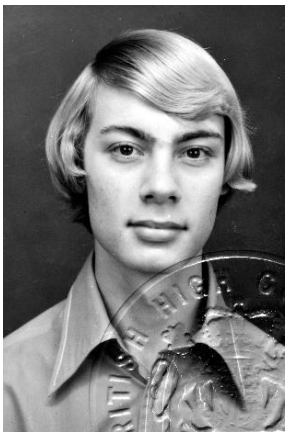
Recollections and Reflections

Or a Missionary Kid's African Experiences

By Tim Reddish



Part 1: Northeastern Nigeria

The men ran towards us and quickly covered a distance of about 20 yards while chanting and shaking their ceremonial spears at us in a warrior-like manor. My father stood frozen to the spot, and my eight-year-old sister Ruth and I were hugging his waist in absolute terror. It would have been unwise to try to run—there was nowhere to go to anyway; it's not melodramatic to claim that it looked like we were about to die. The men stopped right in front of us, and we could see their vividly painted faces and stares of intimidation. It worked: we were petrified. I am sure Ruth and I were sobbing, and my father was probably silently praying. The men turned around and ran back and then repeated their threatening charge several more times. We knew our lives were literally in their hands.

This incident took place in 1970 among the hills rising above the township of Gwoza in north-eastern Nigeria. We had taken a short hike up some foothills of the long mountain range that borders with Cameroon. Since we lived on the mission station at Gwoza, which housed a small hospital (established in 1956), a school, and a church, we saw these hills every day and naturally they aroused our curiosity. We knew people lived up there, since we saw them when they came down to trade their wares in the local market. We were amazed at the large and heavy loads that they—usually women—carried on their heads, and of the sure-footed agility of those who climbed up and down those hills. There were evidently trails up the hillside and we were told they were terraced at higher altitudes and had long supported communities of various ethnicities. So one day we climbed up, at least as far as the stamina of an eight- and ten-year-old could manage. We eventually reached a housing community and were surprised to find it deserted. My father could speak Hausa, the widely used market language, and hoped to greet and chat briefly with the inhabitants before we returned home. So we wandered a little further along the trail looking for people.

Before long we heard some wailing and then we stumbled upon a gathering of near-naked women and children in a clearing. They were dancing and chanting laments while all moving rhythmically together in a large circular motion. This was a most unusual sight, like nothing we had ever experienced—and never would again. Before we had a chance to register what we were witnessing, we were—as I just mentioned—repeatedly charged by a group of about fifteen men.

After the last charge, the men all gathered around us and my dad had an opportunity to speak with them. Tensions slowly diffused when he explained who we were (i.e., that my father was not some kind of government official) and that he was simply taking two of his children for a walk in the hills. They explained that a very important man in their community had died and this was his funeral. My Dad responded by apologizing for our unintended intrusion in their moment of grief. They told him that had he come alone, they would have certainly killed him. But because he had trusted them with his own

children they let him live. After more apologies we were allowed to leave. We certainly experienced far more than we bargained for and realized that on any future adventure it would be wise to have a Nigerian guide.

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About 10 miles to the south of Gwoza is the village of Limankara. While my parents saw themselves primarily as missionaries, my father's practical skills were frequently put to good use in developing building programs for the broader mission society's[1] activities of running hospitals and schools.

Limankara had a small Bible School for training pastors in that part of northeast Nigeria and in 1971 my parents moved there to teach (in Hausa), and travel to Gwoza by an aging short-wheel-base Land Rover to continue overseeing the building work. The house itself needed renovating as this mission station hadn't been occupied for some time. Nevertheless, it was relatively grand and spacious, with a long south-facing veranda to shield the house from direct sunlight.

Our family's lifestyle in rural Nigeria at that time is worth relating for context. We had no electricity, instead we used candles and kerosine lamps. The bulk of the cooking was done on a woodstove (in an

[1] The Sudan United Mission (SUM, British Branch), *not* to be confused with the much larger Sudan Interior Mission (SIM).

external kitchen) and only supplemented by a butane gas burner or a kerosine Primus stove. There were no telephones; urgent, succinct work-related messages were transmitted and received by a short-wave radio that served the whole mission society during a specific, brief time-window every morning. Speaking of radio: we listened to the BBC World Service and other media outlets on our battery-operated multi-band SW radio. And we extended its antenna's capabilities with a suitably orientated, insulated wire strung up to a nearby tree or on the roof. Even then, reception was patchy.

We had no running water or a flushed toilet; all the water was drawn by hand from the nearby well. The toilet resided in a ventilated outhouse and was an enclosed wooden bench seat with an eight-to-ten-inch hole situated over a bucket. After you had finished, you sprinkled dry grass or straw into the bucket in a vain attempt to keep the smell down. Every day the bucket needed emptying into a hand-dug pit some suitable distance from the house. I recall how unnerving it was to go to the toilet at night, desperately hoping that the candle wouldn't be blown out by a sudden draft or attract too many flying insects—or worse, some kind of animal—while you were indisposed! Speaking of insects, it was vital to sleep under a mosquito net and we took *Paludrine* pills daily to protect ourselves from malaria. And in the morning, you grabbed your slippers or shoes by the toe and tapped the heel on the ground to check that nothing had crawled into them overnight.

My youngest sister, Rachel, and her many friends at Limankara. (Notice the hills in the background.) At that time she was fluent in two local languages (one being Hausa); in fact, English was a poor third through lack of the need to use it.

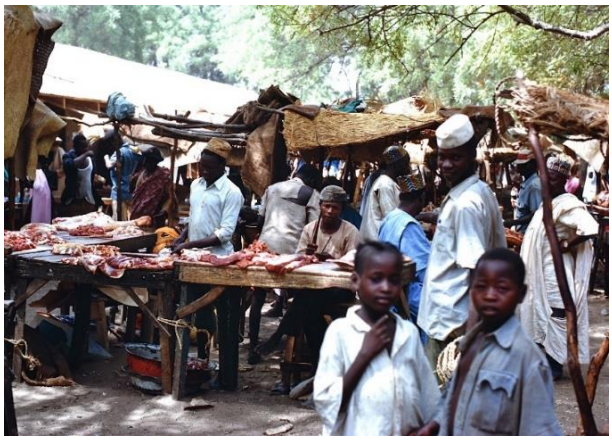
Like many Nigerians, we kept chickens for eggs and the occasional chicken dinner. However, unlike the locals, we kept ours enclosed in a largish space surrounded by chicken wire and fed them with ground corn saved from the previous year's harvest. This practice was widely perceived as bizarre and excessive since everyone else's chickens simply scratched a meagre living wherever they roamed. (We let ours roam free in the early evening and they always returned home at night.) Grain-feeding our chickens meant they grew to a good size and that their eggs were large; both were envied. And while investing in chicken wire seemed pointless, when lethal fowl pests swept through the region, our chickens fared well because they were, essentially, already quarantined. Demonstrating these farming practices was an effective way of engaging the local community. (When we eventually left a particular mission station, it was our practice to donate the chicken wire *and* a good number of the chickens; both were much appreciated.) From time to time, a chicken became broody and would sit on her eggs for the required incubation period of 21 days. There was always excitement among us kids as to how many would hatch and how many would eventually survive to adulthood. (Despite our precautions, the chicks were particularly vulnerable to birds of prey and snakes.) Looking after the chickens was our daily chore, one which we did willingly.

Rachel loved the chickens; she named them all and could readily distinguish between them. Eventually she would refuse to eat a chicken dinner as that meant one of her beloved friends had gone for the chop!

While at Limankara, I regularly cycled to the township early in the morning to buy fresh milk (by arrangement) from a local herdsman, who by definition was affluent. I would bring the milk home in plastic containers provided by my mom, who would then slowly bring it to the boil to kill off the parasites. Once cooled we had the luxury of *real* milk, rather than the usual reconstituted milk from powder. On one occasion, I arrived early before the cows had been milked. The farmer graciously offered

me a cup of milk and since I was hot I gratefully accepted it. Alas, it was later discovered that I had roundworms as a consequence and had to take the appropriate medicine. My parents weren't best pleased and reminded me to politely say "no" in future and to always take drinking water with me.

Much of our food and wares were bought at the local weekly market, including our meat and fabric (to make clothing for growing children). Bartering for the 'right' price was expected and part of the normal lengthy process for purchasing items. If you didn't haggle, you were perceived to be a rich fool. Seasoned shoppers knew the appropriate worth of items and mutual respect was earned by steadily negotiating towards a mutually agreed "final price"—a social process that, like African greetings, couldn't be rushed.



Meat markets were a fly-ridden, smelly part of the market, and the animals were slaughtered not far away; both were places I tried to avoid. The accepted rule was that if a goat or cow was able to walk by itself to the market, it was fit enough to be eaten. Many animals were old and scrawny; their meat was correspondingly tough and had to be boiled forever (or prepared in a pressure cooker) to make it even edible in some form of a stew. My mom fancied a change and bought a nice-looking piece of liver. The house boy put it in the wood oven to cook. A little later both of them opened the oven door to see the progress. To their horror, *worms* were wriggling out of the meat in a bid to escape the inevitable! Yes, the cow had been able to walk to the market, but the owner must have known it was literally on its last legs. Needless to say, the liver wasn't eaten.

Cycling was simply an everyday part of life.
(This picture was taken at Gwoza.)

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Our paid house 'boy,' Iliya, had close relatives that lived in the hills to the east of Limankara. He had long wanted to visit them with my father and share the gospel with them. So my dad and I (now aged eleven), Iliya, and another Nigerian man made an expedition into the hills that was to last for at least three days. Day one was the 3000-foot ascent following our guides up the steep trail. We took our time, admired the views, and navigated the many terraces that enabled people to farm the hillside, to live without the need to descend to the plain. While the climb was hard work, the temperature became significantly cooler with elevation. Once at the top, the hills are undulating and are part of the Mandara Mountains that extend southwards for a further 100 miles. We then made our way to a small market village and there we slept as honored guests in a small round mud hut.

The next day we had a straight-forward hike cross country to Ngosi to where Iliya's relatives lived. Technically we crossed the border into Cameroon at some point, but such a distinction was meaningless in that environment—at least it was at that time. At one point along the narrow trail the guide spoke in an urgent whisper. I asked my dad what he said and he translated: they had seen baboons nearby and we were told to continue quietly and *not* to look at them. Baboons were the largest primates in the region and we were traveling through their territory. They can become aggressive if they feel threatened, especially if the mothers were nursing their young. Looking directly at them is perceived as confrontational and must be avoided. As an eleven-year-old, I knew none of this. Being told *not* to look at them resulted in me looking at them. Being so distracted, I then slipped on a damp rock and made a kerfuffle. The adults were annoyed with me. They pulled me to my feet and we quickly and quietly continued on our way. Thankfully we didn't come across any hyenas or large wild cats.

We eventually arrived at Iliya's relative's home: a cluster of mud huts that were built on the rocky outcrops above the terraces. Other families lived in other similar clusters in the locality, so making an extended community. Despite their surprise at seeing us, their hospitality was evident. We ate their best food, which was chicken—guts and all! Nothing was wasted. Frankly, it looked and tasted awful. But our family rule was that us children had to make a good attempt at eating whatever was put before us, lest we cause offence or seem unappreciative of their generosity. (After all, their own children were last in the pecking order for such a feast.) My parents had no such exemption. I had brought a very special treat with me: a can of Heinz Baked Beans. I used the can opener to take off the lid and heated it up on the campfire. It was the best meal I had on the whole trip. My dad whispered to me to leave some for him.

Hospitality was again evident as we were given our own mud hut to sleep in. The huts in the mountains had a five-to-six-foot diameter with a tall, steep thatched roof to shed the heavy rains. We were also given the best bed, a four-to five-foot axe-hewed plank that for some unknown reason had a large hole about two-thirds down its length. The plank was about eight inches wide and propped up at one end by a rock. We slept in our clothes and I recall being quite cold; we were, after all, not used to being 3000 feet up. My dad was given the honor of sleeping on the plank, and it was important for etiquette's sake that he be seen to be using it; after all it was the best bed going. I was trying to sleep on the dirt floor. My dad, being six feet tall, wasn't doing well on the plank. And I wasn't faring much better on the hard, uneven floor.

I whispered: "I can't sleep."

"Would you like to swap?"

So we did but the floor was marginally better.[2]

What I hadn't appreciated was that I was the *first* white boy they had ever seen! Moreover, I had straight, sun-bleached blond hair. Word spread like wildfire across the hills and a number of men braved traveling during the night to see this wonder. At various points though out the night, we were interrupted by men entering the hut who then shone their flashlights in our faces. They then felt the hair on my head and touched my skin to make sure it wasn't painted white. They were obviously amazed at what they saw and now couldn't deny the truth of the rumors they had heard.

Breakfast over a warm campfire came as a blessed relief. The porridge-like substance was quite edible and filling. My dad spoke briefly in Hausa and it was interpreted by Iliya into the local language. I contributed by turning the hand-cranked gramophone of stories in some language; I have no idea what they were or who had made them.

After extended farewells, we started on our way back. We made it all the way home in one day without further incident; downhill is so much easier than up. We had a lot to tell my mum and sisters that evening. And we were ready for a good meal, which was then followed by a very deep sleep.

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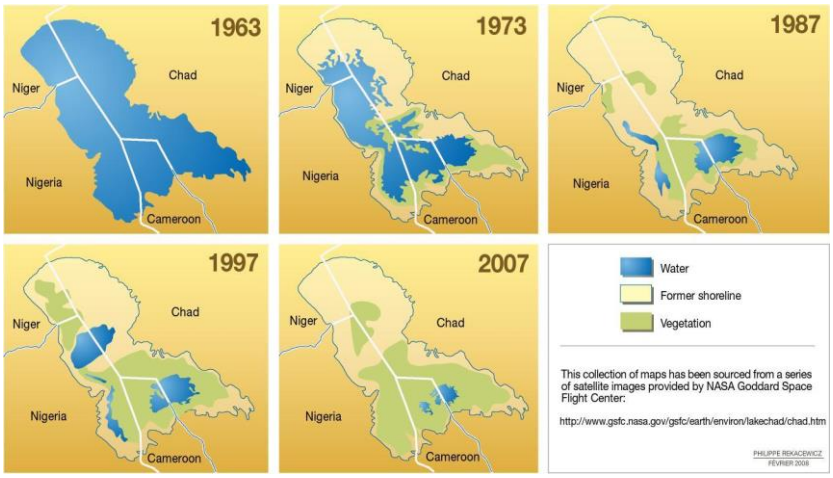
[2] As uncomfortable as that was, on a different overnight cycling trip to visit and encourage local pastors, we were again given the best bed as an honor and this generous hospitality would have been insulting to refuse. This small bed even had a thin kapok mattress. However, the mattress was infested with bed bugs and as fresh meat we were eaten alive…

In the north-east corner of Nigeria is—or was—Lake Chad, a resource shared with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. In the early 1960s it was approximately the size of Wales or Lake Michigan. At that time there were islands, some of them of floating vegetation, that supported communities and their animals. Dr David Carling had a passion for the region and had a vision of a low-draft boat that was a purpose-built floating hospital—an operating theatre with dental and X-ray facilities, and a clinic, to be more precise. Specialist doctors could then fly into airstrips located in permanent townships at the edge of the lake, travel by dinghy to the hospital boat and then tour the islands and perform various surgeries. This was seen as a natural, if not unusual, extension of the mission hospitals already established by the SUM in that region. Fundraising and logistics delayed the implementation of this ambitious project, and before the boat—named *Albarka*, Hausa for "blessing"—could be put to full use, Lake Chad began to dry up.[3] This tragedy made the longer-term implementation of this project impractical and unsustainable.



