

The Axis of a Humanitarian Diplomat: A short review of Jan H. Boer's work at the Institute of Church and Society/Northern Area Office, Jos.

By

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Abstract

Rev. Dr. Jan H. Boer served as a SUM-CRC¹ Missionary in Northern Nigeria for more than 30 years. Aside his primary assignment; understood traditionally as 'Evangelism'² or Shelar Bishara; Boer³ in most of his activities centered on empowerment and mobilization beyond the "religious"; he went far more into community empowerment for 'social action'. He published several books and articles on various subjects, especially areas affecting the socio-economic development of the masses. This paper is a study of his activities from the axis which views it as 'Humanitarian Diplomacy'. Boer himself called this "Conscientization"⁴. The paper responds to the following questions: to what extent was Boer's work successful? How was he more of a Humanitarian Diplomat than a Christian Missionary? What factors were responsible for these successes? What were the challenges? What lessons can we learn from his 'Humanitarian Diplomacy'?

The main purpose of the paper is to assess his work; looking at both the successes and the challenges; consciously to draw lessons for young leaders, Christian Ministers, FBOs and NGOs that are presently doing similar work. His creativity, tact and peaceful approach to issues have enabled him to initiate more than 15 different community development programmes which has earned him a unique admiration among the *Talakawa* (Boer, 1987, 3-30);⁵ the basis on which this article perceived him more as a 'Humanitarian Diplomat' than just a 'Christian Missionary'.⁶

¹ SUM-CRC: Sudan United Mission-Christian Reformed Church

² The "famous" and repeatedly quoted phrase was always "...for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle"

³ Which host Church in Nigeria or the local Church in Nigeria will say in Hausa "*Yada Bishara*" or *Shelar Bishara* and is essentially spreading of the good-news: the ultimate thing in evangelism in our understanding is 'winning souls' converting people to Christianity.

⁴ Boer was passionate to help out the situation in which he found the masses. The situation in some places without exaggeration was more of a war situation than ordinary conflicts.

⁵ *Talakawa* is a Hausa (a widely spoken language in West Africa, mainly in Northern Nigeria, Niger & others) word for Masses. At the grassroot level Boer was mobilizing the masses, while at the policy making level, governmental or national level; Boer continuously advocated, lobbied and at times confronted leaders with facts for change of policies; and persuaded leaders to act in the interest of the masses, the people he considered vulnerable.

⁶ Traditionally Missionaries are thought to only preach, evangelize and convert people to Christianity. They thought to have no business with other aspect of the lives of the people.

Boer's perception of things and his understanding of development is not far from the idea of CRUDAN and RURCON⁷ in Jos, where development is understood as best approached from a 'wholistic' perspective (CRUDAN: *Annual Report* 2-3), and where some have seen it as Pathways to Peace and Unity in the diversity of the country (Dashon 2-6; Augustine 6). This paper studies his activities from an axis that views them as "Humanitarian Diplomacy." Boer himself called his approach *conscientization* (Boer, *Christians and Mobilization* 14-16). The paper also answers: To what extent was Boer's work successful? How was he more of a humanitarian diplomat than a Christian missionary? What factors shaped these successes? What were the challenges? What lessons can we learn from his humanitarian diplomacy? What were the initial motivation or should I dare to call them instigations that made drafted his PhD dissertation which he now later raised a question about the missionaries; whether they were actually 'heralds of capitalism or Christ'? (Boer 1984,1).

Defining Humanitarian Diplomacy

It is the act of persuading decision makers to act in the interest of vulnerable people. Diplomacy as word can be explained as the 'art' and the 'tact' of conducting relations between two countries through negotiation and persuasion without resorting to violence or war. Humanitarian means doing it for the sake or the benefit of 'humanity'. Humanitarian Diplomacy is therefore the art of "...persuading decision makers and opinion leaders to act at all times, in the interests of vulnerable people, and with full respect for fundamental humanitarian principles" (IFRC 2010, 1).⁸ Generally speaking; vulnerable persons are persons at the risk of abuse or harm due to the situation they have found themselves; due to poverty, war, disaster or crisis.⁹

Situations of acute pressure often render individuals or groups vulnerable to choices that may compromise their well-being or long-term interests. As Kakaliagou observes, such contexts create susceptibility to decisions that arise less from deliberation than from immediate strain, thereby heightening the risk of harmful or counterproductive outcomes (4-5). Understanding

⁷ CRUDAN stands for Christian Rural and Urban Development Association of Nigeria, and RURCON stands for Rural Development Counsellors for Christian Churches in Africa.

⁸ Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diplomacy> (accessed last 16/11/2025).

⁹ For example a civilian population is displaced due to war, disaster or crisis. These persons are; but not limited to persons in abject poverty, caught up in war, or have no health care facilities, or they are facing gross injustice and have no legal remedies, still or have no opportunity to seek legal redress.

these dynamics is central to peacebuilding, which seeks not merely the cessation of violence but the transformation of social conditions that expose people to such pressures in the first place.

Within this broader framework, the contributions of humanitarian diplomacy are instructive. A particularly relevant example comes from the work of Rev. Dr. Isaiah B. Hinkon, a distinguished lecturer at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN). In his study, *The Gidan Addu'a Prayer Home: An Indigenous Prophet-Healing Movement*, Hinkon analyzes indigenous Christian movements and the indigenization of ministry, emphasizing how faith communities respond to social needs through culturally embedded practices. His attention to grassroots religious initiatives, especially their capacity to offer psychosocial support, address communal vulnerability, and mobilize local resources bears significant resonance with Jan Boer's philosophy at the Institute of Church and Society (ICS) in Jos.

