

From : Danny and Mary McCain <mccaind@gmail.com>
Sent : August 2, 2006 2:36:23 AM
To : "dm@coopstudies.org" <dm@coopstudies.org>
Subject : Attendance of the Africa Forum on Religion and Government

| | | Inbox

Friends,

Greetings.

I am now back in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, our infrastructure has not been too kind to us. We have had about 8 hours of electricity in the last four days and none in the last three days. The heavy rains and storms that we have here are hard on the fragile electric system. However, we thank God for the battery back-up system and a generator that keeps us going. And our wonderful wireless Internet that the university supplied to us in late May has also collapsed. Otherwise, we are doing fine.

Some of you may know that I came back to Nigeria immediately from Kansas City to attend the Africa Forum on Religion and Government. This was an amazing "invitation only" conference that I really enjoyed participating. I know that reading about a conference is not exactly exciting reading. However, this conference was so unique I thought you might enjoy reading some details about it.

It was good to see many of you this summer and to talk to others on the phone. I always enjoy hearing from you.

Grace and Peace.

Danny

African Forum on Religion and Government

Background

When I was in Abuja in April, speaking at the All Christian Fellowship's annual conference, Rev. Okoye pulled me aside at one point and told me about the "African Forum on Religion and Government." He

explained that a couple of years before, President Obasanjo had initiated a prayer breakfast movement in Africa, apparently patterned after the one in the US. This movement had brought him in contact with several African leaders who had similar convictions about morality and integrity in government, based upon religious convictions. As a result of these discussions, someone eventually suggested that some kind of forum be created in which government leaders and religious leaders could come together to discuss and hopefully come up with strategies whereby the faith community and particularly the Christian church could have a greater impact upon the morality, integrity and efficiency of government. Rev. Okoye said that the president and the chaplaincy were planning to sponsor a conference in Abuja in late July that would hopefully give impetus to this movement. He said that representatives from all African countries were being invited and they were optimistic that some heads of state would be attending.

Description of the Conference

Rev. Okoye gave me a little booklet that told about the upcoming conference. The booklet stated briefly:

As many have reflected on the reasons for the minimal realization of Africa's enormous potential over the years, the conclusion has often been the same: Africa needs a new breed of courageous and visionary leaders of integrity who are able to lead transformation in all spheres of society.

Africans are known to be very religious. In this highly religious atmosphere, questions are being raised about the positive impact of these religions on African society, especially as it relates to the moral and socio-economic development of the continent.

There is also the need to explore how to ensure peace and stability in a religiously plural Africa.

The African Forum on Religion and Government (AFREG) is an initiative that seeks to address these concerns. AFREG I will be a continental consultation of African Christian thinkers and leaders with the following purpose and objectives:

Purpose

To guild a movement of African leaders of integrity who are committed to transforming Africa into a First World continent shaped by God-centered moral values.

Objectives:

1. Develop a moral vision for Africa
2. Design a framework for Africa's development that is holistic and based upon moral values.
3. Develop a framework for freedom of religions in Africa that ensures a democratic environment characterized by peace and stability.

Invitation

To my great surprise and pleasure, Rev. Okoye asked if I would be a part of the Nigerian delegation. I was honored to be asked to be an official part of the Nigerian delegation. This was not quite like being asked to be part of the Nigerian delegation to an AIDS conference. Anyone working in AIDS in a country could be a part of that delegation. However, to be a part of a delegation that is dealing with the heart and soul of the country, seemed to me to be much more personal. The dates were going to be July 25 -28, 2006.

I eventually received a written invitation to attend and participate in the conference. However, there were not many details. I knew that this was an ambitious project that was going to require a lot of money so I was a little concerned about whether or not it would actually get implemented. The invitation letter stated that they would be responsible for all expenses in the country. I called Rev. Okoye as I was passing through Abuja on my way out of the country. He said that plans were going forward though they needed to raise a whole lot of money to make it happen. I later called Rev. Okoye again from the States about a week before the conference was to start and he told me essentially the same thing. The meeting was definitely "on" but they still needed a lot of money. I still got no specific details other than the meeting was starting on Tuesday. I assumed that it was starting on Tuesday evening.

