

# A Day of Reckoning and Healing: If Not Now, When...?

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By Rev. Tegga Lendado, PhD.

In the face corruption, mistrust, misunderstanding, recurrent famine, terrorist threats, border tensions, bitter rivalry among politicians, bickering intelligentsia, silent resistance, remote religiosity, futile climate change chatters and diplomacy, etc., we need to seek God's face. There is gross sin in our heart and our house! Generally, our people are religious but without the fear of God. Pride, anger, deceit, malice, jealousy, idolatry, unforgiving spirit, egotism, hedonism, etc., seem to govern our life.

Our religiosity does not seem to promote forgiveness, confession, fasting, prayer, reconciliation and reconnecting with one another. Wise and godly leaders of the most advanced democratic nation, USA, noticed the lack of these virtues in their societies and openly practiced and promoted prayer. These leaders were not ashamed of their heritage and value although their descendants today seem to be fast drifting from the legacy. In this short article, I would like to persuade my esteemed readers to consider the need of a national, regional or local day of repentance, forgiveness and healing before going to polls to vote for their representatives. My intention here is not to show so much how these could be done but that it could be done.

On March 30, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the following proclamation.

*"Whereas, the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the Supreme Authority and just Government of Almighty God, in all the affairs of men and of nations, has, by a resolution, requested the President to designate and set apart a day for National prayer and humiliation....And whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord....Now, therefore, in compliance with the request, and fully concurring in the views of the Senate, I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30th. Day of April, 1863, as a day of national humiliation, fasting and prayer. And I do hereby request all the People to abstain, on that day, from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord, and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion. All this being done, in sincerity and truth, let us then rest humbly in the hope authorized by the Divine teachings, that the united cry of the Nation will be heard on high, and answered with blessings, no less than the pardon of our national sins, and the restoration of our now divided and suffering Country, to its former happy condition of unity and peace."*

The National Day of Prayer is a day designated by the United States Congress as a day when people are asked to come together and pray, especially for their country. It was created as a floating holiday in 1952 and fixed on the first Thursday in May by Ronald Reagan.

The Bible declares, "If my people who are called in my name shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2Chr. 7:13-14).

In as much as sin provokes God's judgment, genuine repentance and reconciliation invoke His mercy and blessing through earnest prayer (Mt. 5:24). With His mercy comes our personal and national healing. If national begging and poverty do not humble us to be forgiving and kind to one another, then what else would? Notice that such privilege is given to "My" (i.e., God's own) people anywhere although it was given to the Israelites in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is "whosoever" (Jn. 1: 12-14) willing to believe and obey God's Son, the Messiah in whom all believers are included.

In my youth in Wolayita Soddo, Ethiopia, I saw Aba Melaku, a renowned monk who was later renamed Abuna Tekle Haimanot at his ordination as Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church during the traumatic Dergue reign in 1975. Living close to the monastery where the Abuna lived, I had the privilege of knowing him personally. He used to wear chains on his naked torso, a leather skirt covering from his waste to the knee and barasso sandals on his feet. Going to school, I would see him every morning walking so fast past my house.

It was fun to run after him sometimes. He sometimes blessed me laying his cold and soft hand on my head. I must confess that I used to throw pebbles at him along with the neighbourhood boys. But, when I came to my senses, I loved him. I believe he was in his late forties in 1960s when the attempted coup against the Emperor failed and many plotters were killed. Among them was the beloved Guermamay Neway, the former governor of Wolayita. The news about his death was devastating to many who loved him.

I believe it was thereafter that the Abuna organized a prayer rally at the Tekle Haimanot Monastery. He mobilized teachers and students of Ligaba Beyene School, men and women of all ages to pray for Ethiopia. Aba Melaku walked on bare foot around the whole city yelling, "Maat metta, libb gizu" (meaning, a disaster is at hand; repent). He called the people of Soddo to fast and pray daily for Ethiopia for three weeks. We prostrated and prayed every morning and evening. Sure enough, God averted the "Maat" that Ethiopia could have been subjected to.