Hinkon's insights reveal a parallel motivation to Boer's praxis: both scholars identify local agency, contextualized theology, and the holistic engagement of the church as indispensable elements of community development. In doing so, Hinkon provides a valuable comparative perspective for understanding how indigenous religious structures can serve as instruments of peacebuilding and social stabilization, much in line with Boer's longstanding commitment to empowering communities from within (Hinkon iv-v).

A critical dimension of Jan Boer's approach to community development and peacebuilding is his emphasis on *conscientization*; the awakening of critical awareness among community members so that they may understand their social realities and act intentionally to transform them. This dynamic is clearly illustrated in the LCCN Gongola Diocese under study. In examining how the doctrine of 'justification by faith alone' has been understood and appropriated by church members within their religious, cultural, and social context, it becomes evident that Boer's pedagogy of awareness-building has played a formative role in shaping the community's capacity for reflective engagement. Conscientization, as Boer envisages it, empowers individuals to think and act deliberately, no longer passively accepting inherited structures but participating constructively in communal life.

This author's initial visit to the Diocese in 1998 revealed a community hesitant to articulate or discuss doctrinal matters, suggesting a limited sense of agency and theological

confidence. However, the introduction of Boer's mobilization materials initiated a gradual but profound transformation. As congregants engaged these resources, they began to converse more openly, analyze their social and ecclesial contexts, and identify practical ways to address collective challenges. This process led directly to the creation of the community development project named: **CARE**¹⁰, an initiative that symbolized both theological maturation and social empowerment. Subsequent research, particularly that of Professor Reynolds has documented a marked increase in members' participation in community activities, further affirming the long-term impact of conscientization on local development.

Boer's influence extended beyond this Diocese, reaching, for example, the Diocese of Gombi. There, the use of his mobilization text *Talakawa Ku Tashi Tsaye* stimulated cross-denominational engagement within the Local Government Area. The enthusiasm generated by this collective awakening resulted in the immediate establishment of a new community development initiative, DISOC (Development Initiative for Social Change). This outcome underscores Boer's central insight: that contextual theological reflection, when coupled with grassroots mobilization, can catalyze sustainable social transformation.

As Professor Reynolds' writings on contextual theology and doctrine demonstrate, theology becomes socially meaningful only when it intersects with concrete human experience. In this respect, Reynolds' analyses provide an interpretive framework for understanding Boer's praxis, showing how doctrinal reflection, conscientization, and community action converge to advance both peacebuilding and local development (Reynolds 1–2).

Another significant contribution to the discourse on Christian social engagement comes from Rev. Prof. Pandang Yamsat, one of the most respected indigenous theologians in contemporary Nigerian Christianity. For several decades, Yamsat has articulated a sustained commitment to the involvement of Christians in political processes and in the pursuit of economic justice engagements he regards as indispensable dimensions of responsible discipleship. In his work *The Role of the Church in Democratic Government in Nigeria*, Yamsat outlines both the practical and theological responsibilities of pastors within democratic societies,

¹⁰ **CARE** stands for Community Action for Rural Empowerment

arguing that pastoral leadership cannot remain insulated from the socio-political realities that shape the lives of congregants.

Yamsat's analysis provides an important complement to Jan Boer's broader mission of conscientization. Boer consistently emphasized that the pastoral vocation extends beyond the pulpit and into the social arena, where faith communities must critically interpret and constructively respond to issues of governance, justice, and community welfare. In this respect, Yamsat's articulation of political and economic engagement reinforces and deepens Boer's efforts to mobilize pastors and laity towards an integrated understanding of ministry; one that recognizes the church's role as an active participant in societal transformation.

The convergence between Yamsat's theological vision and Boer's conscientization praxis is therefore both substantive and strategic. Yamsat offers the doctrinal underpinnings and ethical rationale for Christian participation in public life, while Boer provides the mobilizing frameworks that empower communities to act on such convictions. Together, their work strengthens the intellectual and practical foundations of peacebuilding, community development, and socially engaged Christianity in Nigeria (Yamsat 1).

A further significant voice supporting Boer's liberative and peacebuilding vision is Rev. Dr. Zakka Peter Ahuche, whose scholarly work offers substantial reinforcement to Boer's humanitarian diplomacy efforts. In his comprehensive article, *The History of the United Missionary Church of Africa 1905-2020: Her Concepts, Manifestations, Challenges and Prospects*, Ahuche provides an in-depth historical and analytical account of the United Missionary Church of Africa (UMCA). His study traces more than a century of the denomination's social, educational, and peacebuilding engagements, demonstrating how UMCA has consistently positioned itself as a transformative agent within Northern Nigerian society.

Ahuche's work aligns closely with Boer's vision of the church as an institution that must respond proactively to the social realities of its context. By documenting UMCA's long-standing commitments to community welfare, intercommunal harmony, literacy, and grassroots development, Ahuche illustrates how ecclesial structures can function as catalysts for civil society strengthening; territory that resonates deeply with Boer's own praxis. His analysis underscores the theological and practical imperatives that compel churches to contribute

meaningfully to the common good, thereby advancing the broader aims of peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Moreover, Ahuche's critique and affirmation of UMCA's contributions highlight concerns central to Boer's humanitarian diplomacy, particularly the belief that Christian institutions must serve as mediators, educators, and mobilizers within fragile socio-political environments. The clarity with which Ahuche articulates the church's historical role in social transformation lends scholarly weight to Boer's long-standing insistence that effective ministry requires active engagement with societal challenges. For these reasons, Ahuche's work stands as an important complement to Boer's legacy, reflecting and reinforcing the themes that have made Boer's humanitarian initiatives widely recognized across Northern Nigeria (Ahuche 195–215).

