

African Research Review

An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 4 (4), Serial No. 17, October, 2010

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070-0083 (Online)

Holy Johnson's Patriotism: an Ethical Challenge to Nigerians (Pp. 123-135)

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Abstract

In this paper, an attempt was made to study Holy Johnson's patriotism in Nigeria, which is supposed to be emulated by the contemporary Nigerian leaders. Thanks to enormously rich archival materials that made it possible to know the role of Holy Johnson in creating black leadership consciousness that led to nationalistic movements as part of its syntheses. Patriotism in this context is essentially love of one's fatherland, which is a noble and civic virtue, of immense social significance and value. It is hoped that Johnson's patriotism should constitute Nigerian ethical principle of leadership. In the light of the nature and obligations of patriotism as outlined in the research paper, one may legitimately conclude that as social justice is the true foundation of social order, so also, is patriotism its animating and dynamic spirit. Nigeria needs disciplined and spirit-filled leaders, morally and academically sound leaders. Nigeria needs also security, strong political, economic, religious, and electoral institutions.

Introduction

In time and contemporary experience, spurious or false patriotism and violent nationalism such as that of Hitler, his mentors and theoreticians have become identical and interchangeable, and equally abominable as both are invariably and equally characterized by arrogance and fanaticism, boastfulness and intolerable chauvinism, narrow mindedness and discrimination, self-righteousness and bigotry, violence and inhumanity, unjust, exploitation, manipulation and other forms of social injustice (Messner, 1957). False patriotism, in its social and international dimension, has frequently led to racial and ethnic discrimination, class rivalry, corruption, kidnapping, armed robbery, envy and hatred, but also to revengefulness and a threat to international peace which eventually lead to war.

According to Ayandele (19970), the precise date when James Johnson was brought into this world may never be known. This may probably seem strange to scholars familiar with the impressive and considerably detailed documentary materials on the Waterloo District of the Sierra Leone Colony, where he was born, among which marriage licenses provide some clue to the birth date of many contemporaries older than he. But is clear beyond doubt that James Johnson had been living several years before 1840, the date ascribed him by the obituaries of his death, and before 1838, the year perpetuated in the expensive and prominent statue in St. George Cathedral Freetown, commission to his memory by his Benguema countrymen. For the records reveal that not only was he in school in 1843 but also he was by this date a mature boy, intelligent enough to read the Bible, master “very well” the compound rules of Arithmetic, and able to take down dictation. In those days of poor diet, relatively slow rare of maturity and little advantage for young children to enter school, James Johnson could scarcely have been less than seven years in 1843. In all probability, then, he was born about 1835.

But to Baur (2005), James Johnson (1832-1917) was a Yoruba, born in the African Methodist Church of Sierra Leone that had been founded by Black American settlers in 1821. Though he joined the Anglican Communion in which he was educated, the independent African Church he had known in his childhood remained the ideal of his whole lifetime. According to Baur (2005), religion and patriotism were intimately interwoven in his heart, expressed by his motto, “God and my Country” (p. 126). His deep piety earned him the reputation of being the most genuine Christian in West Africa; Nigerians called him smilingly “Holy Johnson”, and at the Church Missionary Society Secretariat in London he was spoken of as the “Pope of

Nigeria". He was convinced of the equal capability of the Africans if they were given the same chances as other people. But as he saw it, the European missionaries through their continued dominance and protection never provided these chances and therefore hindered the full development of the Africans. Moreover, he attributed the success of Islam to its use of African customs and institutions. Therefore, he advocated the evangelization of Africa by Africans, and if by expatriates, then best by negroes from America.

Iwe (1990) defines patriotism as essentially love of one's fatherland, is a noble and civic virtue, of immense social significance and value. In time and contemporary experience, spurious or false patriotism and violent nationalism such as that of Hitler, his mentors and theoreticians have become identical and interchangeable, and equally abominable as both are invariable and equally characterized by arrogance and fanaticism, boastfulness and intolerable chauvinism, narrow mindedness and discrimination, self-righteousness and bigotry, violence and inhumanity, unjust exploitation, manipulation and other forms of social injustice (Messner, 1957). False patriotism, in its social and international dimension, has not infrequently led to racial discrimination, class rivalry, corruption and hatred, revengefulness and threat to international peace and eventually to war.