By and large, Ethiopians had been deeply "religious" people before atheistic communism wrecked the country in 1974. In the dilemma of prolonged poverty, starvation, misery and underdevelopment owing to natural and manmade causes, we plunged into a political and socio-cultural abyss called communist revolution. In dethroning the emperor, we felt we also got rid of the Almighty God and His creation whom we blamed for our misfortunes. We rebelled against any authority from parent to prime minister. We defied our environment, tradition, culture, religion, ancestors, our own history and ethos.

We sank into a state of denial having been drugged by the communist literature filled with hatred, hopelessness, destruction, jealousy, rage, bitterness, doom and gloom. In that state of mind we killed each other, facilitated destruction, found ourselves further sinking in corruption and chaos and provoked havoc in the city and country (Red and White Terror). We showed contempt to the rule of law thinking we were the law. We demonized others to promote ourselves. We renounced defeat because thinking we were invincible. We did not feel guilty because we sealed our conscience. We feared neither man nor God. We removed God from our daily vocabulary.

Interestingly, we said we had a religion or an ancestral legacy. We took our children to church but we were not believers. We despised the church and all religious establishments. We did not know how to discipline our private life but we wanted to lead our nation. We did not have peace within us but we preached utopia. We hid hatred and war in our hearts but outwardly advocated for justice. Even now at dandy maturity, we still do not fear God and respect others; we cannot stand each other individually but we easily unite for such activities as edir, debo, feast, zefen, sports, tekawumo or degaf, worship and war. While these seemingly brutal generalizations are largely true, conversely, we possess a legacy of chewanet (gentleness) and endurance as a people. Our bravery in battle and flexibility in diplomacy seem to command universal respect. Obviously, the "we" here refers to any adult who survived the communist revolution of 1974-1991 and are still fiercely atheist or agnostic in attitude and action.

"We" are now fathers and grand fathers but still unrepentant of our past and present sins and crimes overtly or covert committed. Apathy, knowing the right thing and not doing it is also sin. Either way, we are accomplice with the past onslaughts and the present internal woes and the future demise. The good news is that we are all sinners (Rom.3:23) who deserve death but only for God's mercy (Rom.6:23). Many of us have fled to churches and worship centers but only God knows whether we have truly repented, reconciled with ourselves and our neighbours, most importantly with God, repaired our relationship to the point of trusting one another. I believe, this is the national malady.

In April/May 1991, just before Col. Mengistu's arrival in Harare, Zimbabwe, an Egyptian Orthodox priest and I organized a three-week fasting and prayer meeting for Ethiopia. A group of about 120-150 Ethiopians prayed every evening at the Egyptian Church, as did many others around the world. As a result, I believe God averted the danger and brought calm to the land

We are grateful that many people have joined their fellow believers repenting and praying in public prayer rallies in recent years. Apparently, the lacking link is reconciliation to the extent of repairing broken relationships, healing wounded hearts and burying lingering memories in our minds.

We know our past has to be effectively dealt with in order to face the present and unknown future. As a servant of God and a fellow wounded warrior (not physically), I am only here to encourage everyone in advanced age to forgive one another, repent and reconcile with God first and with his/her alleged offender, echoing Prof. Mesfin Wolde Mariam's *Yiqer LeEgziAbher*. No anger should last beyond one day, according to Eph. 4:26.

I am pleading with rulers or subjects, politicians or apolitical, opposing parties or supporters, peasantry or proletariat, professionals or businessmen, rich or poor Tigre or Somali, embittered with one another to reconcile with themselves first and then with their immediate offenders, i.e., neighbours, relatives before praying to God in behalf of the country.

I am appealing to all Christian denominations both in Ethiopia and in the Diaspora, including the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Ethiopian Catholic Church and all Protestant or Evangelical Churches, to intentionally collaborate in this grandiose matter of hosting a day of confession, prayer and reconciliation in ahead of the upcoming election in Ethiopia and in the Diaspora.

Similarly, I am not too proud or too shy to beg fellow Ethiopians of other persuasions, to consecrate such a day for prayer, forgiveness, repentance, healing, reconciliation and reconnection ahead of the upcoming election season, should their religion provide such a moment. I believe God's love and grace transcend all our doctrinal differences and religious traditions.

In this New Year, let us resolve to give gratitude to God and to each other. Our misery will end if we yield to God. Merry Ethiopian Christmas to all.

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