Emerging Concept of 'Humanitarian Diplomacy'

Looking back at some few centuries, there is a significant development in classic diplomacy alongside with emerging issues on globalization. Particularly; "a multiplicity of new ideas of global diplomatic activity, relating to such issues as climate change, the environment, access to water, culture, health, and knowledge...". While the conventional diplomacy maintain its objectives as focusing on the management of international relations of states through persuasion and Negotiation devoid of resorting to use of force; humanitarian diplomacy focuses on raising support for operations and programmes to achieve humanitarian objectives (Regnier 1211; Boer 1979, 530).

Boer's humanitarian diplomacy also takes the media seriously, he engages the media in as much as it was good for the spread of the gospel. He constantly and actively interacted with the media; that was why he was quite noted by most media establishments in Northern Nigeria. The need to engage and inter-act with the Media to promote an idea is more than just necessary; in fact, it is absolutely necessary to engage the media to achieve maximum success in any endeavour (Obateru 1-30, Wilkins & Clifford G. Christians 1; Doll *et al.*). Consciously or uncounciously, Boer was a practicing 'peace journalist'. This is because Boer apart from noting the necessity of the media, his media practice or principles were more of 'peace journalism' where he not only saw the necessity to work with the media, but he did in his own way; so

peaceful, noting very well the key role the media can play in the propagation of his community development activities and the spread of the gospel.

But for the sake of clarity, what is peace journalism (PJ)? What is Peace Journalism? ‘Peace journalism’ (PJ) is a theory and practice of conflict reporting that intentionally frames, selects and phrases news so audiences can see non-violent options, contextual causes, and ways to reduce harm, rather than automatically privileging violence, elites and zero-sum narratives. The modern, widely used definition comes from Jake Lynch & Annabel McGoldrick: PJ is when “editors and reporters make choices of what to report, and how to report it that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict,” applying conflict analysis and transformation to reporting (Sehl, A. *et al.* 1-15; Lee 2-15; Doll *et al.*).

The Core principles; and how PJ differs from conventional “war” journalism.

Summarized from foundational texts and recent syntheses; these are the recurring, core principles in contemporary scholarship:

1. Prioritize conflict context & root causes (not only events). Reporters explain history, structural drivers and incentives behind conflict rather than treating every violent incident as an isolated spectacle. (Lee).
2. Give voice to a wider range of actors — especially affected civilians and peacebuilders. Move beyond elite/official sources and include victims, mediators, grassroots actors and those working on solutions. (Lee)
3. Focus on peace initiatives and non-violent responses (solutions journalism overlap). Highlight attempts at negotiation, reconciliation, de-escalation and reconstruction — not just violence and weapons. (Youngblood)
4. Avoid language that glamorizes violence or moralizes one side. Use precise, non-loaded terms (e.g., “23 people were killed” rather than “a massacre” unless supported) and avoid labels that dehumanize. (Lynch & McGoldrick’s checklist offers detailed comparisons.) (Youngblood 210-2020)
5. Balance immediacy with verification and nuance. Resist cycles of rumor and adrenaline-driven framing that amplify escalation. Include uncertainty, multiple perspectives and independent verification. (Lee)
6. Be transparent about journalistic choices and impacts (reflexivity). PJ calls for journalists to reflect on how reporting shapes conflict dynamics rather than claiming false neutrality. (Lynch 2007, 1-12)

These map onto Galtung’s and Lynch & McGoldrick’s orientations Galtung’s contrasts between “war/violence journalism” and “peace journalism” and Lynch & McGoldrick’s practical checklists)

(Lee), as also advocated by Steven Youngblood in his *Peace Journalism: An Introduction to Peace Journalism*, the Center for Global Peace Journalism, and the *Peace Journalist Magazine* (Youngblood 212-219). Holding as an eye witness to Boer's several interactions with the Nigerian media, and looking at what PJ entails; one will be correct to conclude that Boer was also a skillful 'Peace Journalist'.

Profile of a Humanitarian Diplomat: Jan H. Boer (*Yahaya Mai Gona*)

There are quite a number of skills required of an effective diplomat; few of them will be mentioned here because of the limit of this paper. The skills among others specifically include: Negotiation, Leadership, Persuasion, Advocacy, Effective Listening, Language Proficiency, Media skills, Information management and Intercultural Communication (McAvoy 2010, 15–19). Jan Boer demonstrated beyond dispute all the above mentioned skills. That was why it was not too difficult for him to succeed as humanitarian Diplomat and as a Christian Missionary. An exemplary talented personality that all his previous workers and colleagues felt or exhibited that he must be emulated.

The Principles and the Objectives of Humanitarian Diplomacy

It has four main principles on which its credibility is built: The Centrality of 'Humanity'. It was formed out of strong desire to help and protect humanity. The emphasis is on 'the imperative (need) of addressing human suffering wherever it is found'. Consequently the whole purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health, and to ensure full respect for human dignity (IACWHC, *Guidance Materials*, 2010, 3)¹¹. Other principles include Neutrality,¹² Impartiality and Operational Independence, The Red Cross/Red Crescent movement adds unity and universality (*IFRC Fundamental Principles* 2015,1).

A Short History of Jan Boer

¹¹ IACWHC: Inter-Agency Committee for Humanitarian Coordinators

¹² Neutrality as one of the principles prohibits humanitarian actors from taking side in hostilities or engaging in controversies that has to do with the political, racial, religious or ideological issues of their host countries. To make this clear, it does not mean that the humanitarian diplomat does not recognize the political, religious and ideological development of the country; he/she practice his religion, respect political opinion of the people, but remain neutral and abstain from any controversial discussion that are linked to these areas.

