

Are cursed Africans laboring in futility?

I attended a fascinating conference on African development in Washington D.C. many years ago. During the plenary session, one of the keynote speakers, a learned African-American clergy of repute, made some comments that prompted a heated response from some attendees. At his turn to speak, the gentleman began by making it clear to the audience that no amount of intellectual exercise or financial aid can redeem the situation of people of African descent world over. "We are a people under a curse," he said with deep conviction, pausing to stare at the response of his audience at such a revelation.

In his presentation, the Cleric gave several Biblical references in support of his belief that Africans are laboring under a curse. He pulled a passage from the Bible book of Genesis where it recounts how Noah drunk himself to stupor and lay naked in his chambers. Ham, Noah's son, chanced upon his father in that condition and acted dishonorably by gazing at his father's nakedness and reporting the encounter to Shem and Japhet, his brothers. The wiser siblings plotted a strategy that made it possible to cover their father with a garment without seeing his nakedness. As soon as he regained sobriety, Noah was told of what happened and in anger, he placed a curse on Ham's son Canaan, saying, "Cursed be Canaan; servant of servants he shall be to his brethren" (Genesis 9:20-27). Every person of African descent, the Minister had explained to his audience, is a descendant of Canaan. He finally implored the gathering to, much more than anything else, invest time in prayers and in seeking the face of the Most High for His mercies over Africans. "Only the mercy of God can bring any form of respite to Africans," he concluded.

The Hamitic curse theory presented by the African-American gentleman spiked an interest in my mind on the possibility of

some spiritual explanations behind Africa's accelerated advancement dilemma. Since then, I have heard many African Christians voice their convictions that Africans are laboring in futility under a curse. As recently as last year, I was visiting Tanzania and during an interaction with a university professor, she expressed her frustrations at certain policies she considered retrogressive in the continent and ended by saying, "I think we are cursed in Africa. We can never get it right."

Over time, therefore, I have given some attention to the Hamitic curse proposition, and while this is an ongoing exercise, I will, in this piece, express some thoughts generated.

Many Africans, resident on the continent and in the diaspora, have embraced Christianity for some hundreds of years. According to a 2018 Pew Research Center report, some of the world most committed Christians live in Africa. These Christians pray and carry out numerous spiritual exercises several times a week. This raises the question of how long and hard African Christians will have to ask for mercy before the Almighty will grant pardon for the sins of Canaan's father, Ham.

On another note, there are many thriving economies around the world where an overwhelming majority of citizens do not worship the God of the Bible; is the sin of Ham – casting a glance at his father's nakedness and telling his brothers – worse than a whole nation's non-acceptance of the sacrifice of God's only begotten son?

If Romans 8:1 makes it clear that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, then African Christians are technically liberated from the Hamitic curse, if any curse like that was ever in actively existent.

Rather than any age-old curse on Ham, my postulation is that

generations of Africans have been the very ones placing themselves under a curse through their beliefs and utterances. A curse has been defined as the utterance of offensive words in anger or annoyance, so when Africans see and say nothing good about themselves, their past, present, future, and nation, then they place themselves under a curse of stagnation or backwardness.

The Bible says that "with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10: 9-10). Many Africans contravene this principle of believing with the heart and confessing with the mouth. Many Africans bring a curse on themselves when they see and say only negative things, marinate in hopelessness, harbor resentment towards other ethnic groups, reject their authenticity as a people and focus only on their weaknesses and challenges. When Africans believe with their hearts and confess with their mouths the lies sold to them that the continent and her people are evil and bewitched, that the glory of God cannot be found in that part of the world, it becomes a curse unto the continent.

The angel told Mary, "be it done to you according to your faith." If Africans believe in goodness, then they will reap goodness, but otherwise if Africans believe and say negativities, they shall keep struggling to attain their destined level of goodness and greatness.

The African Christian who is ignorant of his place of dominion over darkness and still believes and confesses that he is under a curse, will invariably reap the harvests of his confessions. But if the Christian believes and confesses that he has been rescued from the curse of the law, through the death of Christ on the cross, then it shall be made manifest in his life, since "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us," for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole" (Galatians 3:13).

The question one poses to the African Christian is, what do you believe and say about yourself and about Africa? Do you believe and speak the best or the worst of yourself, Africa and Africans? African Christians will have to start believing that Africans are a beautiful and blessed people who live in a beautiful and blessed continent. The African Christian must, as a matter of necessity, learn to search for, to believe and to speak out the goodness in Africa and Africans. By believing in Africa's light and through speaking goodness, Africans will gain strength to ascend on to the path of accelerated advancement.

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