See: https://www.grida.no/resources/5593

During our vacations from boarding school, my parents would try to plan special family excursions, such as the hike to Ngosi. Another memorable trip was to visit *Albarka* on Lake Chad. In addition to being an adventure, we were going with three specific tasks to undertake. The first was to open a new air strip and ensure its readiness for the arrival of a MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) plane, scheduled for while we were there. Second, we were to replenish the medical supplies of the local dispensary. And finally, we were to test a novel, pedal-powered, shortwave radio to aid communication to and from the dispensary, the pilot, and medical facilities beyond—such as in Maiduguri, but also in Niger and Chad.[4] The destination was a place across the border in Niger, near Mallam Fatori—I believe, and at the southern edge of the encroaching Sahara Desert. The township was not only close to the lake, but it

[3] It has been recently estimated that about 50% of the decrease in the lake's size since the 1960s is attributed to human water use, with the remainder attributed to shifting climate patterns. Major overgrazing in the region has resulted in a loss of vegetation, which contributes to a drier climate. Large and unsustainable irrigation projects built by Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad have diverted water from both the lake itself and the Chari and Logone rivers, the two main tributaries that feed the lake. (See: https://www.grida.no/resources/5593 ; https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-62417-w .)

[4] My vague recollection is that this innovative two-way radio was not very effective, though I may be mistaken.

also had a very deep artesian well (or borehole) that provided a stable supply of drinkable water.

We travelled by a long-wheel base Land Rover along sandy tracks that purported to be the road. Some hours later, we crossed a dried-up riverbed which we were informed was the border between Nigeria and Niger. (At the next major town my parents presented our official paperwork to the authorities along with our travel plans.) As we continued along the sandy tracks, we passed through abandoned villages that indicated where the lake edge had once been; the people were compelled to follow the receding water—the source of their livelihood. At that time the cause for the lake's recession was somewhat of a mystery to us, but witnessing these eerie ghost-towns made the phenomenon all too real.

As to be expected, African hospitality ensured our welcome was very warm, both figuratively and literally in this case because of the dry, desert heat. My parents and our guide first visited the leaders of the township and exchanged greetings. They then explained the reasons for the visit.

The Land Rover was soon unloaded, and the local nurse was thrilled to receive the medical supplies. The next day my father and various men from the township walked up and down the new air strip built by the community. He was inspecting it to ensure no large or sharp stones were present that could have potentially damaged the plane's tires on landing. Then we waited. . . in the shade.

Eventually we heard the sound of the single-engine Cessna buzzing the township and looking over the landing strip from the air. Naturally, this aroused the attention of the whole town and people came running to see the plane land. Once the propeller stopped rotating, crowds swarmed around the plane—they had *never* seen anything like this before. The pilot, aided by my father and others, enforced a circle around the plane to protect it from the numerous well-meaning but overly curious people who—quite understandably—wanted to touch it. If folk ever wondered why on earth they were clearing this patch of land of its rocks and shrubs, well, now they knew. The pilot then invited five[5] of the most senior elders of the village to go for a short flight. They came dressed in their best togas and boarded the plane and the whole village watched on in awe as it went faster and faster down the dirt strip before finally taking off. The pilot circled around, banking steeply on both the left and right sides so the occupants could see their township and the lake from the air. A short time later the plane landed and the men deplaned—some a little wobbly on their feet from the experience, one they relived at length and could later pass on to their grandchildren. The pilot then took our family of five up for the same experience, keeping the trip short to conserve fuel for the flight home. A little later, farewells were exchanged and, before taking off, the MAF pilot again expressed his admiration for the excellent ground clearing to make this new landing strip. That evening, after taking a shower at the borehole—which was like being put under a high-pressure hose pipe, we could retell our own experiences of the eventful day.

The next morning we decided to try and get a closer look at the *Albarka*, which was anchored some distance offshore. This meant a trip on an aging inflatable rubber dinghy fitted with an outboard motor. There was room for just three of us, so the first trip carried our guide, my father, and me. While we didn't have a key to look around inside the *Albarka*, we wanted to see this floating medical facility that we had heard so much about.

We also knew that Lake Chad contained hippopotami and we were told stories of them by the local fishermen. Hippos may appear slow and cumbersome on the shore, but don't be fooled by that—in the water they are fast and agile; there they are king. And don't annoy them; when you see them, promptly turn your boat away from them and paddle swiftly away. The last thing you want is for a hippo to surface under your boat; they have jaws that can bite your leg off.

[5] Six was the maximum capacity of the plane. (Obviously the elders themselves chose their five representatives.)

After paddling the dinghy away from the shore, the outboard motor was put in place and the starter-rope pulled several times before the motor coughed into life. As we headed towards the *Albarka*, we noticed hippos surfacing in the distance. The sound of the engine had annoyed them and I hoped they were moving away from us. . . .

Then the engine stopped. And when my dad pulled on the rope, nothing happened; the engine turned over but regardless of the number of times he pulled, it would not start. We were drifting on the lake—I could still see the hippos. . . and I feared that they would be emboldened to come and investigate.

I panicked. I shouted, unhelpfully, at my dad: "Pull harder!" He then opened the lid to the gas tank to check it contained fuel: it did. Having replaced the cap, he pulled again and—miraculously, it seemed—the engine started, and my fears began to subside.

We again proceeded towards the boat, still aware of the hippopotami surfacing in the distance. And then the engine stopped again, and I went into high anxiety mode once more. Again my father released the cap to the gas tank and pulled on the starter cord and this time the motor started promptly. What he had now realized—and I had not—was that as the fuel was being used up in the gas tank, it created a partial vacuum which inhibited further fuel flow. Air needed to be replenished in the tank to compensate for the fuel used. He then discovered a valve that did this automatically and the issue was solved.[6] Thankfully, the noise of the outboard motor dissuaded the hippos from coming closer.

Unfortunately, there was no easy way for us to board the *Albarka*; all we could do was circle around it at close quarters. However, the boat ride itself was memorable—even if it was the stuff of nightmares!

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For a while we were stationed at Molai Hospital, about six miles from Maiduguri, the large capital city of north-eastern Nigeria. Molai's hospital also had a leprosy settlement (established in 1938) that provided vital medical aid to its patients. (A ministry towards leprosy sufferers—now commonly referred to as Hansen's disease, a stigmatizing scourge in the region—was a much needed and welcomed feature of mission hospitals.)

[6] To those familiar with outboard engines, this is so obvious; but it wasn't for us.

With the appropriate antibiotics leprosy is a curable disease, but it can leave the person with a permanent disability due to nerve damage. In the situation where the stubby remains of the fingers and thumb are rigid or locked, there will obviously be severe limitations to manual dexterity. I remember Dr Charles Todd applying Dr Paul Brand's tendon transplant techniques,[7] pioneered in the 1950s at a mission hospital in India, to suitable patients at Molai Hospital. The surgery transfers a tendon from the leg to the hand in such a way as to release the thumb so enabling the recipient to pinch and grip objects. If you think about that for a moment, you will recognize that it is truly life-transforming to the recipient. I, as a thirteen-year-old, was allowed to witness this surgery and it clearly made an impression on me.

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At that time there was no electricity at the hospital and my father oversaw the installation of two Lister diesel-powered generators. They were installed in a purposely designed, well-ventilated (for reasons of air-cooling) building at the edge of the hospital campus (for reasons of noise). I recall the Nigerian workmen being baffled as to why they needed to dig two, large, four-foot-deep rectangular holes only to fill them up again. My dad explained that the hard core and concrete were needed to provide solid, separate foundations for the two generators. Large threaded studs (adapted from a U-bolt from a truck's suspension) were embedded in the concrete ready to firmly fix them to the floor. The day finally came when the delivery truck arrived with two, gleaming, green generators; they only just fitted through the door.

I helped the project by going up the poles on a ladder to attach the wires to the white ceramic pots. One day, while on the job in the early afternoon, we experienced a very significant, though partial, solar eclipse. I recall the sky went quite dark and the temperature dropped significantly. The birds went quiet, no doubt confused, thinking it was nighttime. It was certainly eerie, weird, and unnerving. I also recall that some Nigerians were quite panicked, as they didn't realize what was happening. For some it must have seemed like the end of the world—the day the sun went out.[8] Later we heard that Concorde had

[7] See Dorothy Clarke Wilson, *Ten Fingers for God*, (ELS, 1994); Paul Brand with Philip Yancey, *The Gift Nobody Wants*, (HarperCollins, 1993).

[8] See Matt 24:29, which cites Isaiah 13:10; 34:4. (Some Christians read such texts literally and interpret it cataclysmically.)

been chasing the eclipse across the Sahara Desert filled with scientists.[9] That was June 30, 1973. What was particularly special about this eclipse was the *duration* of the total darkness: 7 minutes and 4 seconds, something that won't be repeated until June 25, 2150. However, traveling at Mach 2—twice the speed of sound—and at an altitude of 53,000 feet, Concorde was able to chase the eclipse and this gave the scientists an unprecedented 74 minutes to perform their experiments. The terrestrial experience at Molai has been analyzed as the sun being 90% covered by the moon at about 1pm, with the most notable effects lasting over an hour.[10] Unforgettable!

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At Molai, the missionaries lived about a mile away from the hospital separated by a straight tree-lined avenue. I was allowed to drive the mission's 50cc moped down that road and back again once in a while. Another memorable occasion occurred when I took my mother on the back of the moped for a spin along the road. While on the trip a ferocious sandstorm caught us out; we didn't see it coming because of the trees and we didn't hear it coming over the engine noise. As usual I was shirtless, and the sand stung my skin. We maneuvered the bike behind a tree in an attempt to shelter us from the wind. My mom sat behind me to provide some protection for my bare back. We had experienced sandstorms before, but nothing of this severity and duration. I remember seeing a bird fall down dead in front of me and I was alarmed. What was the wisest thing to do: Should we wait it out or attempt to go back home? We decided to drive. It took a few attempts to pedal the engine to life in that sand-choked air, and then we turned homeward and were guided by the line of trees. Closer to home we were met by my father in the Land Rover coming to find us. Now safe we could admit how frightening the experience had been. We were both incrusted in sand.

This reminds me of another dramatic storm at Molai. I remember waking up one night during a tremendous thunderstorm; I lit my small kerosine "bush" lamp and went to investigate only to find my parents both gone! I couldn't find them anywhere—though, as I recall, I did find that my two sisters were still asleep, at least at first. Being night in a place of no electricity meant the darkness was normally only punctuated by the vivid stars and the luminous phase of the moon; but not that night, all was black . . . and the wind howled. Being raised a Pentecostal, I quickly surmised that this was the rapture and I had been left behind. You may laugh, but I was *terrified*. Jesus had evidently taken all his followers away,[11] including my parents, and I was now abandoned in Northern Nigeria. It didn't matter if I *thought*

[9] See: https://theaviationgeekclub.com/the-story-of-the-concorde-supersonic-airliner-that-chased-a-solar-eclipse-and-set-a-world-record/ ; https://www.space.com/solar-eclipse-1973 .

[10] See: https://www.timeanddate.com/eclipse/in/nigeria/maiduguri?iso=19730630 . The eclipse technically lasted for three hours.

[11] See Matt 24:40-44. (This theology was particularly popular and influential in the 1970s among conservative Christians.)

I was a Christian, clearly I wasn't if I was still here! Eventually my parents returned to distraught children.

The storm had ripped up a tree and hurled it onto the tin roof of the nurses' quarters, whose walls were made of *mud* bricks, and my parents had gone to investigate if anyone was hurt. (No injuries, mercifully, but I witnessed the seriousness of the destruction the following day.) They never thought to leave an explanatory note on the table….

One of the things passionate hellfire and rapture preachers are prone to overlook is the effect of such teachings on children. Put simply, it creates a culture of fear, seriously distorts the good news message of Jesus Christ, and makes God a scary being—not a loving one. Children are *not* equipped to discern or balance such texts—and, evidently, not just children. I remember another story of a child who was terrified of thunderstorms because of the Sunday School story of Noah and the flood. Their fear was because the child wondered if God had *broken* his promise of Genesis 8:21, never to flood the earth again. Again such stories to children, who vividly imagine and visualize such accounts, only creates a climate of anxiety and a sense of panic. Biblical literalism is dangerous, and apocalyptic literature must be more broadly appreciated as a stylistic genre of *warning* to stir people to change their ways. At thirteen I couldn't know of such subtilties.

Reflections

As I reflect on the above events that occurred fifty years ago now, I wonder about the lasting impact or legacy of my parents' work and those of other missionaries—including medical personnel and schoolteachers. It is for Nigerians themselves to fully assess and answer such questions. However, given the continued existence of Gwoza Hospital (established by Dr Laurie Chandler OBE) and Molai Leprosy Settlement (established by Dr Frances Priestman OBE) speaks of the ongoing medical needs within the region. Their vision and dedication, and that of many others, have evidently had an enduring legacy.

Without belittling the significance of establishing hospitals and schools, the primary aim of missionaries is arguably to spread the good news ("gospel") of Jesus Christ. In Nigeria, this has resulted in many churches being established, along with Bible Schools and Theological Colleges to train pastors and leaders. The SUM contributed to this endeavor for over seventy years, eventually handing over all church leadership and governance to Nigerians[12] in 1977, as it should be. After all, that is the *goal* of mission; like the apostle Paul, missionaries then move on to other ventures in other places.

One can—and should—critique the various mission societies concerning the timings, mechanisms, and effectiveness of their handover processes; after all, lessons can always be learned. For example, some might argue that the transition of power, as it were, should have occurred much earlier, i.e., that the missionaries lingered too long—they didn't want to "let go." One can also critique the missionaries' underlying theological and cultural outlooks, often unconscious, that was passed on to the Nigerian church, in some cases to its detriment.[13] (I will come back to this important topic in Part 2.)

Returning to the specific region of northeastern Nigeria, where for a time my parents worked, the situation has been in utter turmoil in recent decades due to militant (Sunni) Islam in the form of Boko Haram.[14] This radical group seeks to introduce strict Islamic law and so wishes to overthrow the Nigerian government, which it regards as too influenced by the West. Consequently, this brutal terrorist organization is violently anti-western, anti-Christian, and against all who it regards as collaborating with the status quo, such as security and police forces, the media, schools, politicians, and even (Shia) Muslims. This has obviously decimated the churches and their activities, as well as schools and medical work, in the whole of the region—including Gwoza, Limankara, and Greater Maiduguri—and beyond.

Various theological questions cross my mind as I reflect on this troubling turn of events, particularly in the context of divine guidance and legacy. Many evangelical Christians, like my parents, would say that God *guided* or *called* them into missionary work. Such language is in keeping with the call narratives of

[12] To the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), now renamed The Church of Christ in Nations.
[13] For another cultural perspective see also Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, Orbis Books, 1978, 2003.
[14] "Boko Haram" means "Western education is forbidden." See also: https://www.channelstv.com/2021/07/24/twelve-years-of-terror-a-timeline-of-the-boko-haram-insurgency/ ; https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/boko-haram ; https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2014/07/28/2014-010945%20NG%20RPT.pdf .

the Old Testament prophets and is perceived as a mandate for their activities. Some readers might be surprised by such strong rhetoric, yet similar terminology is commonly used in the ordination of Christian ministers. In secular parlance we say someone has a *vocation*, itself a deeply empowering concept. Missionaries and ministers would likely view their work as in-keeping with the parable of the sower[15], where different soils represent various responses to the gospel. While some geographical regions and/or social conditions ("soils") are conducive to seeds growing to maturity and harvest, the parable makes it clear that this outcome is not guaranteed. The emergence and ascendancy of Boko Haram might be linked to another farming parable of Jesus, that of the weeds.[16] In that parable, the disciples are simply encouraged to be patient, reassured that justice will eventually occur "at the end of the age," namely the Day of Judgement.[17] Many missionaries and ministers find these stories of Jesus reassuring; their job is to be faithful in the present moment, to endure, and trust in God for the eventual harvest.

I wonder though, if God knows the future—as traditional Christians maintain, could God not have been a little more strategic in implementing divine guidance to avoid such, seemingly, wasted effort by dedicated missionaries?[18] In other words, is an omniscient God being efficient in maximizing the harvest? The question is obviously unanswerable, and perhaps even seen as sacrilegious in some people's minds, but it is articulated here in humility and with seriousness. The question, however, tends to depict God as a chess player, willing to sacrifice pawns to gain an overall advantage.[19] And while that analogy might be consistent with divine omnipotence, I suggest it is at odds with the essence of divine love and the example of Jesus himself. Even so, given the self-sacrifice of some missionaries, the devastation of Boko Haram must make them—and others—wonder if it was all worth it.

