

64TH NATIONAL PRAYER
BREAKFAST: PART THREE

HON. JEFF DUNCAN

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 20, 2016

Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, every week when the House of Representatives is in session, I like to attend the Weekly Members' Prayer Breakfast in the Capitol. The United States Senate also holds a Prayer Breakfast each week as well. This weekly meeting of Congressional Members of faith, gave birth to the yearly National Prayer Breakfast. On Thursday, February 4, 2016 I had the privilege of attending the 64th Annual National Prayer Breakfast chaired by Representatives ROBERT ADERHOLT and JUAN VARGAS. I would like to submit Part three of the transcript:

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THREE

Mr. Burnett: Yes, we are really fortunate and we are very grateful. But our faith has in fact led us to entirely build our TV careers and film careers on family friendly franchises, I mean shows like what was mentioned—The Voice, Apprentice, Shark Tank, Survivor. Often every week four nights out of seven, we have the number one show in America. It is a lot of leverage, which is what matters in Hollywood. We took that leverage and we told Hollywood we wanted to make a brand new series called The Bible. Yes, The Bible on prime time American TV.

Of course our friends told us we are going to destroy our great careers because mixing entertainment and religion is going to make people really angry. But worst of all, they said we were idiots because nobody is going to watch The Bible on prime time TV—they know the story and they can get that in church. Well, as the Americans in this room know, The Bible became the most talked about television show in America, the number one series that year, and 100 million of you watching.

And here is what is really great—The Bible was also shown in Canada but they showed it up against the first game for the National Hockey League—but head to head, The Bible beat hockey. I guess we do know now up in Canada we can officially say that hockey is not God.

Ms. Downey: At that time, The Bible was also up against a show called The Walking Dead and we won, and my favorite headline ran on CNN, "God beats zombies." But far more important than the ratings were the stories of families sitting together in their living rooms watching The Bible. The stories of how God's love for us unfolded through the ages, moved them, and engaged them because faith was and is alive and well in America. The series helped to ignite a much larger conversation about God and faith in this country. We were also humbled that people were inspired to see us, a Hollywood couple of producers daring to speak out about our love of Jesus, daring to talk about our faith in God, and our sincere belief in the power of prayer. I can honestly say that I have never made a decision in my life, big or small, that I didn't pray about first. The Bible series began with a prayer that started as a whisper in our hearts. Our dear friend, Rick Warren had said to us once, "The most dangerous prayer you can pray is, Lord, use me, because then you have to be ready that He might just do so." All we did was ask him to use us.

Mr. Burnett: And use us, he did, trust me. Yeah, it was a TV show but we are also still

telling the story of the most sacred book of all time, the Bible, and we knew we had to get it right. It is a really important, huge responsibility on our shoulders. So the first thing that we did was sign up 40 scholars and advisors—by the way, many of you are in this room right now—you know who you are—you backed us from the very beginning and stood shoulder to shoulder with us. And we thank you so much, all of you in this room who backed us.

You know it was difficult to bridge all the theological gaps, the sway of denominations, but we prayed our way through the process and managed to create a series that brought people together and glorified God. I think it is fair to say—we have become Hollywood's noisiest Christians. You know at least 90 million Americans attend church each Sunday in this country; millions more find inspiration and hope in the person, the story, and the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Christian community is a mainstream community. They watch the NFL they watch The Voice, they buy tickets to Star Wars and go to Beyonce concerts. It is a community that loves Jesus, loves their country, it is a very cool community made up of millions of young believers. Many who have tattoos, earrings, they ride skateboards, they surf, they tweet, they are entrepreneurs and are a vibrant part of the new American economy. It is a very broad audience indeed. It is a community that we are really proud to be a part of, and a community that has covered us in prayer—as to our own surprise we almost became the international spokespeople for the Bible.

Ms. Downey: The making of The Bible series was covered in prayer every step of the way. I can still remember sitting in the Moroccan desert under the shade of a rock and reading Scripture with actors, or praying together with them as they prepared for a scene. When we were getting ready to shoot the crucifixion scene, I sent out an email requesting that prayers would be sent ahead of us to clear the way. There were emotional and spiritual challenges of filming such a scene, as well as the physical challenge because we had to hang an actor on a cross and that day the winds were very high and the sun was scorching, and we prayed for safety, and that God would use this series to open hearts to him. We had a man on the set whose job it was to wrangle snakes and scorpions from each of the locations, and normally he found about 1 or 2 snakes a day, but on the morning of the crucifixion, he removed 48 snakes from around the hillside of Golgotha and we believe that was the power of prayer at work—the symbolism of the snake wasn't lost on any of us. We also prayed as we cast the series. We were only a few months away from beginning filming and we still hadn't cast the most important role of Jesus.