After his two first degrees¹³ he did African studies for 3 years at the Michigan State University, and studied Islam at the Pierre Benignus Study Centre in Ibadan. Boer was a research fellow at the Vrije University in Amsterdam where he obtained his doctorate degree in 1979. He has lectured at various Universities including Calvin Seminary in the States, University of Jos and TCNN,¹⁴ Bukuru. Boer was the founding director of the Institute of Church & Society, a Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN)¹⁵ in Jos, and also director of the Wholistic Health Care Centre in Nigeria (Boer *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, 2077, 166-168).”

He came to Nigeria in 1966 as a Christian Reformed Church Missionary under the auspices of Sudan united Mission (Kumzhi, 1996, 13). After years and efforts among the masses in Northern Nigeria; especially after several publications; Boer was a household name in community development activities in the rural areas in Northern Nigeria and was popularly referred to as *Yahaya mai gona*¹⁶ due to his approach to community development which he called ‘conscientization’ (Boer, *Why Are You Poor?* 1988, xii).¹⁷ He wrote in one of his Narrative reports ”My wanderings have already made me a sufficiently known local entity to be invited quite frequently to preach in various churches. Preaching assignments have been filled in Baptist, Lutheran, COCIN churches as well as at NKST and TCNN. My sermons are invariably related to the concerns of ICS in that I emphasize the need to revise our Christian life and work styles in order to practice obedience to our Lord. I emphasize passages such as the Beatitudes and the Kenosis of Philippians 2.”

¹³Boer did his high school at Port Alberni in Canada, then had 2 bachelor degrees from Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary where he obtained BA and BD.

¹⁴ TCNN: Theological College of Northern Nigeria, Bukuru, Jos Nigeria.

¹⁵ Not to be confused with Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), as people often do.

¹⁶ Due to the understanding that in the Dutch language; *Boer* means ‘farmer’ and John in Hausa is *Yahaya*, putting his 2 names together brings out the *Yahaya mai gona*

¹⁷ Boer radically distinguished himself on social theology when he wrote “ 360 Social Meditations” a devotional literature replacing the well-known Hausa *Abicin yini* later *Abincin Ruhaniya* ‘Our Daily Bread’ later referred to as ‘Our Daily Spiritual Bread’ community development activities of Boer in the light of Humanitarian Diplomacy; he could be better described as Humanitarian Diplomat because of his humanitarian approach to community development and the skills he possessed , which are also the qualities of the Humanitarian Diplomacy mentioned above.

Boer's work shows strong success in how he engaged existing churches and religious bodies, helping to expand both the scholarly and pastoral contributions of local theologians. This influence is clear in the work of Rahila L. Jakawa, whose research on *Pastoral Ministry to Single Women* highlights how theological study can address real social challenges, especially the needs of marginalized groups such as single women.

Her findings demonstrate how TCNN faculty actively shape pastoral responses to issues of gender and social vulnerability, reflecting Boer's focus on community-centered ministry. In addition, her work *Jubilee as a Vision for New Community* provides a biblical and ethical model for justice, restoration, and communal solidarity, themes central to Boer's understanding of the church's role in peacebuilding. Together, Jakawa's writings deepen and extend Boer's vision of community empowerment and social transformation.

Boer's work demonstrates significant success through his close engagement with existing churches and religious bodies, which helped strengthen both the scholarly and pastoral contributions of local theologians. His influence is especially seen in the research of Rahila L. Jakawa, whose study *Pastoral Ministry to Single Women* shows how theological scholarship can respond to real social problems and support groups that are often overlooked, such as single women. Her work highlights the challenges these women face and shows how TCNN faculty are helping pastors develop practical and compassionate responses to issues of gender, marginalization, and social vulnerability. This clearly reflects Boer's commitment to community-centered ministry, where the church listens to people's real experiences and works to meet their needs in meaningful ways.

In her second work, *Jubilee as a Vision for New Community*, Jakawa expands this discussion by offering a simple but powerful biblical and ethical framework for community renewal. She emphasizes justice, restoration, and fair relationships as key elements of the Jubilee tradition values that strongly connect with Boer's view of the church as a force for peace and social healing. By bringing together theological reflection and practical concerns for community well-being, Jakawa's writings not only support but also enrich Boer's larger vision of empowering communities and promoting long-term social transformation.

Dr. Elisha Samuel Dih's article, "Interrogating Syncretism in African Christian Theology," presents a critical examination of the long-debated relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR). His central argument is that syncretism defined as the uncritical blending of Christian beliefs with traditional religious practices poses a serious theological risk because it obscures or even distorts foundational Christian truths. Dih contends that while African cultures contain rich values that can illuminate Christian faith, syncretism as a *method* lacks discernment and therefore weakens doctrinal clarity. His critique is not a rejection of African cultural identity; rather, it is a call for a more disciplined theological approach (Dih 2022, 47-60).

To address this challenge, Dih proposes contextualization as the appropriate alternative. For him, contextualization allows African Christians to take their cultural heritage seriously while ensuring that Scripture remains the final authority in shaping Christian faith and practice. This method affirms cultural expression but filters it through theological reflection, enabling African Christians to interpret and live out the gospel in ways that are culturally meaningful yet doctrinally sound. In this sense, Dih presents contextualization as both a theological safeguard and a socially responsible strategy that empowers local communities to articulate their faith without losing their distinctive identity.