Behind this question is the issue of "legacy." And the very desire to have such a legacy, I suggest, points to ego and a sense of entitlement for an individual. Having said that, of course *others* may identify a person who has made a significant contribution in a certain field (e.g., politics, art, science, etc.) such that they changed history in some notable way. But an individual's *ambition* to leave a legacy or receive accolades is another thing. Now a missionary may not be consciously motivated by ambition, but as they later reflect over their life's work they would probably hope that it made a noteworthy addition to the Kingdom of God. They may be too humble to claim that for themselves, but they might like to think others with discernment would recognize their efforts as being truly worthwhile. In some cases, the missionaries' outcome may be in bricks and mortar—the building of a hospital or school, for example. In other situations, it could be the establishing of a vibrant church community or in training leaders. In

[15] See: Matt 13:1–23, Mark 4:1–20, Luke 8:4–15.
[16] See Matt 13:24–30, 36–43. That latter parable, unique to Matthew's Gospel, is both dualistic and apocalyptic in outlook and needs to be explored with some care and sensitivity. (See also the parables in Matt 25.)
[17] Matt 13:19–30, 40. There is also a passivity implied here that some might find troubling.
[18] This problem arguably disappears with Open Theism because God cannot know in advance the (genuine) free choices of human beings, as that is the nature of freewill and the essence of divine love.
[19] In this dualistic image, who is God's chess opponent? And is an omniscient God actually responding (in time) to his opponent's moves or is the whole game scripted—in which case it becomes something of a farce.

both scenarios something tangible exists that continues after the missionary has left. In the case of the areas controlled by Boko Haram, there may now be no such palpable evidence. That doesn't, however, mean that there isn't any. In the case of the suppression and persecution of the church under communism at its height, Christianity went underground only to reemerge much later as conditions relaxed. The same outcome is possible in this situation too.

Ultimately missionaries and ministers are faced with a decision, fundamentally one of *trust*; this is true for all of us. We are to trust *in God's providence*—God's care and activity in the world—that there *will* eventually be a harvest, even if we see no obvious signs of that at present—or even within our lifetime. Second, rather than the desire to see some tangible lasting legacy, I suggest we focus on *being faithful in the moment*. And to recognize that our conversations and actions may well have influenced and changed lives in ways we may never know. In the language of the parable of the sower: we may not have personally seen much of a harvest, but we have been sowing seed whose outcome is yet to emerge or be realized. Is that not in itself enough? Can we trust God that it is? If so, then having a palpable legacy becomes a nonissue.

I further submit that the above suggestion is unsatisfactory to many Christians in the West, where there is a tendency to be seduced by the concept of church *growth*—specifically in terms of numbers and/or size of budget. That criterion is often perceived as the mark of a "successful" church, regardless of its faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus or of evidence of profound, deep, spiritual maturity. This arises for two obvious reasons. First, it sees the harvest in the parable of the sower in purely *numerical* terms.[20] Second, which is also linked to the first, this is because the Western church has been subtly seduced by its culture, that of capitalism and commercialism. The signs of a growing company are measured in sales, profits, market share, size, etc., and this perspective has been uncritically imported into our understanding of church growth. Now it's of course important to be savvy in church management, but that should also be as a result of an authentic partnership with the Holy Spirit.

Western evangelicalism, the traditional driving force behind much Protestant missionary activity, has—in recent decades—largely bought into the above church growth model, particularly in North America. (Indeed, this attitude reinforces the notion of having an enduring legacy, because visible "success" itself is the legacy.) That being the case, the demise of the Nigerian church that's under the oppressive thumb of Boko Haram can only be regarded as a *failure*. Personally, I do *not* regard this in such stark terms, and I suspect many mission-minded churches in the West wouldn't either. Yet there is in my mind a logical inconsistency here, one that needs to be candidly acknowledged by evangelicals and then authentically incorporated (or fed back) into a better understanding of church development and Christian maturity.

[20] See also the parable of the talents: Matt 25:14–30.

Moreover, this matter of legacy remains timely as many traditional church buildings in the West will close over the next two decades.[21] (Such closures will have been hastened by COVID in some cases, although the writing was probably already on the wall.) There are some churches/denominations who will judge harshly, perhaps with an air of superiority, the theology and spirituality of those churches that close. Again, closure itself is perceived as *a failure* in their assumed church growth outlook. I suggest that this attitude is not only ungracious, but that reality is far more complex—as illustrated by the above missionary example.

Some may disagree, saying that the church's demise in the West is *not* due to persecution. That's true of course. It is, however, still due to *external* cultural changes, and in that sense the two situations can be compared. In the case of Boko Haram's oppression, that happened *suddenly*. People had to flee up into the hills—the Mandara Mountain range, or try to escape to safer regions, such as southern Nigeria. In contrast, the external influences on western churches have been *slow* and *insidious*. The church growth model I mentioned above is one such example; it has infected the church without it realizing it. The church in the West has, over many decades, uncritically absorbed many of our culture's attitudes.[22] In one sense this is only to be expected, and those attitudes are not necessarily wrong or unhelpful. The Christian faith has been assimilated into our world's many and changing cultures from the first century onwards. Indeed, Christianity—initially a small Jewish sect and then a minority religion—adapted and survived because of that process. It is the *uncritical* element that is key here, and to recognize that fact requires serious reflection, with the hope of a resultant Spirit-led reformation.

The above two situations remind me of a well-known, if somewhat grotesque, analogy of a frog being placed into a jar of water. If the water is hot, the frog will recognize it as such and immediately jump out of the jar—and survive. If, however, the water is tepid, the frog will be content and remain in the jar. If the water is then slowly heated up, the frog will eventually die as, being cold-blooded, it does not realize that the temperature is increasing. In both scenarios, the external environment is involved.

Furthermore, many evangelical Christians would likely ascribe the church's demise in both northeastern Nigeria and in the West as due to "spiritual warfare." This dualistic outlook, also present in the New Testament, can be linked with the "God as Chess master" metaphor, where the opponent is deemed to be Satan. Be that as it may, this demise can also be regarded as a consequence of the poor choices *by humans*, what *we* decided to do—or not to do—whether consciously or unconsciously. Those decisions were obviously influenced by our upbringing, education, life-events, societal values, etc.[23] The present so-called "culture wars" in America, with its resultant polarization and tension in so many parts of public life, illustrates the impact of insidiously absorbed values. "Evangelicals," for example, may want to point

[21] That is certainly the expectation within Canada: for example, see Michael Wood Daly, *God Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (Cascade, 2023).
[22] See, for example, Os Guiness, *The Gravedigger File: Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church* (IVP, 1983.)
[23] I suggest it is the decisions knowingly or deliberately made that correlate with freewill that are the most troubling.

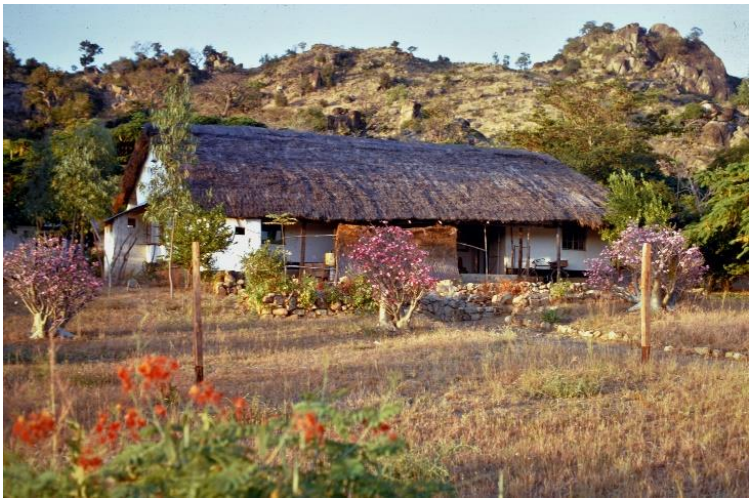
the finger at "liberals,"[24] but what is surprising is that the supposed moral high ground of the Christian right has really become a quest for power—or an endeavor to cling on to existing power—by any means possible, ethics be damned.[25] Ironically, this stance is hardly in keeping with the good news message of Jesus they claim to proclaim. What has happened to "love your enemies"? To "welcoming the stranger among you"? And to the "striving for unity within inevitable diversity" that Paul sought to maintain in the life of the early church? When the Western church uncritically absorbs cultural values, such as racism, non-white xenophobia, capitalism, consumerism, and nationalism, then we have lost our way and need urgent reform. Numerically small churches may be doomed to close, but that does not necessarily mean large churches are inevitably "in the right" or "blessed by God." That's another cultural lie that we have uncritically assumed.

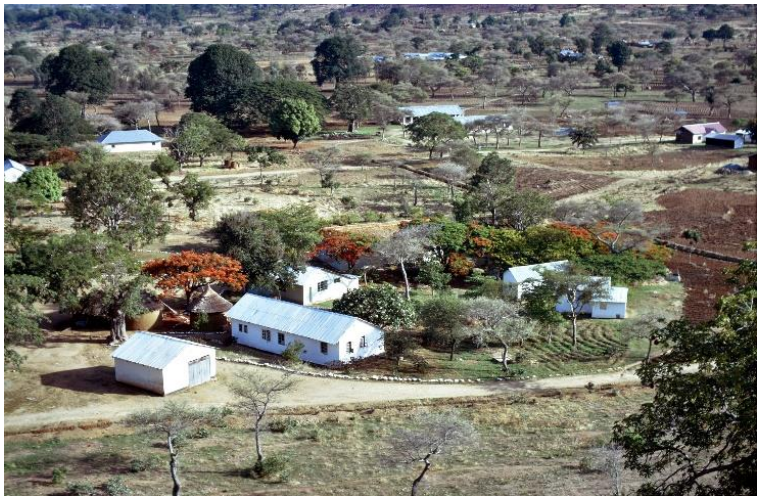
In winding up these present musings, let me first say that the closing of church *buildings* does not *necessarily* mean the end of Kingdom of God activity in a particular location. Perhaps the building (or land) is being sold so that the money can be used for new creative ministries. As is often said: The church is *not* the building—it's the people. Second, perhaps we should all re-read and reflect upon the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. There may be prophetic warnings for us to reconsider as, after all, the long-term survival of our own particular congregation (or denomination) is not inevitable. While some congregations have lost their first love for Jesus—or are no longer salt and light as Matthew[26] puts it—and so are slowly dying, in other cases it is failures of church leadership—of scandal, personality clashes, greed, and ego that causes a church to split or collapse. Both scenarios are due to cultural influences that have been uncritically absorbed into the life of a church, whether conservative or liberal. In conclusion, I repeat what I mentioned earlier: The matter of *legacy* is really the wrong issue or asking the wrong question. Instead, I suggest it's better to focus on *being faithful* to the cause of Christ—with the ongoing help of the Holy Spirit—and to continue *trusting* in God's good character and in his merciful providence.

[24] I am fully aware that these over-used labels are dangerous, usually pejorative, and often ill-defined. They are usually employed as a catch-all description and with little appreciation of nuance.
[25] The dangerous combination of religion, politics, and the thirst for power is not solely a feature of Islamic Boko Haram but of Christian groups in the West, especially within the USA.
[26] Matt 5:13–16.

Part 2: Kabwir Days

Having been in northeastern Nigeria for over four years, in 1974 my parents were posted to Kabwir, southeast of the Jos plateau, which is in the center of the country. The township resides in a hilly region and is relatively temperate, given its altitude of 2500ft. It's halfway (about ten miles) from Pankshin at 4000ft, which essentially defines the edge of the plateau in that region, and Amper at 1500 ft. While the mission station at Kabwir has a long history, being established in 1910[27], its importance at that time was its Regional Bible School[28], which was started in 1964. Pastors who were trained at local Bible schools, such as the one in Limankara, could train at a more advanced level at Kabwir. Furthermore, the wives of pastors could also be educated since—as a team—they could better serve as leaders in their local communities.[29] It was quite a financial undertaking for a pastor and his family to study at Kabwir and, if they had travelled far to be there, it involved some cultural adaptation too. My father became the principal and, with other male colleagues, taught the pastors in Hausa; my mother and other female staff taught the pastor's wives. My dad also oversaw the school's ongoing building program, which included two new teaching blocks, each containing several classrooms, and new accommodation units for the pastors.



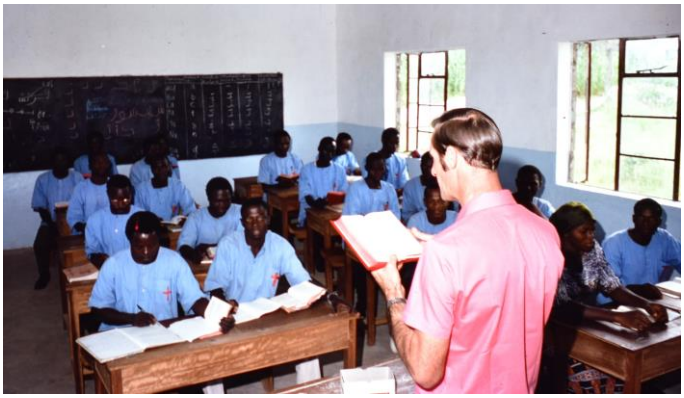


***Top:** Our house. **Bottom:** The missionary compound in the foreground with the Bible School buildings in the background.*

[27] By the Cambridge University Mission Party (CUMP), affiliated with the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The running of the mission station was transferred to the SUM in 1930.

[28] The Regional Bible School was (in the 1970s) as far as a pastor could train *in Hausa*, due to the lack of scholarly Christian books in that language. Further studies were therefore undertaken in English at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN) in Bukuru; see: https://tcnn.edu.ng/ .

[29] Culturally (at that time), the pastors' wives would minister to other women and children, and the pastors to other men. In addition to Bible knowledge, the wives were taught basic health care and other useful practical topics.



The house we lived in was the oldest on the mission compound. It was made of mud bricks with its walls rendered with mud inside and outside and then whitewashed. The aging galvanized tin roof was leaky and, rather than replace it, had thatch laid over it. The added advantage of the thatch was that it kept the interior of the house cool, aided by the house's high ceilings and many windows that enabled a through draught on a breezy day. While a thatched-roof house looks quaint—even idyllic, remember there was no electricity or running water, so things were pretty basic.

As in the rest of tropical Africa, there are only two seasons: the wet and the dry, and the rains transform the landscape from a boring brown to a lush green. Sensing when the rains are coming is important in the timing of seed planting. And the duration and dependability of the rainy season is vital for a good harvest, especially for subsistence farmers—which many people were back then and given there were no significant mechanisms for irrigation in Kabwir. In that sense, everyone was—and is—in tune with nature's cycles, and sensitive to its fluctuations and longer-term changes; missionaries were no exception. The rain also clears the air, literally, in that during the height of the dry season, dust and sand particles (blown in from the Sahara—the "harmattan") stay suspended in the atmosphere. The amount of haze varies daily and besides generally obscuring the view, it can seriously affect those with breathing difficulties and even suppress tree growth. Having just two seasons seems very strange to those who are used to four, but it quickly becomes the new normal.[30]

[30] And being relatively close to the equator means much smaller seasonal variations in daylight hours (and the timing of sunrise/sunset).

My parents were allotted a small plot of land not far from the house to plant seeds for their own needs. It was important to utilize it well and as part of being a good role model, *sons* were expected (i.e., "required") to do their share in maintaining it. Near planting time, my father would arrange for ox and plow to till the land. And depending on the timing of the onset of the rains and my school vacations, I would plant corn seed (each with two pellets of fertilizer[31]) and/or weed near the bases of the seedlings to give them a fighting chance of reaching maturity. From my perspective, the plot of land seemed the size of a soccer field. I used a homemade Nigerian hand hoe—and had to be mindful of scorpions lingering in the soil. It was back-breaking work. . . .

