claim was not as important as the man who voiced it. In case you missed it, the statement was credited to Goodluck Jonathan, sidekick to Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, the slumbering disaster who presumes to govern Nigeria.

Jonathan, a lecturer at the University of Port Harcourt before he made a foray into politics, reportedly "identified the pursuit of mundane things that are worthless to the country's development by both leaders and followers, as the cause of the nation's under-development."

Jonathan made this curious assertion during an Easter Sunday service at Aso Rock Chapel. In what NAN described as "an emotive address," Yar'Adua's deputy waxed diagnostic about Nigeria's crisis. In his words, "What makes us remain the way we are, what makes us to be backward, is that we value those things that matter less to a society."

At this point, those who've followed Jonathan's political career would want to exclaim Wow! But wait, the man isn't done yet. The news agency quoted the man as confessing that, "Having worked in the government for almost 10 years now, I know that most of the problems we have, are because of the vain and trivial things that charm us most." Jonathan then recalled that Nigeria once

shared the same developmental bracket as India, Brazil, Indonesia and Singapore, "but regretted that those countries had left us behind."

What accounted for Nigeria's catastrophic slip? An answer was offered in the gospel according to Jonathan. As NAN reported, Jonathan "blamed past leaders for looting the treasury and stashing funds meant for the country's development in banks outside the country." Again, in his words: "Nigeria has so much money stashed outside this country, most of the money stolen from the public treasury. If 50 per cent of these funds were brought back and kept in Nigerian banks they would have enough funds to give as loans. Our banks would not need to send girls to go out and hustle for deposits."

Nor was this the end of Jonathan's strange confessions. He stated that the embezzlers "do not even need 10 per cent of [their loot]" and that "some of them hide the money and their children will not even see it."

Having diagnosed the Nigerian disorder, Jonathan proclaimed the antidote. He implored Nigerians, wrote NAN, "to use the Easter period to purge themselves of mundane things and pursue things that would be beneficial to the uplifting of the nation." Speaking with the earnestness of a prelate, he made a prediction: "if we sacrifice most of these artificial and

mundane things that are not critical to us...this country will be a better place.”

Odds are that some speechwriter handed Mr. Jonathan this speech and – without pausing to rehearse it – he rushed off to the chapel to read it. Why did he not deem fit to reflect on this self-indicting speech before he mounted the podium with it? For that matter, why did he not see the wisdom of clearing the speech with his wife, Patience Jonathan, before reading it?

Until former President Olusegun Obasanjo’s abracadabra installed Jonathan as “vice president,” Patience Jonathan was a target of investigations by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). In late 2006, agents of the anti-corruption agency seized close to \$15 million dollars from Mrs. Jonathan, whose husband was then governor of Bayelsa. Two months earlier, the EFCC had frozen N104 million it also accused Mrs. Jonathan of attempting to stow away through one Mrs. Nancy Ebere Nwosu.

Given his family’s history, Mr. Jonathan’s sermon on the malaise of graft and greed is nothing less than fascinating. Could this Easter message be heartfelt – or was it just another hypocritical speech by a man who, like most Nigerian politicians, is beyond shame? If the man’s sentiments are genuine, then what has he done to censure his wife? Why hasn’t he invited the EFCC to go through with its investigation of his wife, and to haul her before the law if she’s found to have engaged in gluttonous embezzlement?

Beyond his wife’s questionable financial activities, Mr. Jonathan may also have a few personal questions to answer. A year

and a half ago, this former lecturer responded to public pressure by making his asset declaration public. He declared that he was worth N295 million.

How did he generate that stupendous level of income? As the Guardian columnist Sonala Olumhense noted, “this means he had been growing richer at the rate of close to N17 million per month” during the 17 months he was governor.

If Mr. Jonathan meant what he said in his Easter message, he owes it to himself to explain how he accumulated his fortune. And he should also explain how his wife came by the sums of \$13.5 million and N104 million. He should clarify the disturbing discrepancy between his sermon and his conduct, or he should simply exit the pulpit.

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8. My Biafran Eyes
9. My Father's English Friend
10. A female speaker's manly vices
11. The education of Umar Yar'Adua
12. The triumph of barbarism
13. Achebe's apt censure
14. Andy Uba Goes to War (1)
15. Andy Uba Goes to War (11): What OBJ taught Uba
16. Why I Take It Personally
17. Andy Uba's highest bid
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About Okey Ndibe



Okey Ndibe is a novelist, poet and political activist. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain*, a critically reviewed novel published in 2000. Ndibe founded *African Commentary*, a magazine described as "award-winning and widely acclaimed." He is also a published poet, and a former associate professor of English at Bard College at Simon's Rock. He currently teaches fiction and African literature at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. Okey Ndibe is finishing his second novel titled *Foreign gods, incorporated*.

Speaking Engagements

To discuss a speaking engagement, please contact Okey Ndibe by e-mail (okey@okeyndibe.com) or by phone (860.306.7843).

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