Getting to the Conference

Our IICS conference finished up on Saturday night, 22 July. I spoke at a church on Sunday morning and then headed out to the Kansas City airport. My flights to Memphis and Amsterdam and on to Lagos were uneventful. A driver from the Baptist Guest House met me and took me to the Baptist Guest House where I spent Monday morning. He took me back to the airport on Tuesday. I barely missed a 9:00 AM flight (it was already full) but got one leaving about 10:00. I was in Abuja by 11:00 or so. Andrew was there waiting for me. We drove straight to the international conference center.

I was surprised to see that the parking lot was filled and the front of the conference center was filled with people. I made my way through all the booths and went inside. I finally figured out that this was another conference—a conference of engineers or something like that. I went over to the other side of the lobby and finally saw a sign that said "AFREG." I was relieved. Apparently we were going to use only one part of the conference center while the other body was using the main conference hall.

I inquired at the registration desk but they did not have a pre-printed name tag for me. They wanted a copy of my invitation letter which I did not have with me. However, the lady who was taking care of me knew me from the many times I had spoken at All Christian's Fellowship. She agreed to go ahead and register me without the letter. She also volunteered to go with Andrew to the hotel and secure accommodation for me. She told me to go on inside the conference hall and she would take care of everything.

When I got inside, I learned that they had already had had the opening ceremony, which included a speech from President Obasanjo. I was disappointed that I had missed that. Had I known that this was going to start on Tuesday morning, I could have made a greater effort to get an earlier flight from Abuja. However, I was given a copy of his speech which was very good.

General Overview of the Events in the Consultation

In a short time, the group reconvened to discuss the president's speech and the keynote address. This was to be a panel discussion. Jerry Gana was the moderator. There were four other panelists. One of them was a lady lawyer from Madagascar. One was from Nigeria. And the other two were from other African countries. Jerry Gana was quite good in

coordinating the discussion. Obviously, like all African gatherings, there was no lack of people who wanted to speak.

After this session, we had lunch and then broke into groups for more discussions. We had a good group. I was able to inject that we are in Africa where England was before the days of John Wesley. The Wesleyan Revival had helped to turn around England and spawn so many good things. I then explained that Wesley used a number of different strategies to help change a nation. These included:

Mass preaching and teaching through field preaching to thousands.

Accountability through closed class meetings

Use of media, primarily through documents he wrote.

Use of arts, primarily through the music of the day. He and his brother Charles used this medium to promote messages that were consistent with their other forms of communication.

A different kind of leader. Wesley used "lay preachers" very effectively.

A focus on a holistic approach to life. Wesley wrote books and taught about such diverse things as medicine and linguistics in addition to theology. He wanted God's sovereignty to be exercised over all areas of life.

These comments were well received by the group. I would like to do a bit more research about the impact of the Wesleyan Revival on England and the comparison between England at that time and Nigeria today. I believe that there are surely lessons for us to learn.

We came back together late in the afternoon to report our findings. The program finished about 6:45 or so. We then went back over to the Sharon Ultimate Hotel where I was registered. Andrew had already put all my things in the room except the briefcase I had with me. Since there was no reason for Andrew to just hang around Abuja for the next three days, I had sent him back to Jos that afternoon. He would come back on Friday.

On Tuesday morning, the Anglican Archbishop Akinola gave a devotional. He is the chairman of the Anglican bishops for the southern hemisphere and the one whom the American Episcopal Church has learned to hate because of his public opposition to consecrating homosexual bishops. His devotional comments were good. We then had three plenary presentations which basically filled up the morning. In the afternoon, we broke up into small groups. This was the same basic pattern on day three.

On Day Three, Rev. William Okoye brought the devotional. It was very practical and was well received. On Day Four, my good friend Mike Oye brought the devotional. It was only about thirty minutes long but it was one of the most profound sermons I have heard in a long time and amazingly appropriate for this forum. He spoke from the Ephesians 4:28: "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." He pointed out that there was progression in this verse. The following is a combination of his thoughts and my thoughts that his sermon stimulated. There is a progression in the verse from wickedness to godliness.

Wicked life – "He who has been stealing." All people start here or have the potential of being here.

Normal human life – "steal no more." Some people are able to overcome overt wickedness and live honest lives.