So I sent out an email to all my contacts with a header "Looking for Jesus." We asked in prayer that the right actor would show up. Through a series of remarkable coincidences, we came across Portuguese actor, Diogo Morgado. As he walked up our garden path to meet us for the first time, I turned to Mark and said "There he is; there's our Jesus." He was an answer to a prayer, and his touching and affecting performance as Jesus helped to inspire millions of people around the world.

Mr. Burnett: Yes, that role of Jesus was so important and it was last minute casting, and it was the answer to prayer, and the incredible Hispanic actor Diogo Morgado beautifully portrayed, as you saw on the screen, Jesus in The Bible series. Everyone in the whole country was talking about this Hispanic actor. And it reminds me of a great story.

There are a couple of old men who are Christians, they lived next door to each

other. One was an old black man; one was an old white man. They loved each other and they did everything together. In fact, they've only had one disagreement, the old black man was sure Jesus was black, and the old white man was just as sure that Jesus was a white man. Neither could ever convince the other. One day these great friends died together in a car accident. On their way up to heaven the old black man said "Buddy, we're about to find out I was right all along, Jesus is a black man." And the old white man said "I'm sorry you're going to have to find out this way, because when we meet him, you're going to see that Jesus in fact a white man." They got there in great anticipation and Jesus walked out to meet them, and he smiled at them and said, "Buenos dias."

Ms. Downey: Well, you know I suppose when you think about it, Jesus could have been Irish. He lived at home until he was 30. He never got married, and his mother thought he was God. You know, as a husband and wife producer team, not only do we get to do what we love to do but we get to do it together, and we have fun, you can tell, we have fun. But we also know that being in media comes with responsibility, for to those to whom much is given, much is expected. We are so pleased that our step of faith has reinvigorated faith and family programming in this country, and has hopefully inspired a whole new generation of artists to invest their talent and content that inspires and unifies. This is why we named the company that produced The Bible, Light Workers Media, because we have always believed that it is far more effective to light a candle than to curse the darkness. Let me say that again, we believe it is far more effective to light a candle, than to curse the darkness, and that is what we try to do—to light as many candles as we can. We just keep lighting candles in this often very dark, hostile and hurting world.

Mr. Burnett: It is very easy to divide people, and it is very difficult to bring people together. Did you know what we learned making The Bible? That just among Christians alone, there are over 30,000 denominations. When you think about that, it is crazy, right? And many have argued about their views of Jesus for thousands of years. So for us, working across the Protestant and the Catholic community, working in a very detailed way with the Jewish community, it was very, very challenging to make everybody happy as we told the story of The Bible. But we worked very, very hard, and as many people here advised us so closely, we learned to become bridge builders; and bridge building became our mission.

Ms. Downey: Building bridges has become so much of our mission and I know the power of a bridge from my own life's journey growing up in war torn Ireland. But today, if you go to Derry, you will find something new there. Peace has been restored there and there is now a walking bridge built across the River Foyle, and it is aptly called The Peace Bridge. It stands in defiance of all that once divided us—our very own bridge over troubled water. Protestant and Catholic children now play together, but more than that, the old hurts are healing. The leaders in Northern Ireland finally sat down and talked to each other, and listened to each other, and started to work things out together. We are at a time in the world's history where there is so much pain and fear, and division everywhere, and these divisions show up in race, and in religion, and in politics. The dividing lines are easy to find. The bridges to peace are harder to build. May we all find our dividing lines and work until we have built our own bridges of peace across them. On this day of the National Prayer Breakfast, we pray that with God's help, our world

can heal some of the hurts that wound us and the confusion that divides us, but it begins with us and perhaps a good place to start is to simply see the image of God in the eyes of everyone you meet. As Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you follow me, that you love one another." For in this spirit is the power of true faith that we learn to love each other. We know that television and film can be powerful ways of bringing inspiration and hope through emotional stories that open your heart. As my dear friend the late Maya Angelou said, "People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel." Thank you so much, and may God bless you.

