

The Man Who Would Not Be Cowered: Dele Farotimi and the Unmasking of a Nation

There are men who speak because it is safe to speak and there are men who speak because silence would cost them their conscience. Dele Farotimi belongs to the latter category — fearless, knowledgeable, straightforward and trustworthy. Detribalised. Full of wisdom. In a season when courage has grown scarce and conviction routinely bends before power, his voice has remained stubbornly, inconveniently audible. What makes Farotimi compelling is not merely his eloquence — Nigeria has never lacked eloquent men. What distinguishes him is his refusal to be intimidated, co-opted or bent to suit the political mood of the day. His willingness to say uncomfortable truths, regardless of whose interests are threatened, has made him one of the few public figures many Nigerians regard as genuinely independent of political patronage, ethnic sentiment and partisan convenience. Among Farotimi's most striking positions is his controversial gratitude for the presidency of Bola Ahmed Tinubu — not for its achievements but for what it has exposed. It is a strange kind of debt one owes to adversity but the point stands: without this trial, many Nigerians would not have learned what they now know.

People once regarded as untouchable — some nearly mistaken for gods — have been revealed, simply, as men. Ordinary, fallible, compromised men. Institutions once trusted implicitly are now being questioned openly. How independent is the judiciary, really? How committed are our democratic advocates when power changes hands? How many public intellectuals, religious leaders and political actors remain faithful to the principles they once preached? These are uncomfortable questions but they are questions this moment has forced upon the nation.

Some individuals many regarded as moral giants might have carried their reputations to the grave intact, had circumstances never tested them. Instead, the test came and it undressed them. Men who once spoke passionately about justice, freedom and electoral integrity have shown, under pressure, exactly where their loyalties truly stand. There is a particular clarity in confronting an evil that refuses ambiguity. Had the failures of this leadership been debatable — had there been room to say 'perhaps it isn't so bad' — it would have been easy for the compromised to keep pontificating, keep sounding like men of principle. But when the evidence is this stark, this unrepentant, those who still choose to excuse it, explain it away or normalise it reveals themselves fully. There is a strange mercy in that: clarity forces honesty, even when the honesty is unflattering. In that sense, this era has become a test of character — some have emerged stronger; others have watched carefully cultivated images unravel in public view.

One recurring sentiment among Nigerians is that accusations of tribalism frequently collapse when confronted by integrity. Many argue that if Farotimi were presented as a presidential candidate alongside prominent South-East political figures — the likes of Rochas Okorocha, Hope Uzodinma, Orji Uzor Kalu or Dave Umahi — his support among Igbo voters would be overwhelming, rivaling even a candidate like Peter Obi in

enthusiasm.

The point isn't a claim about any tribe's superiority; it's a challenge to lazy stereotyping. People are not tribalistic by nature — they are drawn to competence, integrity and courage wherever they find it and repelled by mediocrity regardless of where it comes from. The loudest tribal voices often dominate headlines but they do not represent entire communities. Character, not geography, is what earns loyalty and Farotimi's cross-regional appeal is proof of it.

The pulpits, too, have grown quiet as this same spirit of scrutiny has reached the church. For many Nigerians, one of the most revealing developments of recent years has been the silence or selective outrage, of some religious leaders. Back in May 2016, prominent clerics openly challenged government over insecurity and governance failures. One widely cited example: a leading cleric publicly petitioned then-President Jonathan over rising insecurity, threatening a million-man protest march if action wasn't taken.



Today, many of those same voices appear markedly restrained despite worsening national anxieties — some now counselling patience, suggesting critics shouldn't expect the president to personally 'wear khaki and fight insecurity.' Whether one agrees with the criticism or not, the perception of inconsistency has become difficult to ignore. The shift in tone, applied selectively depending on who occupies power, is itself the story. Not all religious leaders deserve this criticism. Many have remained steadfast, speaking truth regardless of who holds office. But the contrast has fueled a broader national conversation: can moral authority remain credible when outrage appears selective, dependent on who happens to be

in power?

This matters precisely because it is the environment in which Farotimi's voice resonates. Many Nigerians see in him a rare public figure whose positions do not fluctuate with political convenience — a man willing to spend his credibility rather than hoard it, to challenge power without calculating personal advantage. He understands that principles only matter when they cost something.

Nigeria does not merely suffer a shortage of good politicians.

It suffers a shortage of citizens willing to defend principle when doing so carries consequences — a shortage of voices that cannot be purchased, intimidated or silenced. Whether or not one agrees with all of Farotimi's conclusions is beside the point. His growing influence reflects a deeper national hunger for honesty, consistency and moral courage. In the end, Dele Farotimi's significance lies not only in what he says but in what his willingness to say it exposes about everyone else standing quietly by. That is why many Nigerians see in him more than a commentator or activist. They see a reminder of what integrity looks like when it refuses to kneel