Good life – "work, doing something useful." Some people are able to go beyond the normal life and become "good people"—hard working people, people that the world respects. Even an unbeliever can accomplish this level of progression.

Godly life – "he may have something to share with those in need." Some people go beyond "goodness" and become godly people, people who demonstrate the quality of giving which is one of the qualities of God.

Mike is a very good friend and I told him afterwards, "Mike, if I ever steal a sermon, I am going to steal that one."

On Friday morning we had a draft version of the declaration that was going to go out presented to us. We spent most of the morning refining that. We returned about 4:00 PM on Friday and continued working on this. In past conferences where we have produced some kind of public document, I have been directly involved in this committee. I was not this time but was very happy to see the excellent document that came out.

Perhaps the most impressive part of the program occurred on Thursday evening. We were supposed to stop about 6:30 but the leaders decided to insert a brief program with the president of Burundi who had been present in most of our plenary sessions. First, his wife gave a testimony. It was a very moving and impressive testimony of a young wife and mother who has now found herself the first lady of nation. The president then gave his testimony. He had fought in their civil war in the bush for several years and had become head of state only eight months before. He had an amazing testimony of working with former enemies trying to bring them together. After their testimonies, they came to front and knelt down. About eight people then prayed for them. It was a moving and impressive part of the conference. It was a very good example of the kind of thing that we were trying to encourage—meaningful faith that brings about reconciliation and integrity into government.

The Participants

One of the best things about this conference, like nearly all conferences was the opportunity to network with people. I was happy to see that such people as Peter Ozodo, one of my closest friends in Nigeria, Yusuf Turaki, another close long-term friend who is one of the leading theologians in Africa, Ben Kwashi, the Anglican bishop of Jos, Dr. Mumbila, the provost of TCNN, Bishop Ferin, the Anglican bishop of Kaduna, Tony Idoku, the national president of the Great Commission Movement (Nigerian branch of Campus

Crusade), Rev. Oswueke, the general superintendent of the Assemblies of God Church, Dr. Adeyemo, the former president of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa and general editor of the new Africa Bible Commentary, and other friends were there. There were quite a few Nigerians who knew me through hearing me preach or reading one of my books but whom I did not know. The former chaplain of the presidency, Rev. Professor Yusuf Obaje, was there. I was happy to meet at least two other Nigeria university professors and one professor from Cameroon. There were several ministers (political) there, including the minister of education of Nigeria. At one point I was standing in the back of the building and one lady, who was sitting there said to me, "Hello Dr. McCain. I think we spoke in the same conference once." I did not recognize her and apparently that lack of recognition showed on my face. She said, "We both spoke at All Christian's Fellowship. I think you spoke before me so I heard your presentation." I acknowledged her words. About that time, Rev. Okoye came up and greeted her as the "minister of education in Nigeria." That certainly got my attention. He said, "You need to talk to her about the thing you discussed with me." I immediately gave her a thumbnail sketch of our faith-based AIDS program. She said, "Send me an email about it." That was quite amazing. She is actually my ultimate boss in this country since the University of Jos comes under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. I was happy to meet her again and believe that something good will come out of this contact.

I was able to talk to many other people, including the head of the SIM-related church in Ethiopia, one of the bishops from the Coptic Church in Egypt, the president of the Protestant churches in Egypt, a representative of the bishop in Iraq, a judge from South Africa, a minister (the political kind not the religious kind) from Uganda, the general secretary of the Africa Association of Evangelicals, a former ambassador from Zambia, the general secretary of the Alianca Evangelica de Angola, which is overall body that unifies all Christians in Angola, similar to the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the secretary generals of the similar organizations in Niger and Chad, the head of Campus Crusade in Ethiopia, the special advisor to the president of Malawi on Christian Affairs, the chairman of the World Evangelical Alliance in South Africa. I think that this is a good representation of the kinds of people who were present at the conference. There were about 180 people from 27 African countries represented and I would guess that I at least greeted most of them.