Each year we would save what looked like plump ears of corn, the best of the harvest, to use as seed for the following year. The local corn was hard, pale, and—frankly—tasteless. But when in season, we ate corn on the cob everyday. The excess harvest was ground up and put in sacks to feed the chickens; some sacks were given to the students. Somehow, we acquired seed for American sweetcorn and so one year we planted it—and it thrived. We now willingly ate delicious, bright yellow sweetcorn, and again saved the best for next year's seed. Over time, more and more rows of sweetcorn were planted, and I could literally taste the benefit of my labor. These memories come to mind whenever I read the farming parables of Jesus, those of the sower and the weeds.[32]

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About fifteen feet outside the back door of our house was a well which supplied all our domestic needs.[33] One day my mom said to me, "We've run out of water; will you draw up a bucket of water from the well, please?" This was an enjoyable task and I was happy to oblige, not least because my dad was away. There was no pully system, you simply lowered, hand-over-hand, a bucket attached to the rope to the bottom of the well. Often when the empty bucket reached the bottom, sometimes it simply floated. What you had to do was jerk the rope from side to side so that the bucket would tip over and fill up with water. Once the bucket was full, I then began to pull it up, hand-over-hand, from the bottom, careful not to let it hit the sides of the well too often, otherwise lots of water would spill out.

After a while, I decided to have a rest and I looked over the rim of the well opening to see how far I'd pulled up the bucket, and how much further there was to go. As I looked down, I saw it was about

[31] And clearing the soil of large stones.

[32] See: Matt 13:1–23, Mark 4:1–20, Luke 8:4–15, and Matt 13:24–30, 36–43.

[33] Water was stored in large clay pots near the kitchen door, and in a 44-gallon steel drum raised on a concrete pedestal to gravity feed the bathroom, which housed a shallow concrete bathtub and a sink. Water was premium, not just because it was a precious commodity in itself, but because all the water was drawn by hand from the well. (All the wastewater was used to irrigate a small garden of luxury items, like tomatoes, cucumbers, etc.)

halfway up, but to my surprise and horror I also saw a snake! It had somehow got stuck in the well and then caught up in my bucket. In a bid for freedom it began to slither up the rope towards me. I panicked and instinctively let go of the rope. The bucket, rope, and snake all fell to the bottom of the well.

My mom came out of the house in response to my shouts. While she understood why I had let go, she was also annoyed because I'd lost the rope and bucket, so how were we to get water now? News soon got around the village about our problem. A courageous man—probably a well-digger—came and said he would climb down to the bottom of the well and retrieve the bucket and rope. He placed his feet on the far wall of the well, and his shoulders and hands on the near side, and slowly and shuffled down the sides of the well towards the bottom, *without* a safety rope.

Near the bottom he stopped and made sure he was wedged tight. Other local men at the top of the well let down a long string which the man tied to the end of the rope. (Clearly, they knew what they were doing.) The people at the top could then pull on the string until the rope was once again in their hands. This stranger rescued our bucket. He braved the dark pit of a well, with a snake at the bottom of it, so that we could have water. Amazing. Afterwards, he slowly and safely shuffled back out again.

You may wonder: "What happened to the snake?" The men drew bucket after bucket of water, filling up many pots (and draining the well) until the snake was again caught up in the bucket. Then they very quickly and deftly brought the snake and bucket up to the surface, where they promptly killed it. Problem solved.

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Snakes, scorpions, and lizards are common, and you have to adapt accordingly. They also provide a good source material for stories. One evening at dusk, while we kids were at boarding school, my dad saw a cobra slither under the main door of our large chicken run. He feared for the chickens' lives, but he didn't want to enter the enclosure only to become trapped against the tall chicken wire, should the snake—sensing it was cornered—then turn to attack him. He shouted for help and my mom came running with a flashlight. Most of the chickens had already entered the hen house to roost for the night through a one-foot square doorway. My parents were horrified when the snake slithered through the same door. They expected to hear screeching and a commotion, but there was only silence. With my mom holding the flashlight on the doorway, my father quickly entered the chicken enclosure and ran and shut and secured the small door—there could be no escape from that exit.

The hen house was attached to an outbuilding that served as our rudimentary kitchen and contained a old wood stove. Inside was also a four-foot by two-foot door into the hen house, which was used during the day so we could check for eggs. My dad, with an axe in one hand and a flashlight in the other, entered the outbuilding. He then told my mother to safely enter the chicken run and repeatedly thump on the closed small door, so as to drive the snake toward the large door opposite where he was waiting.

My dad, in turn, opened that door a crack—axe at the ready. It wasn't long before just the head of the cobra emerged, at which point my dad slammed the door shut, wedging it with his foot, firmly trapping the snake between the door and its jamb. He then promptly chopped its head off while listening to the thrashing of the snake's long tail against the other side of the door. Once the serpent's nervous energy subsided and the noise stopped, he opened the door and put the tail into a bucket in the kitchen and locked everything up for the night.

(Notice the covered well in the near background)

A Bonnybridge Dover Columbian wood stove no. 8.

Early the following morning, he unlocked the kitchen, followed by the large hen house door, and went in to ascertain the damage. He had expected to find carnage, with many dead chickens, but to his amazement, *all* of them had survived the drama and were simply keen to get outside and get on with their day. Having taken the required evidentiary photograph, the snake was chopped up into little pieces and fed to the chickens, who squawked in delight over their luxurious, once-in-a-lifetime meal.

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Behind our house was a series of rock-strewn hills that we would often explore by following one of many faint trails. The boulders themselves were of all shapes and sizes, and were separated by soil, grasses, bushes, and the occasional small tree. We particularly enjoyed climbing to the top of large rock formations to get a better view of the valley.

During one school vacation, my friend Derek came to stay with us for two weeks.[34] Searching for something special to do, I asked my parents if he and I could camp out overnight in the hills. (We were all vaguely aware that wild animals lived up there, though they usually hid during the day so you couldn't see them. Indeed, we had been told that about forty years earlier, there were even leopards, that is until hunters scared them all away.) Derek and I were about seventeen years old at the time and so my request seemed safe to them. They gave us permission: it would be an adventure. So the next afternoon, around four o'clock, my dad, Derek, and I climbed up the hill and about 45 minutes later found a level area with a spectacular view and there we set up camp. There were no tents, just camp beds and sleeping bags because rain was not expected. We also brought some wood with us for a fire and a bit of food for dinner and breakfast, along with plenty of drinking water. Once my father knew where we were camped, he returned home.

[34] We were close friends with the Shores, a SUM family from New Zealand, not least because their children were of a similar age to us, and us kids all attended Hillcrest School in Jos and lived in the same hostel, Rock Haven. (See Part 3.)

We made a small campfire, surrounding it by rocks to contain it,[35] and we lit it as the sun was setting.

As it grew darker, the only light we had was from the fire. (Yes, we had brought flashlights too, but we didn't want to waste the batteries.) On a clear African night, you could see countless stars along with the Milky Way galaxy because there was no light pollution.[36] We ate some food, recounted memories, shared stories, and generally admired the view. Then we looked behind us and to our great surprise, we noticed we weren't alone. We were being watched by numerous pairs of eyes of various sizes and separations, illuminated by the firelight. It was too dark to actually see what kinds of animals they were, but it was certainly unnerving.

On reflection, I suppose we instinctively knew that they would not belong to large animals, like leopards, hyenas, gorillas, or baboons, because we would never have been allowed to explore the hills in daylight, let alone camp out at night. Even so, they likely belonged to monkeys of various kinds, smaller wild cats, owls, etc.

We figured that no animal would come closer because they were afraid of fire. Consequently, we had to keep the fire going, and that meant searching for nearby dry twigs and dead tree branches to burn. We didn't really sleep much that night . . . .

We heard later that our house boy, Jan, was *horrified* to hear we were sleeping in the hills. He told my parents, "We'd never let our children do that, it's far too dangerous." But by then it was night, and any rescue party would have to wait until the next day. My parents didn't sleep much that night either, worrying about us.

Early the following morning, as soon as the sun had risen, my dad, Jan, and another man came to find us to see if we were alright. Of course we were and, with a little bravado, we told them of our adventure. In the end everything was fine; but we were never allowed to do that again.

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In addition to entertaining visitors during our school vacations, we undertook road trips ourselves, often to see other missionaries. My sister, Ruth, had a German school friend whose parents were part of the Lutheran branch of the Sudan United Mission (SUM), and who were stationed much further south. We knew that the journey involved a ferry crossing of the River Benue, one of the two major waterways in Nigeria—the other being the mighty River Niger. We didn't really know what to expect though, as we had never travelled in that direction before, but we knew that it would involve patiently waiting in a

[35] We cleared the ground around out campsite of its dry combustible grasses and twigs to avoid a fire hazard.
[36] This is most vivid in the rainy season after a storm has cleaned the air of its dust particles, much less so during the dry season.

line-up for our turn to cross.[37] We also knew the river contained crocodiles. . . .

The ferry was operated by two deafening diesel-powered propellers, whose direction was manoeuvrable and so able to steer it. You don't have any choice but to put your life in the ferry master's hands, but it was very disconcerting to pass by the sunken wreck of another ferry as we neared the other side of the river. As you drive off the ferry, you breathe a sigh of relief and then hit the road as fast as you dare to make up for lost time.

What we hadn't appreciated was that there was *another* river to cross before reaching our destination. This one was smaller, but still disturbing as this ferry was poled across the river by three or four men.

We were car number four in the line-up, and we were told the ferry could only take three. To make matters worse, the sun was setting so there would be only one more crossing that day. My dad was prepared to pay the owner extra for an additional crossing, but he firmly refused: it was too dangerous to traverse the river at night—he therefore wouldn't risk his livelihood for anyone.

[37] This would be a hot wait since our vehicle didn't have air conditioning, and we needed to conserve precious fuel too.

The ferry arrived at the landing point and the vehicles disembarked. We sat in our car, engine running, ready to move forward in the line-up, and still wondering how we could resolve our predicament. To everyone's surprise, the car in front just wouldn't start! So we overtook the stationary vehicle, whose hood was now up and with two men frantically trying to fix the engine, and we took the final spot on the last ferry of the day.[38] When we later arrived at our hosts', they said they never attempted the two ferry crossings in one day—it was just too unpredictable. Having crossed one river, they would stay overnight at another mission station before journeying on.

One of the things I remember most about this trip was that Ruth's friend's dad smoked a pipe. This just didn't compute for my father because, as a good Pentecostal, he maintained a strict stance of no smoking, drinking, dancing, swearing, movies, etc. This was an encounter he never expected: a fellow missionary smoking a pipe in the privacy of his own home. This raised numerous theological questions for my dad and so he proceeded to grill this Lutheran. Much later, in the car ride home, my dad blurted out to my mom: "There's no doubt about it Glenda, the man's *saved*!" Sitting silently as I was in the back of the car with my two sisters, this pronouncement amused me because why would his salvation be in doubt. He was a missionary living in the uncomfortable, humid, rainforest region of southern Nigeria—and, in my mind, that took some dedication. Was *smoking* really the "unforgiveable sin"[39]? Is it even a sin? I mean, after all, C.S. Lewis smoked a pipe!

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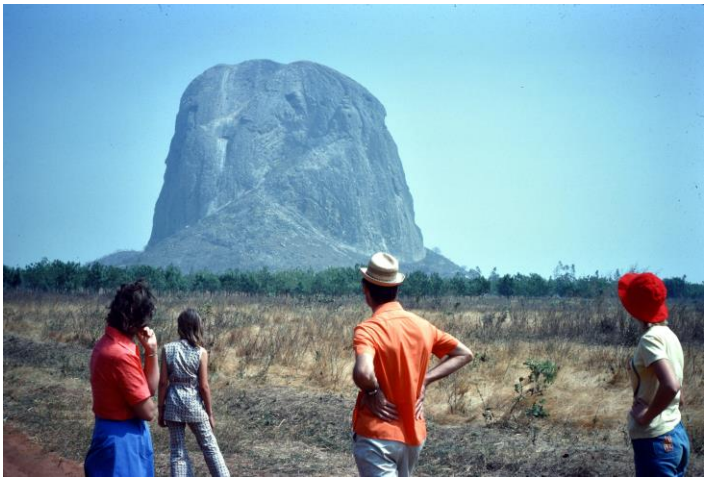

On another occasion we visited Wase (pronounced "*Wassey*"), famed for its distinctive isolated rock—a volcanic plug—that is nearly 1000 feet tall and can be seen from up to 25 miles away. The place has added meaning for the Sudan United Mission because the first mission station in Nigeria was established near the rock's base in 1904. Wase had another advantage as a location: missionaries were less likely to catch debilitating—even deadly—diseases

[38]This might seem most uncharitable, but if we didn't overtake the car in front, someone *behind* us would then take the last spot.

[39] See Matt 12:31–32, Mark 3:28–29, and Luke 12:10 for mention of the unforgiveable sin "against the Holy Spirit."

that were more prevalent in the jungle-like habitation of coastal Nigeria.[40]

Visiting the site of the SUM mission station at Wase.

A little history is perhaps in order: The SUM itself began in 1904 by Dr Karl Kumm (1875-1930), who had a love for north Africa and some knowledge of Arabic and Hausa.[41] His passion was to evangelize the Muslims in the "Sudan" (or "Soudan"), a broad sub-Saharan region that covered a large portion of West Africa. (Roughly speaking, this is called the "Sahel" today.) On 10th August 1904, four missionaries, John Burt, J. Lowry Maxwell, Dr Ambrose Bateman, and Dr Karl Kumm, arrived in Burutu, a port in Nigeria's Niger delta.[42] They then travelled by steamer up the river to Lokoja, where the Niger and Benue rivers meet and, significantly, was the headquarters for the Royal Niger Company. Kumm wanted to begin work in Bauchi, northeast of Jos, but was persuaded by Sir Frederick Lugard, the British High Commissioner for Northern Nigeria,[43] to start at Wase. That involved another steam ship trip up the River Benue, for about 225 miles, to Ibi—another trading post—and from there an overland trek of some 80 miles to Wase. On the way, John Burt developed malaria, and Bateman became seriously ill with appendicitis and had to return to Ibi—and then England. Maxwell and Burt eventually arrived at Wase nearly five weeks after leaving Ibi, and there they were reunited with Kumm who had gone ahead to set up a base camp. They then spent several months building mud brick homes and learning Hausa. Early in 1905, they started trekking to various other locations; Kumm even got as far as Bauchi. They also entertained visitors. In May 1905, Kumm returned to Europe (and later visited America) to gain further recruits, to fund raise, and, more generally, to spread his missionary vision for the region. In all three aspects he was successful. The mission station at Wase became redundant in 1909, since by then many new places (and opportunities) had been established.[44]

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[40] As the well-known couplet puts it: "Beware, beware, the Bight of Benin, for few come out, though many go in."

[41] See J. Lowry Maxwell, "*Half a Century of Grace: A Jubilee History of the Sudan United Mission*," (SUM, 1953); Mollie E. Tett, "*The Road to Freedom:* Sudan United Mission, 1904-1968," (SUM, 1969); Jan Harm Boer, *The Last of the Livingstones: H. Karl W. Kumm's Missiological Conception of Civilization*, (1973, revised 2014), http://socialtheology.com/docs/boer-paper-090073.pdf .

[42] See the 1914 map on page 36 of this document.

[43] The Government Headquarters were at Zungeru; Krumm made the two-week boat round trip on his own.

[44] The Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) has its Karl Kumm University near Vom (Plateau State), named in honor of SUM's founder; see: https://kku.edu.ng/about-kku/history-overview/ .

A little more history: October 1st, 1960, was a momentous day in Nigeria as that was when the country gained full independence from Britain. Not long afterwards the Biafran War occurred (July 6, 1967—January 13, 1970), which has been characterized as "a political-ethnic armed conflict caused by the attempted secession of the provinces of the southeast of Nigeria, mostly populated by Igbo people."[45] Different ethnicities, aspirations, and inequalities within Nigeria, along with the discovery of oil in southeast, fueled simmering, pre-existing tensions. In January 1966, a military coup ousted the civilian government following what was deemed a fraudulent election. In July there followed a countercoup by northern army units. Within a year there was civil war led by two military leaders, Lieut. Colonels Gowan and Ojukwu, who, respectively, lead the forces between Nigeria and the self-declared Republic of Biafra. Eventually Gowan won and sought to reunite the country through his famous "no victor, no vanquished" speech. This was followed up with an amnesty for the majority of those who had participated in the Biafran uprising, and a noble but incomplete program of reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation. (This was remarkable for the time—and long before Nelson Mandela.) He formed a fairly stable military government for five years, until he was forced to flee the country in July 1975 after being overthrown by another military leader in a bloodless coup.