Etymologically, or in literary origin, the word, patriotism is derived basically from two Latin words, pater (father) and patria (fatherland or home land). Etymologically, patriotism is quite domestic. In real meaning also patriotism shares common concepts and connotations with the family or domestic life. As the family connotes paternity and maternity, authority and loyalty, love and sacrifices, so also is patriotism analogously characterized by fatherland and motherland, loyalty and constituted authority, love and service (Pavan-Onofrio, 1966)). Patriotism is fundamentally a socio-ethical virtue which inclines the citizen to the enlightened and legitimate love of his home, his community and his native land. It is a particular form of social charity (*amor socialis*), and both are practically identical and interchangeable with public spirit, fraternity and community sense. Patriotism as love on a social scale has, as its primary objective and concern, the welfare and legitimate interests of one's community and fatherland. Thus the common good of one's community and nation and the relentless pursuit of the same by honest means and service are the hall-marks and primary objective of true patriotism. Hence patriotism is therefore characterized by the willingness to defend and promote its legitimate interests and values. It is a form of civic sharing of resources and responsibilities. It requires national ideology which will take

into consideration the cultural and religious into consideration the cultural and religious (traditional, Christian and Islamic) heritage of Nigeria, the lessons of its political history, the fundamental norms, values and legitimate aspirations of the generally of Nigerians, the unquestionable and crystallized principles of modern democracy and civilized humanity.

Holy Johnson's Ideal Patriotism: An X-Ray

Ayandele (1970) quoting James Johnson's statement posited,

Egypt is a part of Africa, Ethiopia is the land of the Negro people, the land to which I belong, the European governments have parted the continent among themselves-by what law, by what right, I know not. Yes, but they have done it. It is undoubtedly the right of might over right, for they have a stronger power (p.192).

This shows how bad Johnson felt concerning the partition of Africa by European powers in 1885 Berlin Conference. His concern for peoples outside the African continent was not over political matters as such but over the foibles of their human nature – a nature that could, like that of Africans, make them love and hate, virtuous and vicious, spiritual and mundane, ascetic and sensual. Hence he was incessant in denouncing the war element in European peoples. As in national politics James Johnson wished that Christian principles governed international relations. He denounced war generally, whether between professed Christian nations or between a Christian and a non-Christian state, although he never denied that war might fulfill the divine purpose. He denounced the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and commiserated with its victims. He was shocked by the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905, believing that as a Christian nation then Russia ought to have taught Japan, a pagan country, the art of peace. As a continent in which Christianity had flourished for centuries James Johnson believed that the peoples of Europe ought to have become completely saturated with Christianity to the point of beating their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruninghooks.

Ayandele (1970) expressing the feelings of James Johnson averred that Johnson not only astounded by the failure of the European powers to keep the peace and allow Christian ethics to determine the pattern of relations among themselves, he was also scandalized by the nature of their contact with, and their attitude to, the African continent. The Europeans, he said, failed to exhibit Christian virtues in their dealings with Africans. They were first and foremost plunderers. According to Johnson, for centuries the Europeans had

plundered Africa of millions of her inhabitants, thereby making her history "dark" and debasing her peoples. As he put it in 1873, "Centuries upon centuries have found and left us an ill-used people. The land has been denuded of its inhabitants. The intellect has been oppressed and the body enslaved" (CMS, 1873, p.123). Even after the cessation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade Europeans continued to plunder Africa, first of her Sylvan products and then of her enormous mineral resources. This act of plunder, he said, continued into colonial era; the desire to plunder was responsible for the scramble; never had altruism, pure and simple (excepting British repression of the slave trade), determined Europe's contact with Africa. The result, Johnson observed, was that, "No nation or people on the earth now occupy the unfortunate and wretched position we occupy. We have too long been prey to the cruel force of the greed, after gain that has marked commerce by Europe with Africa" (Ayandele 1970, p.193). In his observation the pattern of economic relations between Europe and African was unsatisfactory and inimical to the latter's interest in several ways. Firstly it was not based on the principle of equality, since the middleman's system that served as intermediaries between European trader and the producers in the interior. The European Method of free trade was characterized by military expeditions against African peoples in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. These traders, contended James Johnson, were themselves middlemen; they were intermediaries between the manufacturers in Europe and African buyers.

Secondly, James Johnson deplored the fact that in the Afro-European commercial contact Africans were no more than incidental beneficiaries. Railways, roads, telegraphs and other facilities that improved communication and transportation, he declared, were not introduced for the convenience of Africans but for the development of European trade.