I think I was able to meet all of the expatriates who were there. For example, I met Charles and Rebecca Gilmer. Charles is the president of the Impact Movement, a group that is loosely affiliated with Campus Crusade who specifically targets young African Americans in universities. I also met Philip Clements who is a board member of the International Leadership Foundation, one of the bodies that helped to coordinate this conference. We often sat together during the workshop and became good friends. It was amazing and humbling to me that I was the only actual delegate (not an observer or resource person) representing an African country who was not an African.

In actual fact, I usually get along a lot better with the "little" people at these kinds of meetings and that was true at this meeting. I would guess that we had almost as many "helpers" as we did delegates. Most if not all of them were volunteers. These included the ushers, the security personnel, the people who distributed materials, the people who served food, the people who worked with the equipment, the drivers and many others. Many of them came from the Aso Rock Villa Chapel. Most of them had heard me preach and knew me so they were quick to greet me. I often stopped and chatted with them. They were very helpful and seemed to appreciate it when I could spend a little time with them and especially when I would greet them in their local languages.

Distributing COCEN Materials and My Book

At one point I was chatting with Rev. Okoye and he said, "Actually this conference is simply an extension of the Congress on Christian Ethics in Nigeria (COCEN)." This was the conference that had produced the Nigeria Covenant, a project that I had invested a good bit of effort into. I suggested that it would be good to try to get a copy of the Nigeria Covenant into the hands of all the delegates. He thought it would be a good idea. I also talked

to Peter Ozodo, who had been the most recent head of the organization and he encouraged me to try to make it happen. Therefore, I called Andrew and told him to look for materials. He was able to find 200 copies of the Nigeria Covenant and 100 copies of the Nigeria Covenant Study Guide. He brought them down on Friday morning and we were able to distribute them to the delegates later that morning.

I had also thought about distributing a copy of my book, Tough Tests for Top Leaders to all the delegates. I had instructed Andrew to bring as many copies as he could find down to Abuja when he came to pick me up on Tuesday. Unfortunately, he could only find one package of 40. Therefore, I slowly distributed those out to various people as I met them during the conference. However, when Andrew got back home, he was able to find another 150 and brought them down on Friday morning also. So we were also able to make a copy of that book available to all of the registered delegates. Several of them told me that they had already started reading it before the end of the conference.

Special Dinners

On Thursday evening, I was invited to go with about 15 or 20 others to a dinner at the home of Ojo Maduekwe, who is a former senator and now the secretary of the People's Democratic Party, the current ruling party of Nigeria. We were transported to his house in three vans. We had a very nice dinner and a good time of fellowship and further networking.

On Friday evening, we concluded the program with a banquet at the Hilton. All of us went over to the Hilton which was about five kilometers from the conference center. There was not much of a program. There were three local choirs who sang, including a choir from an Anglican church, one from an ECWA church and one from the Church on the Rock, a Pentecostal Church. Obviously the lively one from the Pentecostal Church received the most

enthusiastic response. From the high table, there was about an eight minute time of prayer and the rest of the time was devoted to thanking people for various things. It was a nice relaxed way to end the whole thing.

Hotel Accommodations

I along with most of the delegates stayed at the Sharon Ultimate Hotel. I would say that this is about a three-star hotel. It is actually owned by a member of All Christian's Fellowship who is also a pastor himself. He owns three hotels in Abuja. When I was completing the application form, I indicated that I would prefer to stay there because it was only about a mile from the conference center and I knew that the rest of the delegates were staying there and this would give me a good chance to interact with them. Andrew and the lady from the registration table were able to get me the last room in the hotel.

The room was very nice but I had one small problem. The air-conditioner was so loud I could hardly do anything. Fortunately, it did cool the room a bit but it was very loud. When I got there on Tuesday evening, someone from the front desk brought something for me to sign and I pointed out the noise in the room. He called the engineer who tried to repair it that night. He was unsuccessful. It was so loud that I finally turned it off so I could try to get some sleep. Unfortunately, I was suffering from jet lag and did not go to sleep until after 4:00 AM. The next morning, I mentioned at the desk that they needed to do something about the air-conditioner. They did not so I called the engineer back on Wednesday evening. He brought some Styrofoam and tried to insulate it a bit better. He was convinced that since the air-conditioner was cooling, it was only the way it was sitting in the opening that was causing the noise. I tried to convince him otherwise but was unsuccessful. From then on, I just lived with the noise. On Friday, I saw the owner at the conference. I have stayed at two of his hotels many times over the years, while preaching at various functions. I said to him, "Please don't be annoyed but, as a friend, I want to let you know about a problem I had in your room." I explained to him the air-conditioner problem and all my

attempts to get it fixed. I said, "I am very grateful that this happened to me and not one of our international guests. However, I thought you would like to know about it." He was very annoyed, though not at me. He said they keep five air-conditioners on stand-by just in case they have a problem with one. He got my room number. When I got back to my room that night, I had a new air-conditioner that ran perfectly.