One vacation we travelled to the southeast coast of Nigeria, the region of the Biafran civil war. On the way we visited an Assemblies of God Bible College in Old Umuahia, roughly halfway between Enugu and Port Harcourt, and I recall seeing bullet holes—poignantly—in the cross, made of decorative glass bricks, on one of the buildings—a permanent physical scar of that terrible civil war. We also visited Ojukwu's bunker in Umuahia, his bolt hole in a time of crisis. Although we came to Nigeria in 1969, because we lived in the north of the country, we were shielded from the horrors of the war by distance. But we heard stories. . . .

Inside Ojukwu's bunker

Road trip memories.

[45] See: https://www.cipdh.gob.ar/memorias-situadas/en/lugar-de-memoria/biafran-war-memories/ .

Reflections

A. Moving Goalposts: A Changing Cultural Climate

It goes without saying that the world changed dramatically between 1904 and 1977, which was the formal duration of SUM's missionary activities in Nigeria, after which it passed the baton, as it were, to COCIN.[46] We must also acknowledge that the Western church itself, the source of missionaries, changed significantly during that time period too. The outlook of SUM's pioneering missionaries mirrored the social optimism and confidence—even certainty—of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Kumm therefore saw himself as bringing spiritual light into the darkness of the "Sudan."[47] Like the rest of Europe, he was *enlightened.* Furthermore, he had a passion to *Christianize* northern Nigeria which, from the perspective of his day, also implied bringing civilization, progress, liberty,[48] and knowledge,[49] in addition to spreading the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. This was a paternal attitude, to put it politely.

Enlightenment optimism collapsed, at least in Europe, with the first World War and all its horrors. It was, in a sense, a war that ostensibly had Christians killing Christians, even if it was under the guise of various nationalistic flags.[50] In light of that calamitous event, the seeds of self doubt were germinating within modernism's intelligentsia. And also within the church, for how could Europe's sending church now have the moral authority it assumed it had, or more generally, the right to see itself as contributing to bringing 'civilization' and 'progress' to the rest of the world?

Lamentably, within a generation the world was at war again.

After WWII, western religious attitudes began to change, slowly at first, but gained pace during the 1960s for *Christendom* itself was ending.[51] A growing number of people no longer felt they needed church (or institutional Christianity). Consequently, fewer children were being baptized and church attendance began to drop. No longer could a nation's identity be *assumed* to be "Christian," hence the era of Christendom was over—even if its formal death came many decades later. European evangelicals were possibly the slowest to accept this cultural change.[52] Maybe that's because they tend to see

[46] COCIN: the "Church of Christ in Nigeria," later renamed "The Church of Christ in Nations."
[47] It is no accident that the name of the SUM periodical was "*The Lightbearer*," which ran from 1905-1991.
[48] Spiritual *and* physical liberty, the latter from trans-Saharan Islamic slave traders.
[49] Such as medicine and education; in the case of the latter *who* determines the syllabus . . . .
[50] Many Christians forget that, theologically speaking, the Kingdom of God does not recognize national boundaries.
[51] See: Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, Wipf and Stock, 2002.
[52] In the US the situation is slightly different. A prominent conservative wing of evangelicalism became, in effect, a political lobby group seeking power and influence through the Republican Party. It still believes the US *should be* a Christian nation, a theocracy, so to speak. The present "culture wars" should be appreciated in this religious context. From the perspective of the political elite, culture wars are a useful and distracting means to gain/maintain their power. From a Christian perspective, they are really conservative evangelism's *denial* of the nation's changing socio-religious attitudes that are, ultimately, linked to the same factors that led to the end of Christendom in Europe and Canada.

themselves as being separate from the world. Evangelicals also have an emphasis on saving *souls*; this priority is ultimately derived from the view that the spiritual is more important than the material, the eternal more than the temporal.[53] Moreover, that attitude results in a tendency to, for example, avoid direct involvement in politics, the arts, and to be anti-intellectual, because those activities are generally regarded as "worldly." Another reason for evangelicalism's denial was its persistent confidence in divine providence, that "God is in control," which is in-keeping with the Christian optimism—even triumphalism—of the early 1900s.

A different, but pertinent, example is that of Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998), who was a missionary to India from 1936-1974, eventually becoming the Bishop of Madras. On returning to Britain he recognized that his sending church had lost confidence in the gospel. So he spent the rest of his life working to influence and, where possible, to rectify that demise.[54]

The above is a personal, broad-brush painting of some the changes in the western church and aspects of its theology during the seven decades of the SUM—and beyond.[55] The point being that missionary attitudes *evolved*, at least to some extent, over that time period. So, in assessing the merits and shortcomings of missionary activities, we cannot assume a uniform or static picture, either theologically or culturally. Neither can we ignore the diverse personalities and skillsets of the missionaries themselves. For all the above reasons, while there is arguably a generic missionary spirit, the mindset of the SUM missionaries was inevitably different in the early 1900s from, say, that of post WWII or of post-1960, when Nigeria gained independence from Great Britain.

B. Christianity and Colonialism

It also goes without saying that, inevitably, there was a relationship between British colonial rule in Nigeria and the SUM (British branch). It was a complex relationship that also changed over time for all sorts of reasons. The voice of the Nigerian church itself, especially COCIN, needs to be heard on that matter. Moreover, with my limited experience as a missionary kid, it would be foolish of me to pontificate on such a sensitive, multifaceted, and complicated topic. In the context of these brief reflections, I lean heavily on Jan Boer's astute observations, both critical and complimentary, towards the SUM and—in particular—the British Branch. And for good reason, his PhD thesis (in 1979, from the Free University in Amsterdam) is remarkably well-researched and an important case study in the area of Christian mission in the context of British colonialism, and it focuses on the SUM in Nigeria.[56] (Jan and Frances Boer were themselves missionaries in Nigeria with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC),

[53] This is also summarized in the line from an old gospel song: "This world is not my home; I'm just passin' through."

[54] Some of his important works are: *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship*, SPCK, 1995; *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, SPCK/Eerdmans/WCC, 1989; *Foolishness to the Greeks: Gospel and Western Culture*, Eerdmans/SPCK, 1986.

[55] This is certainly not unique to the SUM, which itself was a nondenominational and multinational Christian mission.

[56] See Jan Harm Boer, "*Missionary Messengers of Liberation in a Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Sudan United Mission*," in Amsterdam Studies in Theology, Vol 1. (Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1979); Jan Harm Boer, *Missions: Heralds of Capitalism or*

closely affiliated with the SUM, from 1966-1996.[57])

According to Boer, the British were predominantly interested in West Africa *not* for political reasons, but rather as a *source* of raw materials and as a *market* for manufactured goods. Consequently, colonial government was established only to protect these *economic* interests when they were threatened.[58] The construction of roads and railroads was therefore primarily to further that priority. (We shouldn't be surprised by that attitude; after all, a country's embassies today exist throughout the world to promote and (try to) protect the nation's *own* interests, ones that are largely *commercial*.) In light of that historical reality, a secular definition of colonialism can be expressed in the following way:

> A country is a "colonial" country where the real dynamic is in *foreign* hands, nourished by *foreign* capital, directed by *foreign* personnel, inspired by a *foreign* spirit of enterprise, primarily directed towards *foreign* interests. A "colonial" country is therefore a country . . . of which people and land are, in the last instance, instruments and means for *foreign* purposes, and where *foreign* decisions determine the peoples' destiny.[59]

In contrast, Boer's detailed assessment of the SUM concludes with what he considers to be the mission's alternate *implicit* (i.e., never stated), yet enduring, definition:

> Colonialism is a form of imperialism based on a divine mandate and designed to bring liberation—spiritual, cultural, economic, and political—by sharing the blessings of the Christ-inspired civilization of the West with a people suffering under satanic forces of oppression, ignorance, and disease, effected by a combination of political, economic, and religious forces that cooperate under a regime seeking the benefit of both ruler and ruled.[60]

That's quite a bold statement! Its obvious theological assumptions (i.e., "divine mandate," "Christ-inspired," and "Satanic forces") underpins SUM's view of both colonialism *and* the "Sudan." I can appreciate that Kumm and the other pioneers likely held such a view for reasons outlined in the previous section. It also explains their paternal view as "light bearers." I am not convinced missionaries of the 1960s and 70s, including my parents, would whole-heartedly agree with that definition, but they could well be sympathetic towards elements of it. After all, missionaries who believe that God has

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Christ? (First edition: DayStar Press, 1984; revised edition, 2014, https://www.socialtheology.com/docs/boer-missions-book.pdf); Jan Harm Boer, *The Politico-colonial Context of Missions in Northern Nigeria*, (*Calvin Theological Journal,* 19, no. 2, Nov 1984: 167–191. https://www.socialtheology.com/docs/boer-paper-071583.pdf .
See also: https://www.socialtheology.com/index.html.

[57] See: Jan H Boer and Frances A Boer, *Every Inch a Missionary: A Nigeria Missionary Memoir 1966-1996*, Bookcraft, Ibadan, 2022.

[58] In Nigeria that threat came from: (a) cutthroat competition among foreign firms in Nigeria that was creating havoc and, (b) French and German interests encroaching upon Britain's sphere of interest that were supported by their governments. This forced the British government to provide similar protection. (Boer, *Politico-colonial Context of Missions,* p168.)

[59] His emphasis; Boer, *Missionary Messengers*, p. 49, citing H. Kraemer, *World Cultures and World Religions* (Lutterworth, 1960), p. 65. Boer also maintains that "in spite of certain efforts on the part of the colonial government after World War II to encourage Nigerian economic efforts, by the time of independence the economy was firmly in the hands of foreigners and the tradition of exporting raw materials and importing manufactured goods was still strong. Independence was in name only" (Boer, *Politico-colonial Context of Missions,* p170).

[60] Boer, *Missionary Messengers,* p. 218; Boer, *Politico-colonial Context of Missions,* p177.

"called" them for such service see themselves as fulfilling a divine mandate of sorts—and that's also consistent with having a paternal attitude[61] towards those they serve.

Because the above definition is based on theological *assumptions*, the key question is: Were the missionaries themselves *consciously aware* of them? I suspect most of them were *not*—hence Boer's mention of "implicit." Missionaries were people committed to a cause—the cause of Christ (as they saw it)—who were willing to serve in isolated places and under austere circumstances. I suggest those missionaries were generally well-intentioned people who came from diverse denominations and various countries, as well as from different socio-economic backgrounds. Yes, looking back many decades—especially to the post-WWII period, they should have been more self-critical of their own theological and cultural lenses in their ministries.[62] But dare I suggest that such a systematic and thoughtful introspection was probably beyond the intellectual capabilities[63] of many, who were most likely overwhelmed by the numerous apparent local needs and the challenges of their day-to-day existence. Now, that doesn't mean that past missionaries and their practices should be exempt from contemporary criticism, rather their context better understood and considered. Our own faults are often the hardest to see. Nevertheless, today's mission societies and churches urgently need to better appreciate these lessons and, where necessary, change accordingly.

As mentioned in the previous section, there was a general bias against being involved in politics. What other theological blind spots may also have been present? I suggest that many missionaries were theologically conservative, and that perspective was passed on to the Nigerian church—perhaps unconsciously, for the most part. Put differently, while the SUM was officially nondenominational, a missionary's *own* theological perspective inevitably introduced a personal bias into their ministry. Consider, for example, the present contentious matter of the LGBTQ^{+} community within the church. The Archbishop of Canterbury struggles to maintain unity in the worldwide Anglican communion, not least because of the large African contingent that is against full inclusion. I suspect that position is, at least in part, because of the way missionaries presented the notion of Biblical authority along with their general approach to Biblical interpretation. In addition, Boer identifies the negative missionary legacy of "dualism,"[64] meaning distinguishing between the spiritual and physical, resulting in—as mentioned before—a withdrawing from the world rather than being wholeheartedly engaged in it. Another aspect of this withdrawal is a lack of a systematic, critical assessment of colonialism, capitalism, multinational companies/monopolies, nationalism, racism, etc. In other words—and as mentioned above—the missionaries were not self-critical enough of their own cultural, political, educational, and theological lenses. Despite all the good that missionaries arguably did—and Kabwir Bible School still exists, Boer concludes that such weaknesses have not served the Nigerian church well in the longer-term. I would

[61] This paternal attitude is not unique to this situation. Theological polarization in the West can also result in one side feeling superior (or in the 'right') and so dismiss the deeply held views of another group. (See also Matt 7:1-3.)
[62] This must also include more recent Western heresies, such as the prosperity gospel and biblical inerrancy; missionaries need to be mindful not to import partisan Western controversies into their activities.
[63] This is *not* to say they were not well educated; not a few were medical doctors, linguists, engineers, teachers, etc.
[64] See Boer, *Missions: Heralds of Capitalism or Christ,* p196-205.

add that it doesn't serve *any* church well and damages its presentation of the gospel to the wider world.

C. Preliminary Reflections on Types of Government and Powers of Domination

The earlier reference to the Biafran war introduced an important aspect of the Nigerian political context during my time there—from 1969-76(8).[65] From my limited experience, the notion of a military government isn't necessarily a bad thing, so long as stability and national unity is maintained without undue oppression. The modern Western bias that tends to automatically regard democratically elected governments as "good" and any alternative as "bad" is too simplistic.[66] For one thing, it precludes the possibility of a benevolent dictator who may gain the broad respect of the people, and who may earnestly want to hand back power to civilian rule and is actively working towards that goal. In addition, Nigeria at that time was a young, multi-ethnic/lingual nation with bold hopes but one that had very limited experience of civilian self-governance. Indeed, post-colonial self-governance was a steep learning curve in many an African country, and the internal tensions that led to the Biafran War[67] were not unique to Nigeria. Frictions due to ethnicity, religion, language, disparities in regional wealth and opportunities (whether real or perceived) continue even now—fifty years on.[68] Rather than simply continue to blame colonialism—or even the influence of Christian missionaries—it might be better to blame capitalism, consumerism, multinational companies and monopolies, corruption, and a general thirst for power and control. Such things are *global* and *systemic*; everyone in the world is subject to—even complicit in—such powers of domination.[69] Having said that, there are peoples and nations that are more victims than victimizers, and the lingering effects of colonialism continue to extend a long, dark shadow in many parts of the world. In African terms, Nigeria was/is a rich country with its oil, minerals, and export crops. I leave it for others, especially Nigerians themselves, to assess if their country has been able to use its wealth wisely and fairly in the sixty years since independence.

