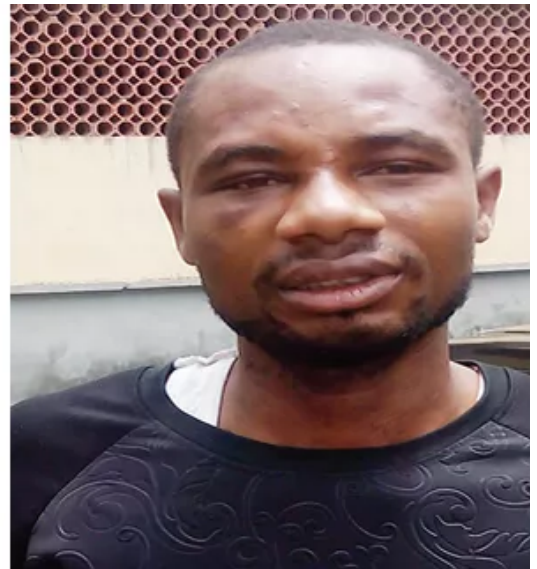


I Depend On God, Not Charms – 'Born Again' Robbery Suspect

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Twenty-seven-yearold Akin Ayotunde is one of those robbery suspects, who used to dispossess people of their valuables at gun point, but earnestly believes in God. In other words, he could be described as a 'born again' Christian armed robber.

According to him, it was because of his fervent belief in God that he doesn't patronise herbalists or use charms during robbery operations like his colleagues.

He said that God has never failed to assist and help him out of

difficult situations. Ayotunde, who was arrested by detectives attached to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), Ikeja, Lagos State Police Command, said he was quite sure; God would aid his release this time again. His words: “I was caught by police because I don’t believe in using charms during robbery operations. The fact is that I believe in God. I believe God can save me.”

The police said that Ayotunde, together with his gang members, attacked and robbed an apartment at Igbogbo, Ikorodu area of Lagos State, where they allegedly killed the head of the family.

The suspects said that they raided the freezer of the victim, found food, ate and watched television before beginning their operation. Ayotunde, while insisting they didn’t touch the victim, explained

that they forced him to sit down on a chair and watch them, while his wife and children were ordered to lie facedown.

He said that after they were through with the operation, they discovered that the man had fallen asleep. When they attempted to wake him, they discovered he was stiff and cold. His words: “We wanted to lock the man in the room with his wife before we left, so that he wouldn’t be able to call for help.

When we tried to get him to stand, we noticed he was stiff. I placed my ear to his heart and discovered it wasn’t beating. We never robbed him with the intention of causing his death. I had no reason to kill him. I had, already gotten all I wanted from him.”

The four-man-gang’s waterloo, however, started after the gang

robbed the home of one Bello Hakeem, residing at Igbe area, Ikorodu, Lagos. Hakeem's house was attacked by the gang just days after the gang members robbed the house where a victim died. Ayotunde said that the gang operated for six hours without distraction in Hakeem's home.

They carted away a lot of valuables from the victim's house, including his Toyota Corolla car. Ayotunde was attempting to sell the car when he was arrested. Ayotunde, who lives in Ikorodu, was alleged by investigators to have once been arrested for robbery. Police said: "He was once arrested for robbery.

He used to gain access into people's compound by scaling fences. Once he's inside, he would switch off the generator and wait for someone to step out,

to check why the generator went off. Once the person steps out, he and his gang members would attack and rob the person.”

Singing like a bird, Ayotunde confessed to have robbed three houses within a year. But detectives believe he has robbed more houses than what he claimed. He said that he used to work as a construction worker, earning N1,300 daily, before the attraction to crime. Ayotunde added: “I went into robbery to raise enough money to start a legitimate business.

There was no plan in my heart to make robbery a permanent job. I was arrested last month at Ojota, Lagos State, after my gang members and I robbed a man of his Toyota Corolla car. We also took some of the valuables in his house. After the robbery, we went to meet our friend, Eyinejo.

“Eyinejo used to sell stolen cars for us. I gave Eyinejo the man’s car key. He promised to assist in selling the car. He said the sharing formula would be 50-50 after the sale, I agreed.

Before nightfall, Eyinejo called and told me to come and pick the car. He said that one of the persons that wanted to buy the car said he knew the real owner of the car.” The following day, the same buyer called again. According to the buyer, he wasn’t sure he recognised the car as he previously stated. The buyer accepted to buy the car.

He paid N700, 000. Ayotunde said: “Eyinejo called to tell me that he sold the car for N700,000. He said I should come to Ojota, to collect my share of the money. I hailed a motorbike and raced to meet him at a restaurant in Ojota. While we were discussing, I

noticed his eyes were bloodshot. I should have become alert, but I didn't dwell on it.

We were still discussing when three policemen walked into the restaurant, pointed a gun at me and took me to their station.” He said he was still battling to extricate himself from the robbery charges, when the widow of the man, who died at Igbogbo, while Ayotunde's gang was operating in their home, came to the police station and identified him. Ayotunde admitted robbing the widow's home, but vehemently denied killing her husband.

His words: “We didn't kill the man! All I can say is that the man was either already sick or died of shock. A man named Paul Oriyii took us to the man's house at Igbogbo, Ikorodu.

We entered his home by scaling the fence. We entered the compound around 10pm and left at about 3am. We didn't go with any gun, just machetes, which we used in threatening the man. We threatened to kill him, but we didn't mean it. "When we entered, the man's wife and three children were in the parlour, watching a movie. We ordered them to lie on the ground.

We later marched them into their rooms. The man stayed in the parlour with us. We didn't rape the woman or her daughters." Ayotunde further recalled: "We took some food from the fridge, ate and started watching television. During that period, the man started snoring.

When it was time to leave, we ransacked the house in search of things we could sell like Plasma television and jewelry. The

jewelry was given to us by the man's wife. We also took an ATM card, money and other valuables.

We loaded the items into the man's 4Runner Jeep. We later discovered the man was dead and left him." After the gang gathered everything it could, the members decided to wait until dawn in order to avoid running into the police or local vigilantes. It was another successful operation.