Dih's position aligns closely with Jan Boer's notion of conscientization, which emphasizes helping communities think critically about their social and religious contexts so they can act faithfully and responsibly. Both thinkers resist superficial accommodation and instead promote informed engagement with culture. While Boer applied conscientization to community development, Christian-Muslim relations, and social transformation, Dih applies it within theological method. Together, their approaches affirm that African Christianity must be rooted in its cultural environment but guided by reflective, principled theological reasoning. Through this synthesis, Dih contributes not only to African theology but also to the larger project of building communities that are spiritually grounded, socially aware, and capable of contributing constructively to peace and transformation in society.

Dr. Elisha Samuel Dih's theological reflections; particularly his critique of syncretism and his advocacy for contextualization relate strongly to Jan H. Boer's vision of humanitarian diplomacy as practiced through the Institute of Church and Society (ICS). Boer understood humanitarian diplomacy not merely as negotiation or mediation, but as a *theological engagement with social realities* in ways that empower communities to become agents of their own transformation. In this sense, Dih's insistence on contextual theology directly complements Boer's method of *conscientization*: helping Christian

communities interpret their experiences through a biblically grounded but culturally aware theological lens.

By rejecting syncretism while promoting contextualization, Dih supports Boer's conviction that African Christians should develop theological tools that speak authentically to their cultural situation without compromising essential Christian doctrines. This approach strengthens community development because it encourages believers to reflect critically on their socio-cultural contexts, identify sources of oppression or ethical confusion, and engage them with theological clarity and social responsibility.

Furthermore, Rev. Dr. Elisha Samuel Dih's work on correcting misconceptions about prayer deepens this connection by linking spiritual formation to social ethics, another key aspect of Boer's humanitarian diplomacy. By showing how prayer shapes both personal character and communal responsibility, Dih advances a form of public theology that empowers believers to respond to societal challenges with both spiritual maturity and ethical integrity. For Boer, the transformation of African reality required Christians who were not only spiritually disciplined but also socially conscious and theologically informed. Dih's efforts to refine the theology of prayer therefore align closely with Boer's belief that the Church must serve as a transformative force in society; educating, advocating, and modeling practices that promote justice, reconciliation, and human flourishing. In summary, Dih's contributions reinforce and extend Boer's legacy by providing theological frameworks that equip African Christians to pursue holistic transformation rooted in both faith and context (2021, 32–48).

Another important and deeply moving contribution to Boer's humanitarian and missionary efforts can be seen in the work of Dr. Justina K. Damap. Through her ministry, the Initiative for Victims' Educational and Economic Development (IVEED), Dr. Damap has shown a strong commitment to supporting vulnerable groups, especially women who face major social and economic challenges. Her presentation, "*Widowhood: A Challenge to the Church*," reflects a concern very similar to Boer's emphasis on holistic Christian ministry at the Institute of Church and Society. In this work, she offers a clear and practical theological response to widowhood as a form of social vulnerability that the Church cannot ignore. Her analysis provides an excellent example of how humanitarian pastoral action can be shaped, much like the community-based projects Boer encouraged through the ICS (Damap 2007, 1). Dr. Damap's work shows that theology becomes most meaningful when it addresses the real struggles of people and helps guide the church toward compassionate and transformative action.

It is also important to note that the wider scholarship produced by TCNN faculty adds further strength to Boer's legacy. Many TCNN scholars have written in local journals and contributed to various *Jos Studies* volumes, especially on topics related to Christian–Muslim relations, interfaith dialogue, and the church's response to social conflict. These writings support Boer's long-term efforts in promoting peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, and responsible Christian engagement in society. Together, these contributions Dr. Damap's focused ministry and the broader TCNN intellectual tradition complement Boer's humanitarian diplomacy by helping the church grow socially, economically, and spiritually while working for peace and reconciliation in Nigeria.

Another case of academic impact is that of Rev. Dr. Zakka Peter Ahuche, who immensely contributed to the impact of Boer's ideology in the academic circle, and has made a commendable success to the progression of Boer's struggle as a humanitarian Diplomat is Dr. Zakka; in his article; *The History of the United Missionary Church of Africa 1905-2020: Her Concepts, Manifestations, Challenges and Prospects*, Ahuche gives a historical and descriptive assessment of UMCA (a denomination), work, documenting its social, educational, and peacebuilding contributions over more than a century. It shows how a church institution responds to social needs and contributes to civil society very similar territory (. This is a serious expression of concern and should be considered as part of the main concerns of Boer, who's humanitarian diplomacy activities have made him a household name in Northern Nigeria (Ahuche 195–215).

The Works and Achievement of Jan H. Boer¹⁸

Few of Boers activities and publications will **not** be treated here due to the limit of this paper. Wholistic Health Care for the people: Boer is a theologian and a sociologist by training, found out in Nigeria that traditional healers and faith healers have popular patronage from Church members including the so educated ones leaving the health centres almost empty. He wondered why it should be so. He soon discovered that most of the health complains are neutrotically psychological, eventhough they prefer to describe it “spiritual”¹⁹

¹⁸ Not to be confused with Jan Harry Boer who was the first Principal of the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN) Bukuru.

¹⁹ Boer radically distinguished himself in social theology when he wrote his “ 360 Social Meditations” a devotional literature replacing the well-known Hausa *Abicin yini* later *Abincin Ruhaniya*” ‘Our Daily Bread’ later referred to as ‘Our Daily Spiritual Bread’ community development activities of Boer in the light of Humanitarian Diplomacy; he could be better described as Humanitarian Diplomat because of his humanitarian approach to community development and the skills he possessed , which are also the qualities of the Humanitarian Diplomacy mentioned above.