Thirdly, James Johnson considered that Africans were being cheated by Europeans in the sense that in return for the rich commodities the latter were receiving from Africa and which were helping to promote wealth and comfort in Europe," Africans were being given in return largely the poisonous, vile and debasing gin. That James Johnson's three basic criticisms of European commercial relations up to the era of colonial rule are historically valid cannot be denied. Contemporaries like Mary Kinsley and Edmund Morel, popular defenders of British rule in West Africa, emphasized clearly that commerce was the primary determinant of the British presence in West Africa, European trader like John Holt and educated Africans such as

Obadiah Johnson recognized that Africans were no more than incidental beneficiaries, whilst the debasement of Africans and the economic unsoundness (from the African viewpoint) of drenching African with gin was admitted by empire-makers like F.D. Lugard and Taubman Goldie. The amateurish criticism by Johnson, of Afro-European commercial relations to same extent would still apply today.

From the beginning James Johnson identified himself with the nationalist movement. Hitherto assume it has been the fashion among scholars to that Nigerian nationalism and constitutional development did not begin vigorously until after 1914. This observation, to say the least, is misleading and not based upon empirical data or investigation. Evidence shows that there was a forceful nationalist awakening in Nigeria before 1914; that it was constructive, purposeful, inspiring and fruitful and that it prepared the ground for the better known post-World War I nationalism. This nationalist movement had three did not but inter-related strands, viz, the resistance of the Nigerian potentates to British rule; Ethiopians, and cultural nationalism. These three strands were clearly exemplified in James Johnson's career, as the rest of this research work shows. Although he did not initiate Nigerian nationalist sentiment, but Nigerian rulers in Yorubaland and Old Calabar did to the British imperialism which was just evident during the coming of missionaries to Nigeria in the forties (Ayandele, 1970). That is before the European missionaries and educated Africans began to nurse the ideas which Ajayi had dealt with so thoroughly in book (Ajayi, 1977).

James Johnson corresponds with American leaders like Booker T. Washington, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. As part of his activities in Nigeria, when he arrived in Lagos in 1874 and was made pastor of the leading congregation, that of St. Paul's Breadfruit Church, his work there was devoted to the setting up of the Lagos Native Pastorate, begun in 1875, and the development of the Lagos school Board. He was far from being indulgent to his congregation. Discipline (ethics) was strict over church attendance, the payment of dues and the leading of an upright life. Even in little matters he imposed his will. It was said, for instance, when he began to preach against the unnecessary adoption of foreign names, that if any baby was presented to him for baptism, he listened as the European names were being read out and then asked if there was not one other name, a local name, that the parents wished to call their child. As soon as one was mentioned, he signed the baby with the cross and baptized him by that last name alone (Ajayi, 1975), which is not common experience nowadays during baptism. At

first his congregation were on the verge of revolt against his high-handed manner of life that, as they grew to know him, they loved him. It was with difficulty they allowed him to go to Abeokuta in 1877.

He travelled through all the old mission stations, to Ilaro, to Ibadan and Oyo, noting the state of the Churches, what parts of the liturgy needed adaptation and what reforms were most urgently called for. He referred in particular to the continued problems of polygamy, drunkenness, and domestic slavery, all of which he wished to see rooted out. According to him, there is no Christian government to stamp out this occurred institution with the stroke of a pen. Consequently, as averred Ajayi (1975), "He attacked domestic slavery, use of European names and advocated for native church Africa" (pp.237, 209, 254, 267). The movement for ceremoniously casting off European clothes hardly attracted the African pastors, but the debate and the research on the laws and customs of the people, their dancing, their elaborate court etiquette, their sayings and philosophy went on as much within as outside the churches. The importance people in Lagos attached to the events on the Niger which culminated in the supersession of Bishop Crowther by European missionaries will be readily appreciated when it is realized that they led directly to the first attempt by Anglicans and Methodists to found a separatist African Church.

James Johnson, in pressing, like Crowther for the promotion of the indigenous culture, was always using anthropological arguments. He was emphatic about the differentiation of the races, not so much physically as culturally, arising out of the differences of geography and climate. Ajayi cited part of what Johnson wrote in 1883 as,

European ideas, tastes, languages and social habits, like those of other nations, have been influenced more or less by geographical positions and climatic peculiarities, and what is esteemed by one country polite may be esteemed by another barbarous and that God does not intend to have the races confounded, but that the negro or African should be raised on its own idiosyncrasies (p. 267).

Later, a few CMS and Methodist members in Lagos decided to form the United Native African Church.

Patriotism: An Ethical Challenge to Nigerians

Patriotism imposes a set of obligations on every member of the community such as mutual respect among all the citizens in their equal citizenship and

the integrity of their fundamental human rights; equitable allocation and distribution of material and cultural available to the Nigerian society; scrupulous avoidance of such attitudes and practices which subvert and corrode social love and fraternity, such as class spirit, and tribalism (or ethnicism) all of which are highly detrimental to the spirit and principle of patriotism; and pursuit of peace and the readiness to resolve all conflicts and differences by peaceful and mutual understanding, as the common good which is the primary concern of patriotism clearly dictates.