SUM Headquarters and Guesthouse in Jos during the 1970s

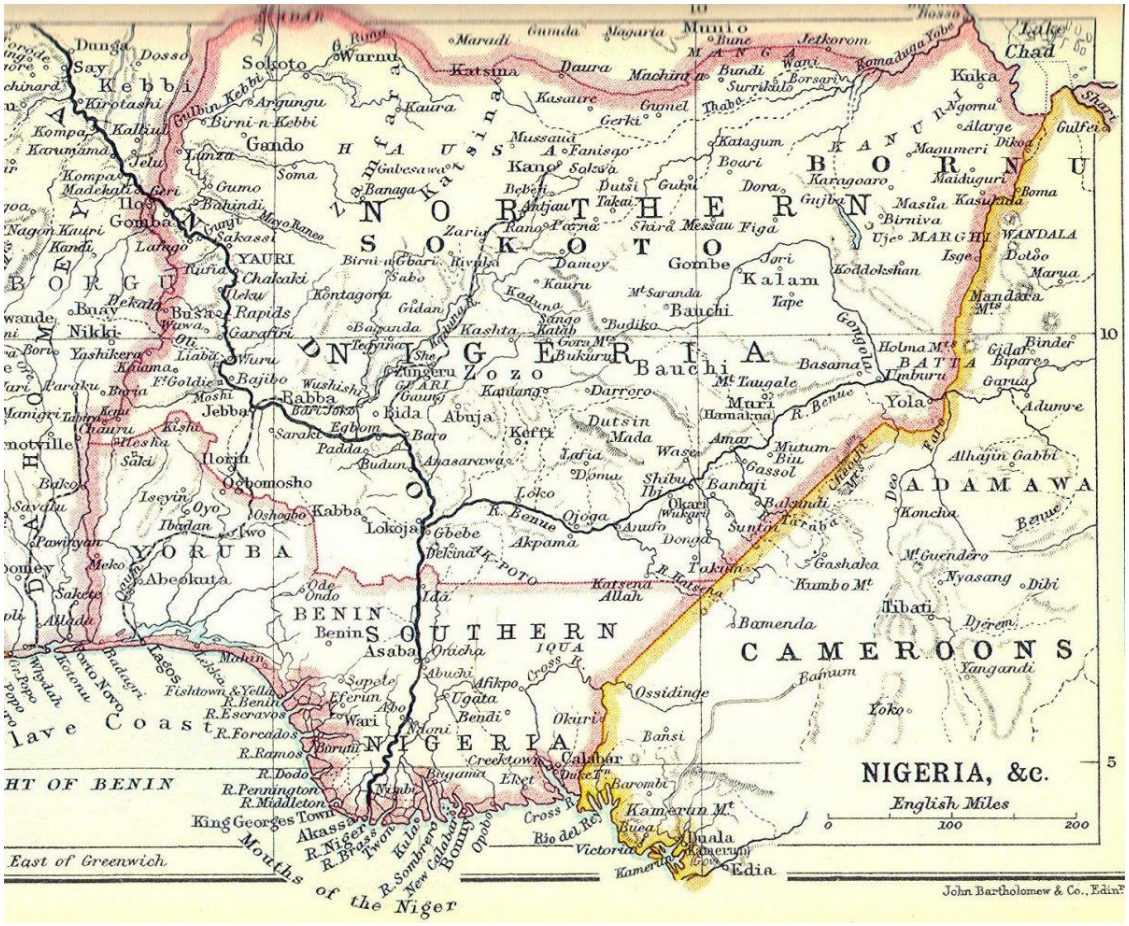
[65] I returned to the UK in 1976 to attend boarding school (for my A-levels). I visited my parents in Nigeria twice a year for two years, after which they also returned permanently to the UK.

[66] American democracy, for example, has in recent years revealed its own vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and even failings due to the influence of Trumpism.

[67] The war also resulted in a famine that killed up to two million people.

[68] One could add to that list the continued presence of *foreign* influence and interference of various kinds.

[69] To use theologian Walter Wink's language. (While *we* tend to blame our elected national leaders, politicians are not as in control of global events/markets as *we* might like to think they are—and *they* know it.)



Nigeria, 1914

Nigeria Today

Part 3: Hillcrest School, Jos

My first memory of Nigeria is of experiencing its blast-furnace heat as our family exited the Sabena Airlines plane in Kano, the major city of the north. My second memory is of a plague of large locusts that swarmed the airport building as we waited impatiently at the long line-up for immigration. Everyone seemed oblivious of the insects, as if they were an everyday occurrence—they weren't—so we bravely tried to ignore them. Someone said, "Don't let them land on you!" At which point, my anxiety level went several notches higher as I wondered: "Why, do they bite?" Eventually we got our passports stamped, cleared customs with our luggage—always a nerve-racking affair at Nigerian airports in those days—and were greeted by missionaries who were expecting us strangers in a strange land.

My parents were initially sent to a large SUM school complex at Gindiri, about 50 miles from Jos on the plateau, where they were to undergo an intensive course to learn Hausa. It was also a time to acclimatize and adapt to the inevitable culture shock. Families were normally expected to face this experience together, but the academic term had already started. My sister Ruth and I were very naïve and *super*-excited to begin our boarding school adventure. So, within a couple of weeks, our parents' waved goodbye to us as we climbed onto the back of a wooden, open-topped truck, along with our belongings, and headed off to Hillcrest School in Jos.

A typical truck with a wood-framed rear section and a rural, hand-pumped, gas station.

My abiding memory of the next two weeks[70] was of me crying; I was terribly homesick and was absolutely miserable. It was not that my classmates were unkind, although I had no one to call a friend at that stage, it was just that I had never experienced anything like that before. It didn't help that term had already begun. I do remember that after the two weeks, my fifth-grade teacher came to see me as I sat blubbing on one of the school swings during recess. "You have to STOP this," she said sternly, "You're not the only person here to miss their parents—and you don't see *them* crying. You need to be a good example for your younger sister."[71] So, after a few more sniffles, I did turn the emotional

[70] I can't be sure of the duration.

[71] Ruth was in grade 2 and experiencing intense homesickness too.

corner—at least in public—and tried to stop feeling sorry for myself. She had been blunt and, in retrospect, quite right; but it seemed heartless to me at the time. I was nine.

In September 1969, my dorm/house parents wrote in their report to my parents: *"Timothy is settling down a little slowly, but we are sure he will soon adjust himself satisfactorily."* Since my house parents happened to be English, that comment should be interpreted as a typical British understatement. Nevertheless, I did settle down and began to enjoy life sharing a room (having two bunkbeds) with three other boys. I have fond memories of all my school friends and house parents. In May 1970 they wrote in their report: *"Your move to Gwoza*[72] *does not seem to have affected Timothy's happiness in the dorm at all."* And in June 1970: "*Throughout the school year Timothy has been an ideal boarder. . .*"

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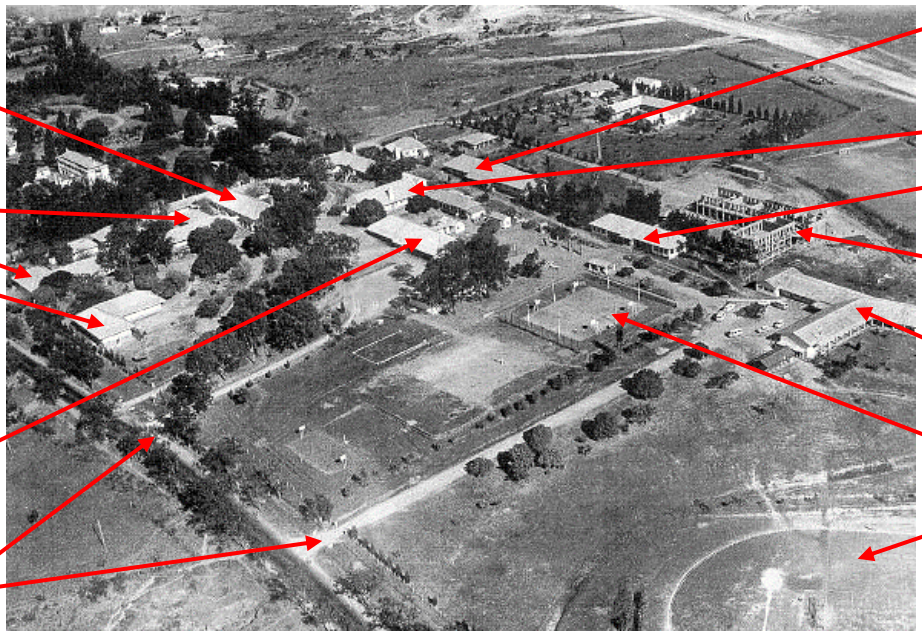


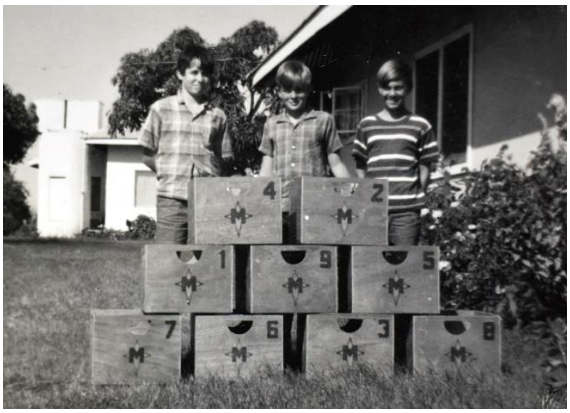
Aerial view of Hillcrest 1969/70 (Credit: Miss P. Wagner and SIM Roots[73])

Hillcrest School[74] was started by the Church of the Brethren Mission (CBM) in 1942 with 12 students; by 1952 there were 70. Other mission societies became interested; SUM joined in 1955 along with the Assemblies of God Mission and the United Missionary Society, and many others joined in the 1960s. It was the era of missionary *families*. By the time I arrived in 1969, there were four dorms on the school campus that housed grades 1-8,[75] named after pioneering missionaries: Studebaker (built in 1947), Livingstone (1957), Heckman (1961), and Maxwell (1961). I was in Maxwell Hall, named after SUM's J.

[72] Gwoza is about 450 miles from Jos. We would travel by road to Maiduguri (via Bauchi) and the following day on to Gwoza (via Bama). In other words, *much* farther than the 50 miles to Gindiri.
[73] See: https://www.simroots.org/Documents/SR22-2_2005fl_no.pdf .
[74] See: https://www.hillcrestschool.net .
[75] Although some mission societies kept all their children together in off-site "hostels," more on that later.

School Auditorium/Chapel (Built in 1954)

Maxwell Hall



Above: Showing off the new laundry boxes for Maxwell Hall, all numbered by our bedrooms.

Upper Left: Eating a snack lunch on a hike to the nearby hills and streams of Jos. (I remember hunting for quartz and amethysts in/near those streams; we often found some.)

Left: Trying out our taught scouting skills by lighting and cooking on a campfire.

Lowry Maxwell,[76] for boys in grades 4-8. (Part of the social adjustment was being segregated and having my sister Ruth in a different house.) This private, international, Christian school was run on North American lines, though it contained kids from other parts of the world (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, UK, and many parts of Europe and Asia.) After 1972, it also had a number of Nigerian students and day schoolers from the Jos area.[77] In those

[76] See J. Lowry Maxwell, *Half a Century of Grace: A Jubilee History of the Sudan United Mission*, (SUM, 1953).
[77] These were often children from the broader expatriate community, even government officials.

days there were about 300-350 students covering all twelve grades.[78]

For those of us students who lived on campus, our meals were prepared and served in a separate Dining Hall, (built in 1956). I recall that our dessert was a small bowl of mixed fruit: mango, paw-paw (or papaya), guava, and other tropical fruits. Some readers may be salivating at the thought of such readily available, fresh, exotic fare. It seemed to us that we had this dessert *every* day, so much so that it became to be known as "old faithful" or "365." It was not long before I hated it, especially the smell, texture, and taste of paw-paw. I tried to pass my dessert off to those sitting next to me who were willing to have a little more. This was soon spotted and stopped by vigilant staff; we *had* to eat it—I suppose it was part of having a balanced diet. Even now, I won't eat paw-paw or mangoes, though I do miss fresh guava with its distinctive pink flesh and smell. (People often asked me what I missed about England, and I would instantly reply: *apples*!)

As I recall, Sunday dessert was a real treat: homemade ice cream. The telltale sign was seeing one of the Nigerian cooks outside on a Saturday using a hand-cranked ice crusher. I have no recollection on the quality of the ice cream, but it was a very welcome luxury.

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I would sometimes be teased about my English accent, and I became sensitive to other differences that singled me out—in particular, my short trousers. British shorts were both short in the leg and particularly baggy—almost indecently so, and with what I called "British-style pockets" (i.e., slit or slash-style) that enabled your coins and things to easily fall out when you sat down. (Even today, I hate such pockets with a passion.) I would *beg* my mom to seek alternative shorts, with jean-style pockets, from the local market or to cut the legs off old jeans that had worn out at the knees. I was also very touchy about my hair—after all, this was the 70s. In one letter home I wrote:

> "Something dreadful has happened; I've had my hair cut and it doesn't even go over my ears or touch my shirt collar. It looks absolutely awful—even my friends think that. So, do you think you can write a letter to Uncle X and Aunt Y[79] saying *not* to cut my hair because I want it to grow longer . . ."

Needless to say, I continued to get hair cuts. . . .

It wasn't long before I developed an American accent,[80] after all about 85% of the school was North American. This seemed inevitable and unconscious on my part, though a psychologist would no doubt think differently. When we went back to England after 2½ to 3 years (for 6 months), my accent would soften only to become stronger again on returning to Hillcrest. In truth, I was deemed neither American nor British by citizens of those countries—either by accent or mental outlook. Later, when I eventually

[78] For an excellent memoir see Ronald S. Cok, *Down Bush: A Boy's Life in Africa,* (2016).

[79] Our dorm parents were honorary 'uncles' and 'aunts'; teachers remained the formal titles of Mr or Miss/Mrs.

[80] This could best be described as a 'generic' accent, i.e., not a regional one, such as from the deep south or Texas. Even so, my accent wasn't completely American and my British intonation and terms came through—and prompted further teasing.

returned to England at 17 (to attend a British boarding school for my A-levels), I managed to retain my accent for well over a year. I felt that it was part of my identity. It also seemed to appeal to the girls—more on that topic in a moment. Much later in 1987, my wife Anne and I moved to Vancouver, BC, where I was a post-doctoral researcher at UBC. To my surprise, my childhood North American accent returned quickly and I felt more culturally at home. On returning to the UK in 1988, I kept my newly found accent, though it naturally weakened with time. Since 2002 I have lived in Canada. My family in Canada think I speak *more* "British" on the phone to the UK than my 'normal' accent; my UK friends and family hear a more North American voice. Canadians, on hearing me speak, simply regard me as an immigrant from the UK. Again, I appear to be in no-man's land. (I will return to this topic later.)

Sometimes the desire to "fit in" can get you into trouble. In May 1971, 11¾ years old, I wrote home:

> "Uncle X will write to you concerning this, but I want to tell you now. I bought some cigarettes and was dumb enough to hide them on the school compound. A little kid found them and either somebody told him or he was suspicious that it was us. We didn't know whether he knew or not, but we owned up anyway. Now we can't go to the canteen, no hikes without an adult present, no going out at weekends, and telling [Uncle X] when we get back from meals or asking him if we can go to school social events—like at the basketball courts. We were smoking because, you know, it is good to smoke once in a while with your friends . . . ."

Clearly, I was "grounded." What I can't remember was if I received an additional punishment when I next saw my parents, but it wouldn't surprise me if my dad spanked me. In the next school report home, Uncle X wrote: "*Timothy must be careful to beware of being misled by older boys*."

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From grade 7 onwards I became aware of girls, though I am not sure I was on many of *their* radars. In those days, dating was tame. You simply sat together at a highly chaperoned event, such as the annual school play, or a movie in the school auditorium or outside projected onto the white end wall of the new junior high building. If you were able to secure a *second* date then there was some hope; if not, you had been politely rejected—an experience I knew well, as I recall, though I never gave up. During high school, I once wrote home:[81]

> "Don't come up this weekend *please*. You see there is meant to be a movie night and I have a date. If you have to come to Jos, please don't upset things like you did last time. X took it well, but Y might not take it too good. Y is a short girl with long brown hair. She is fairly quiet, cute, and . . . a good Christian too. Please try to obey my proposition, she means a lot to me. If you don't, and if you do come up, I will purposefully ignore you!"

Despite my optimism, I believe this was one of those one-date-only occasions. Nevertheless, I did have some steady girlfriends and, having no brothers and two younger sisters, I was generally comfortable in the company of girls.

[81] I am guessing this was during grade 10.

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One of the school hostels, Elm House,[82] had a swimming pool. The whole school loved coming to this place. In October 1974, during my grade 9 year, I was so proud to pass the rigorous theory and practical exams and become a lifeguard. I recall having to rescue some formidable grade 12 guys as part of the final test. The school's lifeguards had a weekend rota, and we took turns to watch over the pool from the top of the diving board.

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The region around Jos was famous for its tin mines, but this boom industry that began in the early 1900s had lost much of its shine by the late 1960s.[83] There were—and still are—numerous abandoned open cast mine pits, slag heaps, rusting industrial equipment, and thousands of mining ponds containing contaminated water. It is without doubt an environmental disaster, a serious health hazard, as well as a dreadful eyesore in a picturesque region of the country. For us at that time, it was just a place to visit and explore. We clambered over the rusting equipment as if they were climbing frames on a playground. I recall the earth being an iron-rich red and the water in the large mining ponds an unnatural turquoise-blue, presumably due to metal-based chemical compounds. We didn't appreciate its dangers.