We should not forget that; Boer did not disregard the Western medicine, but he radically departed from the notion that it is the only solution, he saw the need for a wider approach, haven been influenced by the ‘African thinking’. Which he explained as “...healing that accepts the medical model as only one component of a large arsenal of healing methods...” He departed from “imposition of monopoly of medical model on Africa by colonialism and missions” (Boer 1995; Boer 1989). Boer’s clear engagement in ‘plea (or advocacy) for wider approach to healing that includes the medical model, selective African traditional healing and faith healing’ is an authentic exercise of a Humanitarian Diplomat (Boer, *Wholistic Health Care*, 1995, 22–25).

Boer empowered the ‘vulnerable’ through education using principles of liberation theology; noting the society is religiously oriented, he used biblical texts to give the people biblical and theological basis of their action. (Boer 1980).²⁰ Boer’s concern was not only getting the attention of decision makers and the government, but also donors and other strong NGOs that can influence decisions to come to the aid of the masses who were suffering because of poverty and general neglect. He empowered the people themselves to demand for their rights through peaceful means. (Boer 1996). He encourage the masses to see several pathways to Nigeria’s prosperity. Following this; other good minded Nigerians have expanded this thinking to “Pathways of Nigeria’s prosperity, peace, justice, unity, security, freedom and sustainable development” (Ezekwe & Deborah 14; Ezekwe & Patricia 27).

He became a little bit unpopular later in the eyes of the “Big Men” probably because of one of his publications titled in Hausa ‘*Talakawa Ku Tashi Tsaye*’²¹, or his another publication titled; “Caught in the Middle: Christians in Transnational Corporations” and his yet another title “The Church and the External Dept” Here he was building awareness, educating and edifying the literate population of the masses to rise up to their responsibilities as citizens of their country. Using a Kuyperian reformed liberation approach to encourage these villagers to begin to ask questions and take legitimate actions against any oppressive elite in government, business and

²⁰ Boer was good at meeting Nigerian parliamentarians, governors, and he has a quick way of getting to them and getting to know them, he inviting them for dinner, lunch or any informal meeting of different sorts. As an assistant to him it was sometimes necessary to accompany him to deliver lectures. One of which was the lecture he gave at the Nigerian Police Staff college located at Bukuru in Plateau State, during one of their graduation ceremonies where dignitaries; especially government high-top officials from all over Nigeria .

²¹ The Literal translation of which is: ‘Poor Masses Arise’ meaning poor masses arise and act, or stand up for your right.

the Church. Empowering them with biblical basis for such action (Boer1987; Boer 1989).²² Boer succeeded to remove the fear in the minds of many groups of the masses. He reached the peak of his mobilization when he published another title: ‘You can do greater things than Christ’ (Boer 1991). Boer’s idea of doing greater things than Christ has been resounded positively by one of the most respected theologian Rev. Prof. Pandang Yamsat in his publication titled; *The Role of the Church in Society and Development* (Yamsat 5-17).

Boer started to point towards external factors that have contributed seriously to the situation of the poor masses. He started organizing international conferences out of which he was able to make some thought provoking publications. There were three outstanding publications: ‘The Church & the External Debt’, together with which Boer published a little pamphlet titled ‘why are you poor’? Boer explained the former in this little book, breaking all the technical jargons into a simple and understandable English the poorly educated Nigerians. His message in these publications were clear: “...your government took some huge loans from IMF, instead of using the loan to better your life they have used it on luxuries and other unnecessary of unprofitable things that has generated no interest. (Boer, *Why Are You Poor?* 1988, xii)²³

Even though Boer was just the editor²⁴ of the book, he wrote and presented during the conference a 70 paged paper, and he was in the forefront of shaping the focus of the conference. Boer’s concern with the exercise was to develop Christian perspectives, including solutions to the Nigerian debt problems affecting the vulnerable persons (Boer 1992a; Boer 1992b). One of Boer’s publications that has to be mentioned here is ‘Caught in the Middle: Christians in Transnational Corporations; in which he continued to unveil how external factors have made the Nigerian society terribly underdeveloped; leaving the poor masses poorer year after year. The

²² Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) is a famous Dutch Calvinist, who was Prime Minister (circa 1901-1905) of the Netherlands. Kuyper's most widely read book translated into English is his *Lectures on Calvinism* and a fairly recent popular reader *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*. He became popular because he was able to implement Calvinist Theology in his Political Agenda in a synthesis rarely imitated, and in doing so, breaking ground and setting precedent towards implementing a Christian Government that we may pray comes to fruition in the future for all the World's States.

²³ Instead of the government to improve the living conditions they have no much money to do that because they are paying back not even the initial money that was borrowed, but they are using all your oil money to service such debts. Besides, large part of such loan did not even come to benefit you in Nigeria, they were kept in personal accounts abroad”

²⁴ The rest of the pages were contributions from eminent scholars from Nigeria and around the world, especially Africa. In fact, scholars with international reputation applauded the conference outcome.

main text of the book as described by himself is “discussion of corporations; effect of bottom-line investments; investor responsibility for employees, host community, end-user; Reformed theology of investment stewardship...” (Boer 1992c).

A Christian Missionary and a Humanitarian Diplomat

Boer was true to his call as a Christian Missionary (that is what is expected of any Christian Missionary: liberating the people totally), especially of the reformed tradition, when he published four main titles: *Christians & Mobilization*, *Talakawa Ku tashi Tsaye*, *Why are you Poor?*, *Caught in the Middle: Christians in Trans-national Corporations*. He was doing his work as a missionary when he mobilized the people to act against any oppressive elite in the government. He was also doing his work when he told the masses that, their government took some huge loans from IMF, and have used it on luxuries and on unprofitable things that has generated no interest etc.