Other principles of patriotism include readiness for service and sacrifice, for the welfare of the community, if and when legitimate circumstances so require; refraining, both at home and abroad, from all acts of commission and omission, capable of weakening the nation or tarnishing its image abroad; promotion of the good name of the country through achievements and constructive criticism, if and when necessary, and the unswerving and uncompromising pursuit of excellence, merit and social justice at all times without ill-will, fear or favouritism (Achebe,1983). There should be prudent and careful attitude to public funds, property and other resources; prayer for the welfare of the country and its leaders; loyalty and rational obedience to constituted authority and the amenability of both the governed and the governor, (those in authority and under authority) to the principles of the rule of law and public order.

In the light of the nature and obligations of patriotism as outlined above one may legitimately conclude that as social justice is the true foundation of social order, so also is patriotism its animating and dynamic spirit. Nigeria needs spirit-filled leaders, morally sound leaders and the led alike and financial prudent citizens.

We need strong sports institution where Nigerian footballers and athletes should play for honour and not for money. We need strong political institution where the leaders will rule for good name and not to enmass wealth to the detriment of the citizens. We need strong security institution whereby the police, army, navy, customs and civil servants etc should render selfless service to our beloved nation devoid of corruption, violent, nepotism, tribalism, statism, embezzlement of public funds meant for security. Nigeria is at war against kidnapping, armed robbing, corruption, human trafficking, child abuse, unemployment, religious bigotry, election rigging, mal-administration etc. The security agencies should not involve themselves in politics. They should avoid political, spiritual and moral cowardice. They

should respect democratic principles. No administrative office that is for one person or for a family. It is for Nigeria. And Nigeria is greater than any person.

There should be strong educational institution devoid of examination malpractice, nepotism, statism, god-fatherism, but it will serve as a veritable formative centre for future leaders. It should be an institution whereby one can be a Headmaster, Principal, Provost or Vice Chancellor irrespective of his state of origin. Obama's victory at USA Presidential Poll should be a lesson to us. We need also strong judicial institution where justice is seen and rendered without sentiment, emotion, delayed and without been biased. There should be a strong traditional institution consolidated with sound moral spiritual and traditional values.

There should be strong political institution that is greater than individual or group of persons, and also devoid of corruption, thuggery, nepotism, statism, tribalism, god-fatherism, embezzlement of funds, ego-centric and mal-administration but with strong political ideology. Nigeria needs also strong electoral institution led by men of integrity from good family backgrounds, pious, and straightforward as independent national electoral commissioners who will conduct credible, fairest and freest elections. Elections where our votes will count. They must be dogged without being bullish, mature in approach, discourse, action, principled and integrative. Their motto should be, "We-minded" and "We-focused", and not I-minded or I-focused.

Our country needs strong religious institution guided by enlightened minds, broad-minded clergy, and honest pious minds devoid of denominationalism, religious bickery, fundamentalism, fanaticism, envy, and the like. The religious leaders should be interested in restoring solidarity spirit among different religions.

We should serve God and our country. When we seek for welfare of our country, in its welfare, we shall also find welfare for ourselves. The image of our country should be paramount thing our mind should focus on.

Nigeria and its unpatriotic forces

At this point, we shall like to highlight on same factors militating against true patriotism in Nigeria. This includes,

1. Decline of domestic discipline. In most recent times, the average Nigeria family is threatened by instability and disintegration owing to several factors. Lack of adequate premarital and marriage counselling facilities has meant eventual domestic disharmony or disintegration. Unemployment, and corruption among some government officials have imposed problems and domestic disabilities.

2. Tribalism or Ethnicism

Achebe (1983), gave the definition of tribalism in Nigeria as “discrimination against a citizen because of his place of birth” (p.7). In operation and effect, tribalism is the secreting of excellence, merit, social justice and true national interest on the altar of unjustifiable and selfish ethnic considerations (Iwe,1990). It is tribalism that has made impossible of realization, so far, the idea of a Nigeria in which a citizen could live and pursue any legitimate goal open to his fellows; a Nigeria in Kaduna or Lagos states, and a Fulani or Hausa to become governor of Enugu, Cross River or Rivers states. Tribalism, in other words, is the antithesis of patriotism. The former is after exclusive selfish sectional interest, while the latter is a quest for the common good of all the citizens.