Rep. Vargas: Wow, thank you so much. Muchisimas gracias. I have to say, thank you again, Mark. Thank you so much. Our purpose in this breakfast every year is to lift up Jesus as a solution to the problems of the world, and ask for the Lord's help. In that vein, we came together today to love and pray for the President of the United States, and his family, and we do this with all our hearts and we appreciate the message that you brought today to us, it was so uplifting. Mr. President, when we were in law school together, I had lunch with one of our smartest classmates, in fact I mentioned his name to you. And I asked him who he thought was really, really smart, and he said "This guy named Barack Obama; he's really, really smart; and he may even become a Supreme Court Justice some day." So there's still time, Mr. President. There's still time, you're a young man.

But all kidding aside, Mr. President, we honor you for your dignity. We honor you for your integrity. We honor you for your faith, the way you honor God with your life and your service to all of us. Ladies and gentlemen, for one last time at our National Prayer Breakfast, it is my honor to introduce the President of the United States.

64TH NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST: PART TWO

HON. JUAN VARGAS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 20, 2016

Mr. VARGAS. Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, February 4, 2016 I had the privilege of co-chairing the 64th Annual National Prayer Breakfast with Representative ROBERT ADERHOLT. I would like to submit Part two of the transcript:

64TH NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST: PART TWO

Rabbi Jack Bemporad: I think in these few days that we are together, there is such a spirit of love and joy, and affection. A sense that an environment is produced these days that elicits the very best in us and there is a constant struggle in everyone to find a way in which our best selves emerges. And the self that manifests the love of God, and the love of one's fellow human being, and it calls us to something higher, to a calling that gives us the nobility of what it means to be a child of God.

In this spirit, I would like to read from the book of Isaiah, Chapter 58. It is a reading that is done every Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement, in every synagogue throughout the world. It is a day, incidentally, where Jews fast. And yet on this very day when Jews fast, they read this.

"Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a rush, and to spread sackcloth

and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am. If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking of wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday and the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in."

Thank you.

The Honorable Julian Castro: Good morning. To President and Mrs. Obama, co-chairs Congressman Vargas and Congressman Aderholt, and to all distinguished guests with us this morning. On this day of hope and of harmony, let us pray.

Dear Lord, we gather here as one, connected by the strength of our faith, by our pride in this great nation, and by our common bond as Children of God. Let us remember that each of us is beloved equally in the eyes of our Lord, and let us serve as instruments that spread your mercy to our brothers and our sisters. Jesus told the disciples in the book of Matthew that what we do unto the least among us, we do unto Him. So, just as the grace of God provides nourishment to our souls and sanctuary for our spirits, we must provide food to the hungry, care for the ailing, shelter to the poor. The Bible instructs us to find unity in our faith, and compassion for all men and women through the example of Christ.

And I pray that we will find inspiration from the second chapter of Philippians, which reads:

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." Amen.

Thank you and God bless.

U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi: Good morning. Mr. President and Mrs. Obama, all of the distinguished guests gathered here in prayer. I know we all want to thank Congressman JUAN VARGAS and Congressman ROBERT ADERHOLT for their leadership in making this morning's breakfast such a success, and I thank them for giving me the opportunity to read the following from the Gospel of John. In the gospel of John, we see the golden rule that stands at the heart of the gospel. And as we hear these words from John chapters 13, 15 and 17 we know that this

message, this command of love is not confined to the New Testament. The same message stands at the center of the Torah, and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. From the Torah, it says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And from Mohammed, "None of you has faith until he loves for his brother or his neighbor what he loves for himself." And now from the gospel of John: "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father..."

"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with a towel..."

"When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asks them. 'You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is any messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.'"

A little while later Jesus said,

"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be with you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love hath no one than this, to lay down his life for his friend."

And finally, listen to Jesus' prayer for us, he went on to say:

"My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them, and you in me, so that may guide to bring us to complete unity."

That is the gospel of the Lord. May the Lord guide us to answer this prayer of togetherness, unity, and love, that we may be from many faiths, we may be united by our service to God and to one another. Amen. Thank you.

The Honorable Robert Rigsby: Good morning. Mr. President, our First Lady, this is truly the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Let us pray.

Thank you, Father, for allowing us to live in a country where we can come together in your precious name. In peace, fellowship, and communion offering you praise, glory and honor. Father, we ask that you watch over our President, Barack Obama, as he literally carries the weight of the world on his shoulders. Continue to lead and guide him, and bless him with the courage of David and the wisdom of Solomon. Bless all of our national leaders from all branches of our government. Father, bless the leaders from around the world who are charged with the great responsibility to bring hope in the midst of hopelessness, calm in the midst of chaos, and peace in the midst of war. Father, infuse in our leaders a call to action to protect those who cannot protect themselves. For as Dr. King said, our lives begin and end the day we become silent about things that truly matter. Father, let our leaders never forget that