



**GIVING GOD A BREAK:
ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORLD**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The conversations around the absence, presence and putting of God in the platform at the Democratic Convention immediately raised questions and invites reflection on the ways ritualized references to God become a substitute for a more substantive engagement and honoring. Clearly, it could be read as recurring signs of putting God on paper, in platforms and in play moves against opponents, but not necessarily in the way we live our lives. Indeed, it could be read as convenient and calculated professions of faith without the follow-up in practice, which a living, vital and vibrant faith requires.

After all, what is the value or meaning of words—secular or sacred, if they are unattached to the way we live and relate among ourselves, to others and to the world? Thus, the critical issue, the sacred teachings of our ancestors tell us, is not whether the word “God” is in the platform, but rather the place the spirit of God, as the divine embodiment of good made manifest in human practice, has in our lives, our relations with each other and others, and especially the way we treat the most vulnerable among us.

Certainly, there was no expressed concern for the vulnerable, no serious mention of social justice which is central, even indispensable, to any real and relevant talk of God and good. The poor were unreferenced, passed over and put to the side like shoes or clothes no longer fitting for fashion or fad. We are all, by edict and consensual understanding, miraculously made “middle class,” regardless of homes lost, debilitating debt, and lack of adequate income to qualify or claim such a central source of reference and meaning-making.

In the 60s we engaged in a rigorous and relentless criticism of those false faiths and racialized religions that Rev. Martin Luther King called moribund and unworthy; Messenger Elijah Muhammad classified as mystification and will-misguidance; and Min. Malcolm X called racist, irrational and disempowering. We did not follow in the footsteps of our oppressor, nor let them instruct us in how we lived our lives, worked, worshiped, raised our children or waged our struggle for the good, the just and the promising. On the contrary, we saw ourselves as a moral and social vanguard, whose struggle would not only benefit us, but expand the realm of freedom and justice in the country and the world.

Thus, as we followed the conversation and discussed its implications and hidden meanings, we thought also about this historic role we once self-consciously embraced and performed of being *an uplifted light and mirror to America, a moral and spiritual vanguard* that dared teach and struggle for a new way of living and relating in this country and the world. And as we discussed these things, we seemed to sense a progressive losing and letting go, among our people, of what defined and defines us as a people. That is to say: a dignity-affirming communal and cultural conception of ourselves; an audacious assertion of our uniqueness once called *soul* and applied to a wide and varied range of things we did and do—from the way we worship to the way we walk; dance, do music, march in bands; speak and do sports; be and become men and women; and muse over “how we got over” thru the most trying and horrific times and tests.

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And this *soul*, which had a spoken and unspoken sacred dimension to it, was expressed in the way we used to see and read signs from history, heaven and earth, dared to move mountains, saw struggle as an ethical obligation and leadership as a moral vocation; and emulating the legendary warrior women and men of ancient times, sat up all night, talking, preparing for battle and victory, eagerly waiting for the day to dawn.

And so, the challenge today is not to be lost in election bluster and blame, and the petty and perverse patriotic and religious posturing of politicians and their handlers, handmaidens and hirelings. It is to realize that regardless of the outcome of this election, we, as a people, have no hope and no honorable or promising way forward *unless we struggle*. It is to understand that elections are never the first or last hope, but that it is the people themselves who are their own hope and it is they, themselves, who must in *dignity, strength and struggle*, open up the horizon of history and build the good society and world they want and deserve. As we have said so many times, no people is more spiritually-grounded, ethically conscious and committed, chosen or elect or in tune and in touch with the Divine than us, and we constantly affirm in writing, speech, and practice the enduring meaning of this in our lives.

In the *Million Man March/Day of Absence Mission Statement*, we cite as essential our “reaffirming in the most positive ways the value and indispensability of the spiritual and ethical grounding of our people in accomplishing the historical tasks confronting

us.” And we asserted that among these most positive ways includes “freeing and renewing our minds and reaffirming our commitment to the good, the proper and the beneficial.” We also expressed the need for “joining as families and persons the faith communities of our choice and supporting them,” but also and equally important “living the best of our tradition ourselves and challenging our members and the leadership to do likewise, and constantly insisting that our faith communities give the best of what we have to offer to build the moral community and just society we struggle for as a people.”

Indeed, we are called by the best of our ethical and social justice tradition to oppose the misuse of God talk and take responsibility for the world and do well for the world as the *Odu Ifa* teaches us. And also, as the *Husia* and our other sacred texts tells us, we are to love justice, hate wrongdoing, and always do what is good and worthy of our special and sacred status as possessors of dignity and divinity in the world.

This is no atavistic nostalgia and a wish to go back to an earlier time, but rather a raising up models of excellence and possibilities for moving forward without losing ourselves and the best of what it means to be African in the process. It is about calling for positions and movement forward which won't let us accept less than we are or demand, more than we deserve, and embracing an *ethics of sharing*, key to the liberated and secure life of the people and the well-being of the world.

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