3. The Deficiencies of Public Functionaries

The short- comings of our public servants and functionaries are a matter of common knowledge. Many of them are servants only in name, for in reality they behave as masters of their fellow citizens, in their attitude to and discharge of their duties. Often the civil service always lack resourcefulness and imagination, limping bureaucracy, self-serving conformity, and down right insensitivity to the legitimate requirements of the citizens, who in extreme cases are treated with spiteful arbitrariness and arrogance, if not subjected to physical violence.

4. Lack of Proper National Ideology

At various times and occasions, opined Iwe (1985), many Nigerian leaders of thought have suggested one form of ideology or the other-leaning in general towards one brand of socialism or the other. However, today in the third millennium and fifty years after political independence, Nigeria as a nation is still wallowing in a socio-political disarray and ideological vaccum, without a systematically well articulated body of ideas, norms and strategies for its national identity and development. Even when these ideas that are lacking are made available to the government of the day, it will

discard the noble ideas with ignominy and look for its selfish ideology that will not stand the test of time. In Nigeria, there is no strong electoral institution and no strong political will.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria is still in need of a carefully and systematically developed political ideology to serve as a basis for effective reincarnation of social values, for political, economic, cultural education and socialization of the masses, and guiding spirit of the juridical constitution of the nation, as a strategy for the integration of the various ethnic groups and as a bulwark against all forms of corruption and abuses of power and ownership and lastly, as the foundation of public order and social justice.

The basic duty of the Nigerian citizens is love for their country. This duty rests in the law of nation because the fatherland is the community of people to which the citizens are bound by common mores and cultures, and because they are indebted to their country for protection and promotion of the common weal. The love of one's country must manifest itself in interest and concern for the country's welfare (Peschke, 1999). Love of one's country should however not be confounded with narrow nationalism, which in an egoist way is only concerned with the benefit of one's own nation, or overvalues it and disregards the rights of others or thinks little of them. True patriotism is at the same time characterized by the spirit of love and justice towards other nations, even towards the enemy nations of yesteryear.

In general usage patriotism is often used synonymously with 'nationalism' (Macquarrie, 1981). It is the individual's attitude of love and loyalty directed towards his own country. From the standpoint of Christian ethics one's own group does exercise a claim. Every man should demonstrate loyalty to fellow workers, family members, or other members of his church. No one should neglect proper devotion to the legitimate interests of his country. Each Christian has a mission in his situation.

For the Christian, patriotism is always to be defined in terms of a hierarchy of loyalties. His first allegiance is always to God alone. Among human groupings loyalty to the national state is to be tempered by consideration for other nationalities. The thoughtful man is loyal to his class and to his college, but even more to the whole community of learning.

The foundations of patriotism comprised the family, the educational system, mass communication media, culture of excellence development of justice,

sound national ideology, leadership by example that is devoid of corruption, law of domicile, spirit of religion and the recognition of the dignity of labour from all account and as the uniquely profuse tributes that accompanied his death clearly testify, Holy James Johnson was a rare gem, but popular personality who occupied an Olympian height in matters of morality and patriotism. Virtually half a century this idealist of British West Africans commanded undiminished universal respect among African and Europeans even when they disapproved of his irrepressible passion, his puritanical outlook, his dogmatism, sphinx-like resoluteness, anti-white vituperations and his quixotism. To the Sierra Leonians he was “Wonderful Johnson,” for Nigerians “Holy Johnson”, to the authorities of the Church Missionary Society the “Pope” of Nigeria, and for those who knew him in Britain a “Saint”.

Though he left behind no evil that might have lived after him his good was interred with his bones. His activities and ideas, which essentially anticipated those of the well-known nationalist leaders of the inter-war years and of post independence statesmen were completely forgotten until only very recently. Two factors would seem to account for the total eclipse of James Johnson. First, he left behind no self-advertisement in the form of publications of monumental value such as have perpetuated the names of E.W.Blyden, J. Casely Hayford, J.M. Sarbah and J.B.Horton, whose works are now being reprinted by Frank Cass. Second, naturally, biographies of the nationalist crusader and independence winners of present day Africa have absorbed the interest and attention of writers. These writers do not perceive that Abdel Nasser, Habib Bourguiba, Ben Bella Leopold Senghor, kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Julius Nyerrere, Jamo kenyatta and Kenneth Kaunda-to name a few-are architects rather than factors of independence, winners rather than beginners or originators. All over Africa, both before and during the colonial occupation of the continent, lettered and unlettered individuals and peoples had prepared the way for the well-advertised patriots of the last half century. Thanks to enormously rich archival materials, it has been possible in this paper to partially exhume and resuscitate one of the earliest of the literate prophets and pioneers of African nationalism-Holy James Johnson.

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