

Appendix 40:

Prayer and the Nations

Vanguard

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Praying for nations and people for various needs has been instituted from time immemorial. The Bible is replete with stories of great prophets, from Eli to Samuel to Jesus Christ and the latter day prophets or leaders, praying to God for the salvation of nations and mankind. Today churches, prayer groups and prayer cells abound, all praying in their own way to God for the solutions and resolutions of various problems, ailments and needs, be it personal, groups, states, nations etc. It can therefore be justly asked, what is all the hoola baloo about with regards to the Kenyan National Prayer Breakfast, “Raising the Banner of Prayer over the Nation, Kenya”? I will say simply that the difference from most other forms of prayer group cells etc. that abound in Kenya and the rest of Africa is that this is made up of committed men and women of faith from all denominations and groups, from the cream of Kenyan elected political leadership in the National Assembly or Parliament who are strongly influenced by their faith to continually seek guidance of God through prayers to enable them to provide a godly and righteous leadership for their people and nation around the person of Jesus of Nazareth. To me, this is the surest way many of our problems in Africa, be it political, social, religious or economic can best be resolved through prayers and sincere consideration and solving of the problem, void of any partisan interest. Through prayer and total application of the best of one’s faith and upbringing, bridges and cooperation and understanding could be built across any political, religious or economic divide or chasm. Through this we can achieve wholesome reconciliation between one another leading to the attainment of peace, love and respect of one another and humanity which will ultimately make any nation healthier and stronger.

You have recently, as we have in Nigeria, passed through some momentous political experiences and changes. We have both carried out elections and installed democratic civilian governments and institutions upholding the rule of law and human rights and dignity. But they are not without some crises and reservations. There were differences between opponent and rival groups; feelings were hurt and egos bruised. It is my hope that in the spirit of accommodation, love and understanding these hurts

and differences will be smoothed over. I am encouraged that this is now the case in this country and I commend you all for it. May this new spirit found in this Parliamentary Prayer Movement help in achieving the end goal of love, peace, harmony and understanding in the nation.

God answers. I urge you not to relent on your resolve to pray for your nation and people. God answers prayers when they are done in faith. The Holy Book is full of examples of answered prayers of people when they pray in faith. But are our prayers being answered today? I believe they are and if I may share with you our “Nigeria Prays” experience which could be said to be an example of “Raising a Banner of Prayer Over the Nation, Nigeria,” the outcome of which was “answered prayer”!

“Nigeria Prays” came about as a result of a dire need to pray for Nigeria following a prolonged period of political, social and economic crises and upheaval in the country in the late 1990s, which gave Nigeria a bad name and image throughout the world at the time. Nigeria became a pariah nation, untouchable! During our attendance at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., USA in January/February 1996, many Nigerians at the Prayer Breakfast were feeling very concerned about the report they were receiving and reading about their home and country in the press and the media in the United States. They approached me to know more about the situation and discussed what all Nigerians should do to bring a change for the better. After due explanation and following heart-searching discussions and prayers, we came to the conclusion that if all attempts to advise the Nigerian authorities/leadership fail, we should resort to putting Nigeria’s case in prayers to God to intervene where human beings fail. It was further agreed that it would be necessary to engage in three months of concentrated prayers by all Nigerians and friends of Nigeria, at home and abroad. As recorded in 2nd Chronicles 7:14, we believe that “If my people who are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal the land.” Those abroad believed and agreed to this approach, but since the major problem is back home, the idea had to be taken home and sold there. This was done on my return home in late February 1996.

We discussed with a cross section of committed and concerned men and women of faith and we agreed to raise a “banner of prayer” over Nigeria. I decided to put the then Head of State, who was a Muslim, in the picture of what we wanted to do. I was pleasantly surprised and delighted that not only did he endorse and support the idea, but added that “prayer is

good;” to make the prayer truly national, our Muslim faithfuls should also be part of it. I accepted the suggestion and promised to put it before my committee and some of the Muslim leadership to agree and work out how best to go about it. This was done, and after long and thorough deliberations, it was agreed that the national “Nigeria Prays” will be for adherents of both major faiths and religions in Nigeria, but undertaken separately to respect some fundamental religious sensitivities on both sides. The Muslims will pray on Fridays during their Jummat Prayers and the Christians will pray any day of the week convenient to them, but preferably Sundays. That has been the practice in Nigeria ever since to date.

Nigerians of all faiths embraced the idea and prayed for the nation, for the leadership and the followership and for a change in the Nigerian situation and fortune, believing that God would decide as he deemed best. We never prayed for anyone’s demise or hurt but prayed that God would touch the heart of the leadership and followership to do the right things for the country and people.

By mid 1998 Nigeria’s name and image was at its lowest ebb, particularly in the eyes of the international community. Then suddenly in early June 1998, the good Lord brought about a welcome change. A new government was ushered in after the reported sudden, unexpected demise of the Head of State. The new Head of State, after taking due advice, set in motion a programme of return to civilian rule and democracy which event took place a year later on 29th May, 1999.

Following the change and having extended our Prayer Rallies beyond the initial three months period to the end of the transition, i.e. 19th May, 1999, we wanted to fold up the Prayers. However, as a result of popular demands of most Nigerians, even some of our initial ardent critics, we had to continue the “Nigeria Prays” programme, to continue to pray for Nigeria, her people, leadership and followership. My belief is that there are never too many banners to be raised for prayers over any nation. My hope is that Nigeria’s National Assembly will soon set up their own prayer group and establish a National Prayer Movement as you have just done successfully today.

Prayer works. Mr. President, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I hope our experience in Nigeria as just narrated does confirm and reassure anyone that prayer works and that it is worth “raising a banner of prayer for the nation” as you have just done. We pray for the success and positive influence of your new Parliamentary Prayer Movement and National Prayer Breakfast, not only for Kenya but also throughout the East African Regional

community. May God bless you all and your most commendable efforts in this regard.

I would like to leave you with some of these thoughts that whatsoever the problem, social, economic, religious or political, the solution is not usually found in the valley of contention but on the mountain top of prayer and consecration to God. Remember that God always and still directs and decides the fate of nations and that leadership is wise that seeks the face of God in the day to day affairs of daily living and service. All of you, the Kenyan leadership, the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary should work closely in partnership and cooperation as enduring success can only come if all hands are on deck in your joint efforts and service to your nation and people.

I pray that God will raise men and women for Kenya to achieve all your noble goals and objectives for your nation. Time such as this demands men and women of faith and dedication to the cause of the nation.