[82] The hostel for the Evangelical Lutheran Mission.

[83] Tin put Jos on the map and caused railway lines to be linked to the city. One factor for the industry's eventual decline is thought to be the discovery of the oil in southern Nigerian during the mid-1950s—a more lucrative venture.

On one visit with my parents, a Nigerian boy was distressed because his goat had somehow fallen off a vertical cliff into a sizable mining pond. I volunteered to swim and rescue it, but by the time I reached the goat, it had drowned. I swam back to the entry ramp dragging it by a leg—I distinctly remember its lifeless eye staring at me—and we returned it to the lad. From an economic point of view, a goat was very valuable to his family and this loss was tragic. But at least he had the goat to back up the story he would later tell his father; no doubt the goat was cooked and eaten. It's only as I now reflect on this memory that I realize we had no idea how deep the pond was and gave no thought to its pollutants. With hindsight, it probably wasn't the wisest thing to have done.

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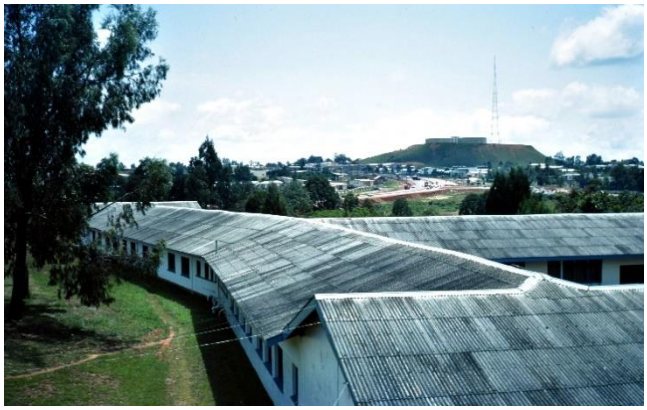
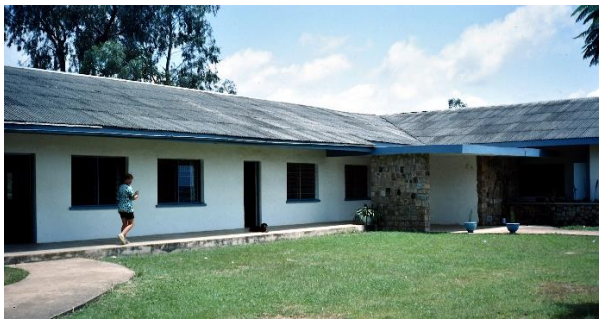
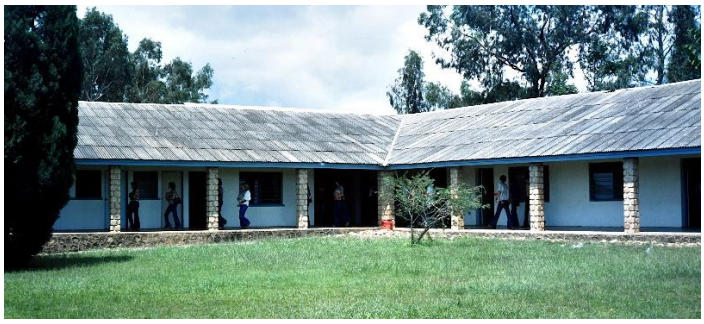


The new Junior High Building (above) and various photos of the High School building.

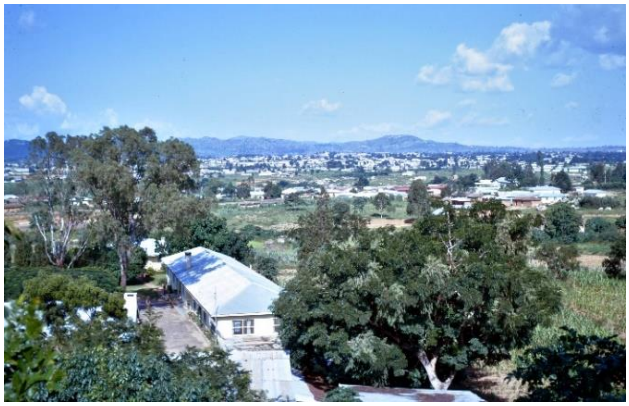




I participated in the* Spirit *singing group (below), led by Mr. Byron Trist, in my grade 9 and 10 years (1974/5).

At the end of grade eight, there was a choice to be made. The English education system was based on national Ordinary ('O') and Advanced ('A') level exams, taken when a student was typically 16 and 18, respectively. (Good A-level grades were imperative to attend university.) Hillcrest's North American-style education didn't naturally dovetail with the British GCE[84] system, so to make the academic transition less awkward, most children of British missionaries would return to the UK to attend a boarding school when they reached 13 or 14 years old.[85] In the 1973/4 academic year, there was a small cohort of 5 or 6 about to enter ninth grade, who were expecting to leave to start their studies for their chosen O-levels, including me. The school decided to offer a pilot O-level scheme for this group. I was very keen to stay at Hillcrest and was delighted to be part of this experiment.[86] (Having lived through junior-high, I was eager to experience high school.) But that meant I needed to move to an off-campus hostel.[87] Rock Haven, run by the United Missionary Society, was the perfect choice. It was a small hostel populated primarily by Canadians and it housed students from all twelve grades, so my two younger sisters could join me too. Although this meant making new friends, we were all fairly used to such changes by this time.

Rock Haven Dining/Study Hall



Rock Haven dorm building with Jos in the background

Dorm building

Dining/Study Hall and 2 VW minivans for commuting to school

[84] General Certificate of Education (GCE).

[85] The SUM would fly the children back to Nigeria to see their parents twice a year during UK school vacations.

[86] This was an enormous staff commitment for Hillcrest at the time, so I am forever grateful to those teachers and to the school's far-sighted administration. (Our syllabus/exams were through the West African Examinations Council, WAEC.) After completing my O-levels I did return to the UK and did my A-levels at a co-ed boarding school in Godalming, Surrey. My one frustration was leaving Hillcrest for the UK in the middle of grade 11 and so I never got to graduate with my class (1977).

[87] Maxwell Hall was for grades 4-8 only.

Rock Haven was appropriately named not only with connotations as a place for peace and rest within a Christian community, but because there was a mound of boulders that we could climb and explore, and which overlooked the compound and the city of Jos. This was our playground after school and on weekends, along with Rock Haven's aging tennis/basketball/volleyball court and a soccer pitch. That playing field was lined by a series of citrus fruit trees that kept us well supplied with grapefruit and oranges.

In grade 9 I was fascinated by having a radio and picking up various international radio stations, such as the BBC and Voice of America (VOA). I was also frustrated by the poor life of my batteries. So, being creative, I found an old 12V car battery and was able to use it to power the radio. It wasn't long, however, before it was banned from my room because traces of battery acid had inadvertently got on my bedspread and ate holes in it. I can still hear the telling off I received. It was wiser to just have a cassette player and it wasn't long before I was introduced to the music of Larry Norman…

Despite having regular showers, I recall that I (and others) had nasty boils from time to time. I remember having one on my elbow and, on another occasion, having one on my left facial cheek. The latter one was *so* public and *so* embarrassing. It also coincided with having my 10th grade school photograph taken. I had to turn my left cheek away from the camera, resulting in more of a side view of me rather than the normal full facial shot. I was also relieved the photos were in black and white. O vanity….

The long dorm building of Rock Haven housed the girls at one end and the boys at the other, separated by the house parents' domestic quarters and a few other rooms, including an office. The strict segregation of the two sexes' sleeping areas was thus rigorously maintained. To be fair, we were all pretty well-behaved kids and didn't try to push the boundaries—though our house parents may recall things differently! We did occasionally get up to some hijinks though. I recall that one afternoon,[88] we boys somehow climbed up into the attic from our end of the building and very quietly crept along the roof space towards the girls' end. I was the last boy in the train and I gave the game away by putting

[88] It was probably during the rest hour or siesta that we routinely had at the weekends.

my foot on an insecure timber, which then crashed through the ceiling into the office space below where there were adults present. There was shouting and a large commotion because the wood had narrowly missed hitting an adult. I, on the other hand, had to react quickly and grab on to the secure rafters else I would have gone through the ceiling too. The first face to sheepishly appear at the large hole was mine, and I was well and truly busted. UMS must have wondered whether it was worth having an SUM boy in their midst. Of course, *all* of us teenagers got in trouble, but there was much hilarity too at our daring and bravado. I suspect this kind of mischief was *nothing* in comparison to that by some members of the Boy's Baptist Hostel, which had a reputation for such things.

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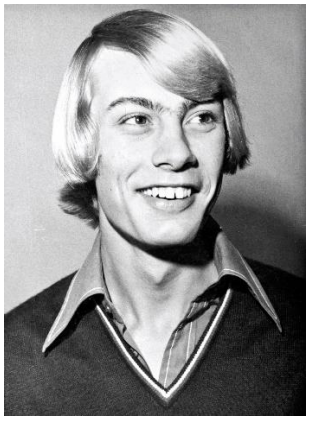
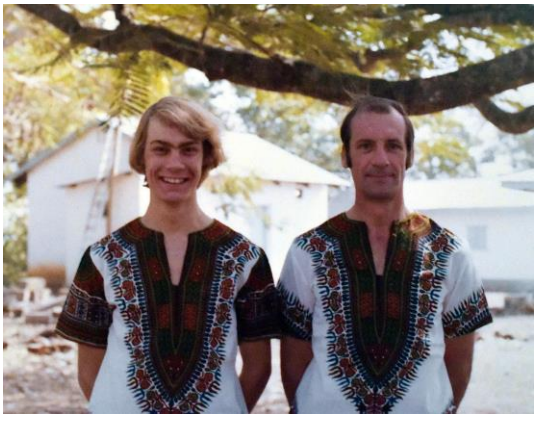
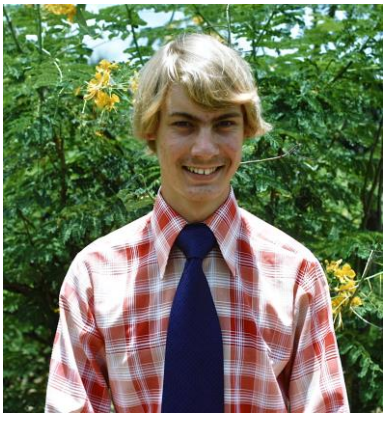
Hillcrest's 1974 Student Handbook gives some insight into some of the school's regulations:

- Boys are *not* allowed to come to school in messy T-shirts and faded or ragged jeans. Hair length at maximum is to be at the base of the neck when not wearing a collar and to the base of the collar when a collar is being worn.[89] Boys are allowed to wear or grow mustaches. Sideburns should be neat and *not* below the jawbone.[90]
- Girls may wear nice pants with matching tops. These tops come *below* the waistline so they don't have a tendency to pull up. They may wear jeans that are not faded or ragged. Tops that are worn with these jeans should be loose fitting—*no* tank tops—and should match. Dresses and skirts worn higher than six inches above the bend of the knee will *not* be accepted.[91]
- *No* bare feet allowed on the Hillcrest campus.
- Gum chewing is *not* allowed in the classroom except with the teacher's permission.
- There will be *no* smoking or drinking on the school compound or at any Hillcrest sponsored function.

The wording of some of these rules suggest lessons had been learned from trying to enforce the previous regulations.







[89] My recollection was that the previous version of these regulations only permitted a boy's (maximum) hair length to touch the *top* of the shirt collar.
[90] Clearly growing a beard is the prerogative of male staff members.
[91] My recollection was that the previous version of these regulations had *four* inches above the bend of the knee.

Reflections

Returning to England to attend a co-ed British boarding school in Surrey was a strange re-entry into what was meant to be my "home" country. You *expect* to experience culture shock when you go to *another* country, particularly one with a different language. But the widely held assumption is that on returning "home" you will instantly fit back in.[92] But I left England at 9 and returned for good at 17—and to a different part of the country. I was therefore experiencing a different *kind* of culture shock; I will say more about that later. Moreover, in my case, I had sun-bleached blond hair, an American accent, an unusual life-story, and some overly-bright clothes that were tame by African standards but inappropriate for England. The school quickly forbade me from wearing them. Unlike Hillcrest, I now had to wear a school uniform—a dull grey. And house parents where no longer referred to as "uncle" and "aunt," instead the House Master was addressed as "sir," and we had a "matron." It all seemed so regimented and constraining, a daily visible reminder of the pressure to conform to the expected behavior required by the school and, by extension, perhaps, UK society as a whole. Even so, it was still a *boarding* school, and I already knew how to adapt . . . and I wasn't entirely alone; there were others who were MKs too, even a few from the SUM who had left Nigeria at age 13.[93]

A little later, in 1979, Supertramp had a hit single, *The Logical Song*,[94] whose lyrics resonated strongly with my thoughts and feelings around that time:

When I was young, it seemed that life was so wonderful
A miracle, oh, it was beautiful, magical
And all the birds in the trees, well they'd be singing so happily
Oh, joyfully, oh, playfully watching me
But then they sent me away to teach me how to be sensible
Logical, oh, responsible, practical
Then they showed me a world where I could be so dependable
Oh, clinical, oh, intellectual, cynical

Chorus:

There are times when all the world's asleep
The questions run too deep
For such a simple man
Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned?
I know it sounds absurd
Please tell me who I am

[92] This overlooks the fact that people's lives have moved on since you left, and that some of your previous relationships may not be recoverable.

[93] My amazing guardians lived nearby too and would take me to their home for long weekends and half-terms. It really helped that they were former missionaries from Nigeria with two teenagers—their son had overlapped with me at Maxwell Hall. In addition, they organized driving lessons for me, and I was thrilled to pass my test first time.

[94] From Supertramp's *Breakfast in America* album. The fact that the song was a big hit shows that others appreciated its sentiments.

I said, now, watch what you say, they'll be calling you a radical
A liberal, oh, fanatical, criminal
Oh, won't you sign up your name? We'd like to feel you're acceptable
Respectable, oh, presentable, a vegetable.

Chorus

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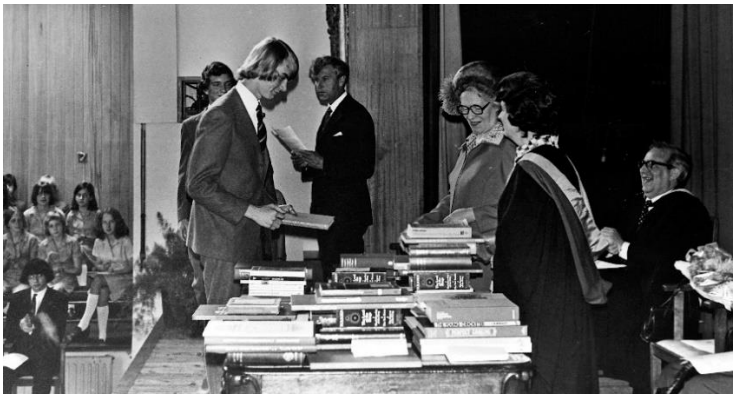
People sometimes ask me if I was disadvantaged academically by being educated in Nigeria. The short answer is: "No." At Hillcrest I was a mediocre student, though I really tried my best in high school. My best subjects were Math, Chemistry, Physics, and Biology, with my worst being French and English Literature. The school had an Honor Roll system and to be on it your grades had to be higher than B– for *all* of your academic subjects.[95] This was posted on the high school notice board four times a term—which was 18 weeks long—namely, once every six weeks and the overall term grade. I *never* made the Honor Roll; I always had at least one C+ and sometimes worse than that. I was *so* disappointed because I had many friends who were regularly on the list. As it happened, my grades in the final six weeks of grade 9 *were* all above B– . I ran to the notice board to proudly see my name on the list only to find it wasn't there. That was because I wasn't taking the same subjects as regular 9th grade students, since I was in the O-level stream. I was *crushed*; I had not received any recognition or encouragement—the stated goal of the Honor Roll. And after that, I could never get higher than a C+ in French.