Here, Boer is understood as having left the area of Humanitarian Diplomacy; because humanitarian diplomats are not supposed to interfere in the economic and political positions or views of their host countries. Boer is viewed as interfering, building or shaping the opinions of the citizens on socio-economic and political matters which according to the concern politicians is not part of his missionary tasks.

But in the opinion of this author, and in the opinion of many other people; that was the problem with the “gospel” that was brought to Africa. The “gospel” which kept talented Christians too long in the shackles of poverty; made little or no effort to liberate or release them from the shackles of poverty. As such most Nigerian Christians remained economically illiterates or un-oriented,²⁵ and politically paralysed because they were constantly reminded that ‘they are in the world but they are not of the world’ and that ‘the love of money is the root of all evil’ from the following Biblical references (Yamsat 1)) etc.

The Challenges of his work

²⁵ Though educated in the western sense of it; they are still uneducated in the spheres of business, they are still afraid of business for the fear that they may not be respected as good Christians; what a shame.

One of the the main challenges that Dr. Jan H. Boer face while conducting advocacy, negotiating, communicating to persuade decision makers, political and Church leaders and other opinion leaders to act in favour of the vulnerable masses include the fact that; it was extremely difficult for the people to understand him, because from their religious orientation they did not see their role as businessmen or businesswomen, again, they did not see their relevance in politics. Worse to all these; the Christians Boer met thought or understood ‘Christian humility’ as keeping quiet in almost everything. The advocated Christian humility was so much misunderstood.²⁶ Other challenges include the following as he wrote;

“Our main problem at the moment is lack of contact with ICS headquarters in Ibadan. Telephones do not work and mail is slow. My director, Rev. Adegbola, has been abroad ever since we began this work and we have not seen him or had contact with him since June, 1977. Whether or not he has returned I do not know. Unfortunately, we have been left with no advice, instructions or information. This total lack of consultation and coordination at this early stage does not make for a healthy beginning.”(Boer 19781-6)

In fact, it was considered a sin to take business seriously and to participate in politics, people are always referred to Biblical references such as John 18:36; (“My kingdom is not of this world”) Philippians 3:20 (“Our citizenship is in heaven”), Romans 12:2 (“Do not be conformed to this world”), John 17:14-16 (“They are not of the world”), Revelation 18:4 (“Come out of her, my people.”) Some interpret “Babylon” as political structures; thus, Christians should withdraw from them, Matthew 4:8-10 (Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world); for this biblical text; some argue that earthly political power is under satanic influence, as such “good Christians” should not be part of it.²⁷ There are Christian Groups such as; the Anabaptists, early monastic

²⁶ Humility is even misunderstood and wrongly interpreted to mean keeping quiet, not question leaders even if they go wrong or climbed or hold onto power through illegitimate means and corrupt practices. Sometimes wrongly making reference ‘that leaders are placed by God’.

²⁷ Other Biblical references include among others the following: Matthew 6:24 (“You cannot serve God and Mammon.”) Wealth-creation has been seen as a competing “master”, 1 Timothy 6:9–10 (“The love of money is the root of all evil”) is interpreted by many to warn against entering wealth-driven business. Matthew 19:21 (“Sell your possessions... and follow me”), other used to argue that Christians should reject material accumulation, Matthew 6:19 (“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth”) was understood as a prohibition on wealth-building. Luke 12:15, “Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” Luke 16:13–15 (What is prized by men is detestable to God). Applied to condemn profit-seeking business. James 4:13–16 Rebuke of business planning (‘Today or tomorrow we will make a profit...’) used by some to discourage business involvement entirely, Proverbs 23:4–5 (“Do not wear yourself out to get rich.”) has been seen by some as a warning against wealth-creation, Luke 6:20

movements, Jehovah's Witnesses, some Holiness groups, and some Pentecostal Holiness fellowships cite these verses to defend complete disengagement from political and economic systems.

Here it is necessary to draw the attention of Christians to the following Biblical references: Genesis 1:26-28; it can be noted that humanity was given dominion (mandate of governance), this has been seen by many scholars as the foundational cultural mandate, legitimizing human responsibility for public affairs. Daniel 6; Daniel 2:48-49; We can see Daniel and his friends in government service, which demonstrates righteous participation in state administration under pagan empires. Genesis 41:37-44; here Joseph is elevated to political leadership in Egypt, this is a biblical example of God appointing a believer to high government office. Proverbs 31:8-9 ("Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves") is often used to argue that advocacy in public life is a moral duty. Jeremiah 29:7 ("Seek the peace of the city... pray for it") implies active concern for the political and social welfare of society.

Matthew 22:21 ("Give to Caesar what is Caesar's") acknowledges the legitimacy of political authority and civic duty. Romans 13:1-7 Government as God's servant; here we notice Paul teaches that state authority is a divine institution; Christian participation is permissible. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 Pray for kings and all in authority clearly assumes the existence of a legitimate political order in which Christians operate. Acts 16:35-40; Acts 22:25-29 Paul appeals to Roman law; here we can see how Paul's invocation of his Roman citizenship shows lawful engagement with political systems. Matthew 5:13-16 'Salt and light in the world' has been applied by many theologians to public life, including governance.

Biblical References Supporting Christian Participation in Business and Wealth-Creation include the following: Genesis 2:15, humanity called to work and cultivate the earth; the "creation mandate" includes productivity and economic activity. Proverbs 31:10-31 here the entrepreneurial woman is a telling example, because it explicitly describes investment, trade, real estate, and value-creation. Deuteronomy 8:18 ("God gives you power to create wealth") affirms that wealth-creation is a divine empowerment.

("Blessed are you who are poor"); some traditions idealize poverty as spiritually superior.

