

CAN A BORN-AGAIN CHIEF JUSTICE REVIVE THE JUDICIARY?

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Sierra Leoneans might be adept at discording with one another on many issues not least which is the better premier league team—the dangerously lethal Killers “East End Lions” or the self-declared “Mighty Blackpool” or the seemingly frail Eagles of “Kamboi Hills” or the missing in range “Bo Rangers”. But certainly, one opinion which enjoys trans-regional appeal is the part the judiciary played in fueling the disenchantment which provoked the more-than-a-decade-long civil ire. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not opt for a diplomatic diction when it narrated that (on page 27):

The judiciary was made weak and corrupt. It had been abused by successive governments; several politically motivated appointments being made by all post-independent governments. This largely compromised the independence of the judiciary...Thus the independence of the judiciary has been systematically destroyed. The judges and lawyers failed to stand up to state tyranny.

It seemed from the TRC’s commentary that the judiciary was the wooden tree on which the body politic of our nation was hung. And the men and women of the law were the gladiators who manned the body while it oozed out, drenched in injustice and social failings. Many had hoped that the judiciary should be far from the characterization it was given in the TRC report considering the many post-civil-war rehabilitation programs. However, the many judicial and social issues which brewed discontent have sadly re-emerged and have been amplified by the devices of technology. Indeed, many steps have been taken in attempting to reform the judiciary post the civil conflict. But many of these strides have fallen short of social resurrection of the ideals of justice and equity. Rather they have targeted the refurbishment of the physical infrastructures of justice. These reforms were and are not altogether inconsequential—as they have, for instance, proliferated the presence of magistrates and judges in places especially far-flung regions of the country where they were only seen once in a blue moon, analogically as Father Christmas to the kids.

The judiciary has recently had a new man at its helm. Justice Desmond Babatunde Edwards was appointed by President Bio following the resignation of Justice Abdulai Hamid Charm in what many believed were murky circumstances. Both men are graduates of the Sierra Leone Law School and were in fact class mates. Justice Charm was the first locally-trained lawyer to assume the office of Chief Justice. Justice Edwards is a man known for his love for his church, the New Life Ministries. He once mentioned to me after his tragic accidental fall in The Hague that as soon as he was picked up by paramedics and scooted to Hospital, the first person he requested they contact was his Bishop, so that he could pray for him. The New Life Ministries International is perhaps the most populous domestically-founded Christian Pentecostal sanctuary. It has exported its Christian message and vision across the world to places like the US and the UK who once led the Christianization of African peoples mostly between the 16th and the 18th centuries. Its founder and overseer, Bishop J. Archibald Cole has been president of Pentecostal Fellowship of Sierra Leone for many years and has perhaps the most state-decorated insignia as a clergyman.

Justice Edwards is not just a regular member of the New Life Ministries; he is a part and parcel of the pastorate of the church. I have once been in a service, while visiting, where he raised offering for that particular service and I can vouch that he is one of the vanguard of that congregation. Because the current Chief Justice is a high-profile member of such a leading Pentecostal fellowship, we can correctly guess that he speaks in supernatural tongues! Can he therefore speak in tongues and revive the moribund soul of justice of our nation? The multi-hued problems of the judiciary certainly, would require much more than mere speaking in tongues to be solved. Well, while the demons assigned to keep the judiciary in bondage may well flee at the release of the heavenly thunderous language, their mortal accomplices might not budge. And so, intercessory prayers must be backed up with tangible actions and robust steps, perhaps like what Christ himself did when he whipped the money-changers and gamblers out of his Father's temple.

The mantle of shepherding justice in our nation has been entrusted in the hands of a man who professes to love, honour and worship God. It is about time he led a crusade against the historic frames of injustices that God's people (by the way, everyone is God's people, for we all were created by His flawless Hands, even the non-believers and the self-professing atheists and agnostics) have faced in the very hands of the institution sanctioned by social contract to uphold

justice and safeguard the rule of law. In the book of Leviticus (chap19v15), God commanded the Levites (who were the priests in the Old Testament; just like our Chief Justice is now in the New Life Ministries): **“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly”**. As a Bible-believer and perhaps practicer, our Chief Justice might not therefore be in need of any reminding that his Lord is a God of Justice (Isaiah 30v18) and has succinctly made clear His requirement: *“To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to [Him] than sacrifice”*(Proverbs 21:3).

The responsibility of stewarding the presence of God in our nation through sheer justice and righteousness now lies with God's very own. It is just apt for the Chief Justice to be reminded since the arrogance of power and authority have the tendency of diminishing the values and ethics which prepare and propel many a leader for the position and status they attain. Our Chief Justice's God *“will bring everything and everyone to judgment”*. Unlike others before him, Justice Edwards professes to have the spirit of God, which is the enabler to always do right. Many in the Christian circles, greeted his appointment with a mixture of joy and expectation, as they are very optimistic that the judiciary would experience rebuilding of its walls like Nehemiah did for the ruined walls of Jerusalem. Will we see justice rolling on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream? Or would our Chief Justice, like Rehoboam ignore the counsel of the Holy Spirit and cave in like others before him to the machinations and manipulations of politics? The time for the revival of the judiciary is now and like Queen Esther in the Bible, I believe, that our Chief Justice is ushered unto the highest judicial seat of our nation for such a time as this. But since the God of our Chief Justice does not force His will on any man, he (Justice Edward) will have to make the choice to either herald the revival or continue the desecration of justice and fairness! Until then, the revival of the judiciary remains a cliffhanger...