

When the Servant mistakes the stage for a Shrine

There is something revealing about the timing of Temitope Ajayi's article. It arrives not as an independent reflection on governance but as a polished piece of presidential propaganda, published swiftly to contain the fallout from a meeting between the Catholic Bishops and a president whose record invites more scrutiny than praise. That Ajayi holds the title of Senior Special Assistant to President Tinubu on Media and Publicity is not incidental. It is everything. A man paid to manage perception cannot also be trusted to deliver honest assessment. His article, for all its elegant dressing, is architecture built on sand. Ajayi opens with the claim that Cardinal Onaiyekan abused "clerical privilege" by speaking publicly after the bishops' meeting. But this framing is intellectually dishonest from the very first sentence. In a democracy, the president does not own the people's mandate. He borrows it. He is not a king granting royal audiences to grateful subjects. He is an employee who works at the pleasure of the citizenry, and receiving their representatives, listening to their concerns, and responding to public opinion is not a favour. It is a function. To dress a constitutional duty in the costume of generosity is to confuse the employer with the employed.

Beyond that, calling the bishops' submission "acerbic" is Ajayi's editorial choice, not a universal verdict. The same words can sound sharp to those being critiqued and sound long overdue to those who have suffered longest under the conditions being described. Ajayi should not mistake his employer's discomfort for objective measurement. The article then performs an interesting acrobatic feat: it acknowledges that every interest group has the right to demand more from government, yet it quietly sidesteps the most damning question this principle raises. If interest groups have rights, do all interest groups enjoy equal standing before this administration? Because the evidence in Benue State, and across the Middle Belt, tells a different story. Farmers have abandoned their fields. Communities have been wiped clean of life. The Internally Displaced Persons scattered across IDP camps are not a statistic. They are men, women and children stranded between hope and the grave, and they have been stranded there for years. Yet the administration that speaks so sensitively about interest groups has shown no comparable urgency in confronting the jihadist campaign terrorizing non-Muslim communities.

When a government is seen to be more responsive to the demands of those wielding weapons than to the cries of their

victims, the question of whose interest group really matters answers itself. Ajayi insists that no president can wave a magic wand and make Nigeria's problems disappear. This is a statement that sounds wise until you examine it. It is, in logical terms, a fallacy of false necessity. No one asked for magic. The people asked for political will. Rwanda rebuilt itself from the ruins of genocide. Morocco has grown into one of Africa's most stable and diversified economies. These are not fantasies. They are facts. The difference between those countries and Nigeria is not geography or natural endowment. It is leadership that chose honest delivery over impressive propaganda. On the economy, Ajayi points to the payment of salaries and pensions as evidence of fiscal restoration. This is perhaps the most striking anticlimax in his entire piece: a government celebrates the payment of salaries while the currency carrying those salaries has lost more value than perhaps any period in the country's history. Paying a man, a wage that cannot buy what half that

wage once purchased is not restoration. It is a slower form of the same deprivation. The devaluation of the naira is not a footnote. It is the headline that swallows every other claim of progress.

On insecurity, Ajayi offers a curious logic: the president receives classified intelligence briefings, therefore his assessment of the security situation is more reliable than the experience of the victims. But the bodies in Benue State are not classified. The deserted farmlands are not confidential. The farmers

who went to their fields and never came home left no intelligence gap. Their absence is its own evidence. If the president's briefings tell him otherwise, then either the briefings are false or something more troubling is happening. The truth is not hiding in the classified files. It is bleeding in the open, in full public view. Finally, Ajayi suggests the bishops should have preserved the "confidentiality" of the meeting. But bishops, like presidents, are servants of the people. A servant does not owe confidentiality to another servant on matters that belong to the public. The people have a right to know what their representatives said and what they were told. Clerical office and presidential office alike exist in trust, not in secrecy.

Ajayi's article is not without craft. But craft in service of power, rather than in service of truth, is merely a more sophisticated form of silence.

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