We took our breakfast and our evening meal at the hotel. They had a nice buffet and the food was very good. This did prove to be a nice time to meet the other delegates and spend good informal time with them.

Other Events in Abuja

During the dinner on Thursday evening, the host stated that he was hosting another group that night, a pastoral counseling training group. There were about 30 of their group present. While he was introducing this group, I thought I recognized someone who looked familiar. We actually saw each other at the same time and were both equally surprised. It was Winnie Kalu, the wife of Ogbu Kalu, one of the leading church historians in West Africa and a good friend for the past fifteen years. Winnie mentioned that she was leading a pastoral counseling training workshop and invited me to stop by the next day and share a little about our AIDS work.

Therefore, on Friday afternoon, Andrew and I found our way to the Ibru Hotel where the workshop was being held. There were about 25 people from probably six or eight different countries there at the time. I took about 20 minutes to give them an overview of the faith-based AIDS awareness program and the subsequent programs that this project has spawned. I also gave them a copy of our AIDS manuals. I answered a number of questions and then decided to give all of them a copy of the book, *Tough Tests for Top Leaders*. This was a very enjoyable meeting, a little bonus that I had not expected.

After that I went over to see Solomon Lar, who was the founder and chairman of the People's Democratic Party. He is an elderly man with whom Tassneem and her mom lived for some months. Therefore, I went to report to him about the college where we are sending Tassneem. When I got there, a man who is a governor candidate in Kaduna State was waiting to see him. I was a bit humbled, that Babba Lar, as we call him, kept the future governor waiting so he could see me.

From there, we went over to the Yaradua Center. The director of this place is Mrs. Jamila Farris, an American lady who used to work for Mayor Andrew Young in Atlanta. She has gotten to know Daniel real well and has been responsible for getting him some of his big jobs in Nigeria. I just stopped by to chat with her. She was very happy with the video Daniel recently did. She also asked me to do her a favor when I got back to Jos. Their center sponsors scholarships to secondary school for good students in the state. However, she cannot get the Plateau State Primary Board to respond to her letters. (I was able to take care of this on Tuesday after I got back to Jos.) We had tea together and discussed many things. I always enjoy stopping and seeing her (and hearing her say nice things about my son).

Observations

I was very happy about the conferences. The following are some miscellaneous observations about it.

1. Just having the meeting was a success. Just getting that many senior people together to discuss how Christians can be more influential in society and particularly in government was an amazing accomplishment.

2. I am optimistic about the possible impact of Christianity on the continent. I believe that something good is going to come out of this and that Christianity is going to have more and more influence on the African continent.

3. This movement has the potential of having a major impact not only on the church but on the society and on governments. I doubt if there will be an immediate and overwhelming impact. However, this forum was another one of the important small steps that must be taken for the Church to grow and increase in influence. The caliber of people who were present at the forum is a great cause for optimism.

4. I am more and more impressed by Rev William Okoye, the chaplain to President Obasanjo. The man is a quiet and humble man but he really knows how to get things done and to get them done with excellence. Very few people in the world could have pulled this conference off but he did.

5. It was an honor to be asked to participate in the conference as a delegate from Nigeria. I have discovered in the past that a "white person" has to be a little careful in continental wide meetings about being too aggressive in presenting ideas and suggestions because not everyone knows me and some tend to view me as an outsider. However, no one in Nigeria has that attitude. They all view me as one of them and for that I am most humbled and grateful.

I am most grateful for the opportunity that I had to participate in this unique and historic conference. Even though I had to leave the states a bit early to attend, it was worth the time. I look forward to seeing the good things that might come out of this.