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Zimbabweans must not despair but keep hope alive

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The Bornwell Chakaodza column by Rev Dr Levee Kadenge

What has the last 37 years bequeathed Zimbabweans as we fast-approach the biblical 40 years in the wilderness that the Israelites endured to reach the Promised Land? The attainment of independence in 1980 was only one stage of leaving oppression by the colonial government, yet the journey to our destiny has been likened to the journey to Canaan.

Moses was raised by God to liberate his people who would not dare be political in case they were declared enemies of the state. Bondage was a reality for all the Israelites until God decided to liberate them on his own. Should we wait for God to liberate us?

Like the Israelites, we find ourselves in dire straits but we do not know who to turn to for our liberation. We are quickly reminded that we are liberated and should be eternally grateful.

We are all political animals, but in African politics, it's either you belong and you are safe or you don't and you are vulnerable. You hear many an African leader bragging "losing elections is by choice when you are a ruling party."

The politics of consensus has been thrown into the dustbin of history. This is why on our way to final freedom, most African countries tried a one-party state soon after independence. When shall we come up with a home-grown system of African politics?

For lack of a proper home-grown system of governance which is user-friendly, we ended up copying foreign and unfriendly systems into our continent. The result is that Africa is not really stable. While in the west, multi-party democracy is something they pride themselves in, for Africa, it is a luxury we can do without.

Some ask why we should go for elections when you can predict the results? The ordinary men and women are held to ransom by African leaders for they either acquiesce or behave otherwise and face the consequences. When one is in the system, they stand to enjoy the benefits of joining the gravy train, or face the poverty song when outside the system.

It seems the acceptance of a multi-party system was done begrudgingly. While at face value there seems to be tolerance of other parties other than ruling parties, there is a deep-seated dislike of the former. This is more pronounced at election time. These are times when Africa is at war with itself. If there were enough resources,

people would rather go for long breaks outside the country to avoid the hatred and threats that is the order of our elections. Tolerance is a word not used by most African leaders.

Political rallies become the arena of displaying such hatred in the form of “pasi na...” (down with so and so or rather death to so and so). Those who want to be safe by not aligning themselves to political parties would pray that this event never comes. But fate has it that the most oppressive regimes religiously follow elections without fail and as legally scheduled. Few rogue ones postpone elections from time to time.

When Pharaoh intensified his stubbornness, God did not ignore him. It seems that God specialises in those leaders who treat subjects badly. They are given the long rope to hang themselves and as they raise the banner of oppression, God actually gives them more resolve to retain power at all cost.

In the case of Pharaoh, after all the efforts to force him to release the oppressed by sending the calamities/scourges which were crowned by the deaths of the newly born sons of Egypt, God finally hardened his heart not to release the children of Israel (Exodus 14 vs 4). When the children of Israel were released, God again hardened the hearts of both Pharaoh and the Egyptians who followed the liberated Israelites (Exodus 14 vs 8) who were now on their journey to uhuru (independence). The Egyptians were led by God to their demise.

The safest route Africans are forced to take is to declare that they are apolitical. Once one has been labelled opposition, they carry that mark to the grave.

For this reason, we witness groups, communities and individuals being paraded to renounce their former parties while surrendering their party cards and regalia. This is done so that one declares their comeback or total declaration that they no longer belong with the enemy. After this ritual, one can now sleep well and safety is guaranteed.

We have to remove hatred from our politics so as to enjoy democratic principles, as practised in the west. People should be able to belong to different parties and still be friends, or at least not kill each other because of opposing views.

Artists, clergy and any popular figures are in a quandary. While in the west these can publicly show their party affiliation, here they cannot do so. The best they can do is to play safe by standing aloof. But what they do not realise is that being aloof is also being political.

Publicly, they seem to support both sides; when invited they will accept to perform or to come up with a piece of art created as per request. As a result of this fear, we have lost talent from these capable individuals. It is only when they go in to exile that they develop their talents politically. They can say their minds against the system from the safety of the diaspora.

Perhaps we will enjoy politics when this present generation of rulers has gone.

Israelites were for too long in bondage plus or minus 400 years with God’s acquiescence, one would say. No wonder we read towards the end of their captivity God actually hardened Pharaoh’s heart, in spite of having chosen Moses to liberate them. As if that was not enough, God hardened again the hearts of the Egyptian army that followed the Israelites to where they were camped as they waited to cross over.

We should not despair. Oliver Mtukudzi says in one of his songs, “we should not lose hope.” Such like him have soldiered on and not left their country because of their love for their country. This article is not saying that those who have left the country do not like it. Africa needs to be liberated both from foreign types of democracies and from its oppressive leaders. When are we going to have our own home-grown type of democracy/governance?

We should never lose hope. We do not need any modern-day prophet to tell us that we are destined for greater heights, for the Lord has already said, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not evil, to give you hope and an expected end” (Jeremiah 29: 11).

As The Standard celebrates 20 years, it pays tribute to the late Bornwell Chakaodza who was editor of the paper from 2002 to 2005.