Luke 19:11-27 Parable of the minas is about rewarding economic productivity; and condemning the servant who failed to invest. Matthew 25:14–30 Parable of the talents encourages responsible, profitable stewardship of resources. Acts 18:1-4 Paul as a tentmaker point to the situation that indicated Paul supported himself through business while doing ministry. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 Work with your hands... so you will lack nothing encourages economic productivity. Proverbs 10:4, 22 Diligence leads to wealth depicts wealth as a blessing resulting from righteous labor. Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 Diversify investments; this is a direct commendation of wise commercial activity. 1 Timothy 5:8 Which instruct Christians to provide for their households implies financial responsibility and economic engagement. Here, such people usually forget or ignore Biblical references such as; Used to argue that Christ’s followers belong to a spiritual kingdom, not earthly political systems. That was why Boer concluded that without conscientizing the people, it was not possible to bring about the desired change (Boer 2022,1).

Jan Boer continued to educate, empower and; in his own word “conscientize” the public to open-up and see what is going on around them, to participate and contribute to the development in their respective communities. When he left Nigeria he continued to write and came up with several amazing books; some which are titled as follows (in his series of ‘Studies in Christian – Muslim Relations’): “Nigeria’s Decades of Blood(1980-2002).”²⁸ “Christians: Why we reject the Muslim Law” Muslims: Why the Violence?” Muslims: Why the Sahria Law?”, “Christian and Muslims: Parameters of Living Together” etc.

The Lessons/Recommendations

Looking at the extent and the elaborate work Boer has done, there has not yet been an appreciation from the direct and indirect beneficiaries commensurate with what he did. Boer has certainly played a key role as a missionary and a Humanitarian Diplomat, such type of missionary work-ethos is needed in every deprived society. Individuals should learn from Boer’s type of missionry work; which has earned him a respect among the masses, though confronted by some powerful individuals in Nigeria. There is need for Mission boards and Christians to look at their tasks differently; the emphasis on ‘evangelism’ without strong or higher emphasis on humanitarian actions is old fashion and should be discouraged. Continuously preaching the

²⁸ If Boer will return to Nigeria now, he will realize that the situation has grown from Bad to worse.

gospel of ‘humility’ without empowering the people to speak-out, to stand up for their right, or hold leaders accountable is as bad as promoting the enslavement of the people for whom Christ died to set free.

A Theological Analysis: Non-Participation vs. Participation

In a write-up of this nature, it may not be out of place to provide a little insight, or a peep into Christian theological positions on the argument.

The Case for Non-Participation

The tradition of Christian withdrawal from politics and economic life draws heavily on New Testament texts emphasizing separation from “the world” (John 17:14-16; Romans 12:2). Early monasticism, Anabaptist separatism, and certain Pentecostal-Holiness traditions argue that political structures are inherently compromised by violence, power struggle, and moral ambiguity. They interpret Jesus’ statement that His kingdom is “not of this world” (John 18:36) as a call to radical discipleship free from worldly entanglement. Additionally, teachings warning against wealth (Matthew 6:24; 1 Timothy 6:9-10) are read as rejecting commercial pursuits that might distract from spiritual devotion. This position prioritizes holiness, simplicity, and eschatological hope over civic or economic participation.

The Case for Participation

Other Christian traditions including Roman Catholic social teaching, Reformed theology, Anglicanism, African public theology, and contemporary neo-Calvinism argue for active involvement in political and economic systems. They point to biblical figures such as Joseph, Daniel, and Esther, who exercised righteous political leadership. Paul’s positive teaching on government (Romans 13:1-7) and his own use of civic rights (Acts 22:25-29) form part of this argument. Regarding economics, passages such as Proverbs 31, the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), and Deuteronomy 8:18 support productive labor, innovation, and wealth-creation as dimensions of human stewardship. These traditions insist that Christian presence in governance and markets promotes justice, human flourishing, and the common good.

Synthesis of Both Views

A balanced theological perspective recognizes that both positions emphasize faithfulness to God but differ in understanding how holiness is lived out in a fallen world. The New Testament presents both warnings about the corrupting power of wealth and political ambition, and opportunities for redemptive engagement. Consequently, Christian ethics today often adopts a “missional” framework: believers may participate in politics and economics when such involvement advances justice, reduces suffering, and reflects Christ’s character. Yet withdrawal may also be appropriate where political structures demand moral compromise. Thus, participation is neither universally required nor universally forbidden; it is a context-sensitive calling discerned through Scripture, community, and the demands of Christian witness.

Conclusion

Humanitarian Diplomacy is act of persuasion, so that decision makers and opinion leaders can act at all times in the interest of vulnerable people, with the aim to mobilize public and governmental support and resources for humanitarian operations and programmes, and to facilitate effective partnership for responding to the needs of vulnerable people. Boer was truly a successful humanitarian diplomat; guided not only by the core principles of the Humanitarian Diplomacy, but he was guided by his core Christian Missionary Principles, and he has leaved up to the expectation.

For the sake of clarity, humanitarian diplomacy is the strategic use of negotiation, advocacy, and dialogue to protect vulnerable populations and secure access to humanitarian assistance during crises. It involves engaging governments, armed groups, international organizations, and communities to uphold humanitarian principles, neutrality, impartiality, humanity, and independence while navigating complex political environments. The best thing about a humanitarian diplomat is their ability to bridge divides: they combine empathy with skilled negotiation, creating space for life-saving aid and peaceful solutions where mistrust, conflict, and bureaucracy would otherwise block relief. That is exactly the appropriate description of Dr. Jan H. Boer; a Dutch by origin and a US citizen.

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