Receiving an academic award on Prize Giving Day in 1977.

I believe I must have been what you might call a "late developer." In the British boarding school, King Edwards School Witley (KESW),[96] I was a straight A-student.[97] Afterwards I studied Physics at Manchester University and graduated with 1st class honors. I then proceeded to graduate studies in Atomic and Molecular Physics and was awarded a PhD in 1984. So, it's fair to say I wasn't disadvantaged academically by being educated at Hillcrest. If anything the experience taught me to be focused, determined, and gave me a positive work ethic.

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[95] And Physical Education (mandatory) and Choir grades had to be C– or higher.
[96] See: https://www.kesw.org/ .
[97] In July 1977 I was awarded the Mathematics, Lower VI, and General Studies prizes. In July 1978 I was awarded the Physics prize.

I have numerous memories concerning cultural adaptation, a process that continued over many years, even decades. In 1981, my final year as an undergraduate, I had taken a girl on a date to the cinema. As I walked her home afterwards along dimly lit streets, a small branch fell from an overhanging tree and landed on my head/shoulder. I abandoned her instantly and ran ahead trying to shake off the snake that I imagined had fallen off the tree on to me! That instinctive reaction provoked an amused response as I tried to explain what I was doing. It didn't ruin the date though, and the girl, Anne, eventually became my wife.

On another occasion not long afterwards, I was trying to sway Anne's father, Ernest, by helping him with the gardening. He wasn't impressed when I first kicked over a rock before picking it up. He told me not to be lazy and "put my back into it." In Nigeria I was taught to *always* kick over a rock first in case there was a scorpion under it. I was sure he wouldn't believe that explanation. I had to remind myself once again: There are no scorpions in England.

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A number of years later, in the mid 1980s, a good American friend from Rock Haven—a roommate for one year—and his wife came to visit Anne and I (now married) in Manchester. I was thrilled to see him again after such a long time. We were hospitable and naturally took them to quintessential English places in the locality, such as Bramall Hall and Haworth, home of the Brontë sisters. What was somewhat bizarre, even disturbing, was that once they had left, I returned to our living room and *sobbed* uncontrollably for some time. Anne was deeply concerned as she had never witnessed that kind of behavior in me before. It had been a wonderful visit, so *why* was I reacting so intensely? Good question. What was going on?

I suggest my outburst was an expression of repressed grief or latent anguish, although I am not sure I could have articulated it as such at the time. A feature of my boarding school experience was repetitive cycles of friendships and loss. Missionary families returned to their home countries every 2½ to 3 years for 6 to 12 months—the precise time periods depended on their mission society's policy. So each year, perhaps even each school term, some families would leave . . . and others would arrive/return. And as a child you obviously had no control on the duration of your overlap with your friends. Or even if you would ever see them again in the case that they returned to their homeland for good.[98] Each one of us experienced this repetitive cycle of friendships and loss, and we coped with it in different ways. After a while, some MKs became reluctant to forming new or close relationships for fear of them ending. Others, on knowing their friend would soon be leaving (or vice versa), started subconsciously to disinvest emotionally from the relationship—in order to protect their already bruised spirit—so confusing their friend. Even so, I found the bonds of friendship were generally very deep and profoundly real because we shared a common experience of living as MKs.

[98] This could arise because a student had graduated from high school or because the parents were permanently leaving Nigeria for some other personal reason.

Since most of Hillcrest's missionaries were from the US, my prospects of engaging with them again was effectively zero, (or so I thought at the time). Remember, this was the pre-email, pre-internet era, and international telephone calls were prohibitively expensive and so not a realistic option. America itself is a huge country, so this loss was real for American MKs too. However, in the case of large mission societies, that community still existed state-side and periodic reunions occurred and, depending on the situation, it was possible for some friendships to be maintained since regular communication and contact were easier. The SUM (British Branch) was a relatively small outfit, and—as far as I know—its MKs had to simply fend for themselves, at least that's how it seemed from my perspective. I haven't kept in touch with any SUM MKs, although my parents were able to maintain links with other SUM missionaries they knew, primarily through annual newsletters.[99]

On that note, it's important to recognize that adult missionaries face loss too when they return to their home country,[100] and so they are processing their own grief while trying to re-enter society and provide financially for their families. That being the case, it's not surprising if their children's emotional needs are sometimes overlooked. It's not therefore unusual for their children to rebel or, alternatively, to become introverted; either way parents—rightly or wrongly—are often blamed. I recall overtly reading David Wilkerson's[101] "*I've Given Up on Parents*" (1969) in the presence of company. My highly embarrassed parents could hardly complain as it was a *Christian* book!

Returning to my intense grief response: when I saw my American school friend it was a sort of resurrection; someone who was in effect dead—since he lived in the US—had come to life again, only for him to leave once more and so remind me of my broader sense of loss, perhaps even of abandonment. The visit had both elation and intense pain. In certain circumstances, to avoid the heartache it's easier to forgo the joy.

About ten years later, in 1996, my sister Ruth died of breast cancer at the age of 34. At her funeral I met up with two former SUM Hillcrest teachers who had come to pay their respects. They told me that there were school reunions in the US every three years. I never knew.[102] Since Anne worked for British Airways, we received company discounts so enabling me to attend the next event. While a number of my close friends weren't able to be there, it was wonderful to see so many. What surprised me was that we instantly *understood* each other because of our common African/Hillcrest upbringing. Our

[99] When my parents returned to the UK for good, I soon became an undergraduate in another city. While I visited them during some vacations, we never were never a complete nuclear family again.

[100] One of the losses can be one of *identity*. A home (or sending) church can be very supportive of their missionaries when they are abroad but are not sure what to do with them when they return. In Nigeria they were "someone," leaders even, but back home their experience and giftedness can be overlooked, perhaps even perceived to be threatening to a church's leadership, and so a former missionary can become a "nobody." Put differently, evangelical churches can easily understand and support God's original call *for* the missionary, but that call is sometimes perceived as a one-way ticket; does God actually call them back home at a later stage?

[101] The famed author of *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1963).

[102] As far as I know, SUM had nothing similar in the UK.

stories of re-entry—those of social and religious confusion—had similarities despite the obvious transatlantic differences, and this was most reassuring; I wasn't alone after all.

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One of the people I met was Ruth Van Reken; I was acquainted with her two younger sisters since they sang in Hillcrest's *Spirit* group. She processed her childhood MK experience much later in life, in part, by writing "*Letters Never Sent*" (1988) and had become something of a pioneering expert in this area of sociology.[103] Ruth led sessions at the reunion on the adaptation of MKs on returning "home," which were enormously helpful to me, and we later had several one-on-one conversations. I bought the books she recommended and devoured them.[104] They helped explain *who* I was in light of spending my formative years in Nigeria. Here is a summary of what I learned.[105]

MKs are members of what has been termed a "Third Culture Kid" (TCK). David C. Pollock defines the label in this way:

> A TCK is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside of their parents' culture. A TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relation to others of *similar* background.[106]

Put differently, a TCK is a "hidden immigrant" in that they may *look* like a stereotypical member of their homeland, but they *think*—and often *behave*—differently. TCKs include children of diplomats, military and business personnel, and others whose parents have been posted abroad, including missionaries. The degree of a person's TCK experience depends on many factors, such as the duration of their stay abroad and their degree of integration, including understanding/speaking another language. For example, those who live in a large, gated community may be more insulated from the outside culture than those who are embedded within it.

My own situation, though far from unique, was a bit more complicated. I was a British kid living in Nigeria and attending an American boarding school. I was therefore influenced by all *three* cultures, while, as Pollock puts it, "not having full ownership in any." You could perhaps say I was a *fourth* culture kid. As such, this only enhanced my degree of confusion when returning to the UK. Even so, I remain squarely under the broad umbrella of a TCK or as a *stranger* at "home."

Here are some of the (now) well-recognized characteristics of a TCK, first the downside:

- Rootlessness – where do I fit in? (TCKs have often experienced a life of high mobility.)

[103] See: http://www.crossculturalkid.org/ .
[104] *Strangers at Home*, edited by Carolyn D. Smith (Aletheia, 1996); David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Rekan, *The Third Culture Kid Experience: Growing Up Among Worlds*, (Intercultural Press, 1999).
[105] This summary comes from Ruth Van Reken's presentations and papers, and from the books recommended in [104].
[106] Emphasis mine.

- Identity crisis – who else is like me?
- Loneliness – who understands me?
- Insecurity in relationships/commitment due to their previous cycles of deep friendships followed by irretrievable loss.
- Unresolved grief, not just from past losses but from having to put on a brave face.[107]
- A lower self-image.
- Socially 'backwards' or off balance due to missed history while away, (e.g., music, movies, politics, and books), an inability to appreciate jokes,[108] and confusion concerning expected norms or rules (e.g., dress code or fashion, dating etiquette, and shopping experience[109]).
- All the above can result in withdrawal, or anger, or depression, or paralyzing perfectionism, or heightened anxiety, or a denial of appropriate feelings, or a crisis of faith.

Concerning the penultimate point, I recall having recently returned to England and visiting my uncle and aunt in Lincolnshire. Early in the evening we were watching "Top of the Pops" on color TV[110] and my uncle insisted on us seeing Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* video, which happened to be on. At the conclusion, he asked if we liked it. I was *horrified*; I had never seen anything like that before. My uncle, to my surprise—and that of my parents—admired it and thought it was ground-breaking. Now, over time, I have come to love it too, along with all the other Queen classics. Learning about "worldly" music, always pretty much taboo in my strict Pentecostal upbringing, was one huge adaptation for me. In slowly discovering my own expression of Christian faith, I was able to embrace and enjoy contemporary, secular music. I had years of catching up to do—including the Beatles.

Here are some of the more positive aspects of the TCK experience:

- Living abroad instills cross-cultural enrichment, including observational and language skills.
- A larger worldview and open-mindedness; a sensitivity and an appreciation of the "other."
- Knows how to fit in; adaptable—which doesn't necessarily mean compromising.
- Has a sense of independence through living away from home and traveling alone (such as transcontinental air travel).
- Witnessing firsthand faith lived out in practice.

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[107] MKs can experience added isolation through fear of offending their parents' church (and hence funding) or undermining their parents' sense of call or missionary "image." There is also a hiding of your true feelings by projecting positivity when writing letters to your parents so that they will not worry about you. (This style of writing is learnt from reading your parents' prayer letters to supporters or in news articles they write for the mission's magazine. Such things are written, at least in part, to reinforce what *they think* their readers *want* to hear, i.e., replete with Christian jargon and a tone of triumphalism.)

[108] In my later interactions with international academic colleagues, I discovered that humor is often prone to being misunderstood because it is so rooted in a particular culture and language. This misinterpretation has the propensity to offend, something many appreciate today because emails and texting don't communicate the tone intended by the sender.

[109] I recall one unusual incident in the high street: my younger sister had never seen a mannequin in a store window and stood staring at it—to the surprise of onlookers—until my parents eventually dragged her away.

[110] I mistakenly interpreted having a *color* TV as meaning they were *very* wealthy. ("Top of the Pops" was a weekly music review of the top 20 singles in the UK; some acts were live and other groups/singers had promotional videos.)

- Some MKs end up with a broader view of God.

As I mentioned earlier, I faced much of my TCK re-entry experience alone, or so it seems to me in hindsight.[111] The above systematic analysis of common TCK traits helped me better understand myself in context. It also made me realize that I wasn't an isolated and sometimes misunderstood oddity, but part of a much broader, international community of adult TCKs. Consequently, I was able to revisit my past and process it better, sharing my learned insights with my wife and close friends.

The world has changed dramatically since the 1970s, obviously. We now live in a highly-mobile, global village—often, but not always, *by choice*. Air travel is far more common, and many young people get to experience other cultures firsthand (e.g. international university students, gap years, summer vacations abroad). Related to this is the rise in immigration and, sadly, increased numbers of refugees, both of which result in social challenges for children and adults alike.[112] One of the outcomes of such displacements is new terminology, such as "multicultural" and "multifaith," which recognizes and tends to normalize or assimilate such experiences. Nevertheless, some western countries are facing a crisis of their self-perceived national identity, resulting in increasing xenophobia and racism.[113] Since TCKs were, in a sense, pioneers or unwitting guineapigs in social adaptation, I suggest the benefits of the above characteristics of TCKs have a wider relevance for today. Maybe our turbulent world needs the broader insights of adult TCKs…

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I attended two other Hillcrest School reunions, one at Wheaton College in Illinois and another in Chicago, after which I decided not to attend any more. It was wonderful to know that those who were effectively "dead" to me, because they lived on a different continent, were actually still alive. Even so, our lives had moved on. Regardless of how wonderful our common past experiences had been (at least for the most part), we can never go back. We can only move forward. I now live in Canada, and although some Rock Haveners are only 3½ hours drive away, I rarely see them, but I take comfort in knowing they are there. I have experienced a significant degree of emotional healing as a result of a much better understanding of the enduring impact of being a MK/TCK. Put differently, I don't see myself as psychologically crippled by my upbringing, rather I regard myself as a reasonably highly functioning and a modestly successful individual. Even so, in addition to the positive TCK attributes identified above, there remains a lingering negative legacy; both are simply a part of who I am. For example, having moved house, school, city, and country so many times I am left with itchy feet. Consequently, I have found it hard to put down deep roots, as after a number of years I begin to wonder if it's time to move

[111] Having said that, my guardians were understanding and patient; I knew they understood me. (See [93].)
[112] In the case of refugees, there is the added trauma linked to the reason they needed to leave their home country.
[113] Such attitudes can be overt or covered by a thin veneer of respectability.

on to a new job or location. That tendency for high mobility remains and I have to curb that feeling for the sake of my family.[114]

I heard or read somewhere, "Don't pick at your scabs, they are evidence of the body's healing process." What's left in the end are physical scars, but they themselves are proof of the healing.[115] Whenever you see them, you are reminded of the trauma of the original injury, but there's no need to relive it. I suggest invisible emotional scars are similar. Even so, it seems to me that "inner" healing is only ever partial, sufficient for the present moment. We will likely need to address similar issues at later stages in life, as we experience new triggers that bring up echoes of our past. With that in mind, regularly attending school reunions is *for me* an unnecessary reliving of those cycles of joy and loss. As I said earlier, sometimes to avoid the heartache it is easier to forgo the joy. However, I have *no regrets* for having been an MK. It has broadened my horizons and shaped my life for the better. In my mind, the positives have far outweighed the negatives. My life has been profoundly enriched by my African experiences; I am so glad I have had them and wouldn't want to have missed them for the world.

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[114] It has been said that MKs/TCKs feel most at home in airports; that's a feeling I understand. My job as a university professor entailed a fair bit of international travel for research and conferences, so satisfying my itchy feet. Over the last 15 years I have become far more settled in that regard and no longer feel the need to pack my suitcase once more.

[115] Note too that a scar is a visible sign of healing or closure, but your body has *not* returned back to its pre-injury state. Too often we assume that "healing" means a return to "normal," meaning things *as they used to be*. Clearly, that's not the case for a serious injury and the scar is an indelible reminder of a now past event.

About the Author

Tim Reddish has a PhD in Physics from Manchester, UK, and a MDiv from Knox College, Toronto. In late 2023 he retired from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Amherstburg, having been their minister for nearly 5 years. His previous career was as a physics professor at the Universities of Windsor (Ontario) and Newcastle upon Tyne (UK), researching in experimental Atomic, Molecular and Optical Physics for 25 years. He spent his formative years in Nigeria, where his parents were missionaries, and has a diverse church background—Pentecostal, Baptist, Anglican, and Presbyterian. Tim and his family moved to Canada in 2002. His first wife, Anne, died of cancer in 2011. His son, Philip, and his family now live in Edmonton and Tim is a grandfather of three. Tim remarried eleven years ago and enjoys being a stepdad to four young adults. He and his wife, Mary, live in Old Riverside, Windsor. He loves reading theology, watching British detective stories and period dramas, F1 racing, and photography. He is also the author of four books, and co-editor of another (all available from Amazon).