

**CHRISTIANS AND MOBILIZATION FOR  
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

This essay first saw the light as a lecture delivered at a conference held at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria in 1988 during the years of Operation Mobilization, a Federal Government programme headed by the charismatic Evangelical Dr. Jerry Gana. It was an attempt to arouse the interests of the average Nigerian citizen in the politics and social mobilization of the country.

Simultaneously, President Shagari had embarked on Operation Feed the Nation to encourage the development of contemporary farming methods. It was a heady time for the country with lots of excitement everywhere. This lecture was part of the programme of the Institute of Church & Society (ICS), both in Ibadan and Jos, to participate in and support these programmes.

Actually, already years earlier we at the ICS had identified the challenges these government programmes sought to face; the concerns were already embedded in its own programmes, but we sought to “make hay” of the optimistic atmosphere these government projects had awakened nationally. The approach the ICS developed is described at some length in Chapter III of this document. The ICS’s major emphasis was on the underlying religious basis to both underdevelopment and development as these play out in Nigeria.

Though the lecture itself dates from 1988, the basic principles outlined remain valid and useful for every so-called “underdevelopment” situation. The literature—booklets, pamphlets and brochures-- the ICS produced in the context of the programme is still relevant and helpful, especially those in English. No one else has published radical materials like these in the Hausa language. Feel free to copy whatever you find useful on this page or contact me for further information at < [boerjf@hotmail.com](mailto:boerjf@hotmail.com) >.

Those interested in pursuing further stories about this booklet as well as the ICS’ programme of community development are referred to Jan H Boer & Frances A. Boer-Prins, *Every Square Inch—A Missionary Memoir*. Vol. 2, throughout. (E-book self-published on < [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) >, where it is available free of charge. It is possible that in the near future that memoir will also appear on this website. Just keep your eyes open.)

Unfortunately, the ICS Northern Area Office closed its doors some years ago, while its headquarters in Ibadan is a mere shadow of its glory days. But while I’m

still around, I will be happy to be contacted over these matters discussed in this article as well as in the others under the rubric of “Development.” I’m still within reach. Feel free! I will welcome you to my screen!

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## ***I. THE SITUATION***

The farmers quietly grumbled amongst each other. They had been waiting for the District Head and his guest, a “big man” from Yola. An hour and thirty minutes had passed and they still had not appeared. The farmers were getting impatient. It was time to plant their crops and it was only because the District Head himself had invited them to the meeting that these village farmers had agreed to come at all. Now they were not so sure they should have left their farms.

Finally, after a full two hours, the District Head and his big guest appeared only for the former to apologize. He would soon complete his discussions with the stranger and then he would attend to the business for which the farmers had been invited. The stranger stood high and tall with his flowing robes. He looked over the farmers with a look of arrogance as if he dared them to object to the District Head’s explanation. Let his business be finished first so that he can go back to the Commissioner who sent him, back to the comforts of Yola. “The farmers better wait for a big man like me.” That, clearly, was his attitude.

That, of course, has been the attitude of the peasant farmers, not only in this case, but throughout the years and throughout the country. It is a general attitude that pervades their lives. The big are big and the poor are to humbly do their bidding.

After the District Head and his arrogant guest disappeared, most of the peasants merely grumbled. What CAN you do about such a situation, except to grumble? But one man spoke up.

“Why should we wait for this stranger?” he challenged his cohorts. “We have been called here to prepare for the launching of Operation Feed the Nation. Our farming has been interrupted just so that this stranger can be served and go his way. His salary will not be interrupted if he spends the night here. Let’s all go home and show that we don’t want to be treated this way.”

The others looked up with a look of surprise.

“Who dares to speak that boldly?” they thought.

The bold speaker received no visible or audible support. He was the only one to act on his own suggestion. The others waited for another full half hour before the

District Head attended to them. The “big man” from Yola was driven away in his Mercedes without even so much as acknowledging their presence.

The above is a true story. It is a story that could happen almost anywhere in Nigeria any day. It is typical of the passive attitude that characterizes the peasant class in much of Nigeria whenever they are faced with oppression and contempt.

Oh, I know there are exceptions. I know that peasant women blocked the road when former Governor Yohanna Madaki was to drive through their community - but their men had safely hidden themselves! I know of the peasants who stopped the lorry with fertilizer and forced the driver to see them his load at the official subsidized price right there and then on the highway. I also remember the “Bakalori incident” in which more than three hundred villagers died (Usman, 1982). Such things do happen and when peasants show such resistance to oppression and abuse, my hope for them as a group revives, even when the action ends up in tragedy. However, such radical action is not characteristic of the peasantry in general.

There is a government dispensary in the village, but it seldom has any drugs. The villagers complain amongst themselves, but they do not ask where the drugs may be. When they do occasionally know, they take no action against the culprit. When the local headmaster and his teachers fail to teach the children of the village and the latter seldom pass examinations, the parents complain, but seldom challenge the teachers, let alone the headmaster. Neither do they consult with the local education authority. When I once encouraged a group of parents to so challenge, they refused, arguing that the government had not given them the authority to interfere in the school! When the local farmers cannot get their rightful share of subsidized fertilizers except on the expensive black market, they simply do without, thought they may grumble amongst themselves.

And so it goes on and on in one village after another. Year in; year out.

The poor suffer from a low self-image. They often are illiterate. They have no impressive cars, houses or clothes. Their food is very basic at best. They think of themselves as powerless and, *therefore*, they are. They suffer from an excessive degree of docility and are all too ready to pay homage to any “big man” who happens to come their way. When they are cheated, either individually or communally, locally or nationally, they seldom rise up against it but accept it with a shrug of the shoulder, placing the right hand inside the left with the remark,

“*Yaya za mu yi?*” (Hausa: What can we do about it?) That is never more than a rhetorical question, the implied answer of which is a loud “*nothing!*”

If the villagers happen to be Christian, they have *religious* reasons for their passive acceptance of all these forms of oppression. They are taught over and over again that the role of the Christian is to be obedient to those in authority - and those who regard themselves to be over them are legion! They are taught to pray for them, to honour them, to assist them and to pay their taxes to them regardless of what happens to these taxes or how that authority is exercised. Furthermore, they are taught to be patient. After all, their reward lies in heaven; certainly not on earth. Least of all would they expect their God to be interested in such affairs. Is He not interested primarily in spiritual and church affairs? So, let us be good religious boys and girls and put our hope in Him. Let us concentrate on religious things, for only they will bring peace. One day, upon Christ's return, we will be delivered. And so the attention of many Christian peasants is directed to their future peace and reward without any hope for change in their present condition and without any thought about improving them here and now. Such attitudes led Karl Marx to refer to religion as the opium of the people: it puts them to sleep, thus giving their exploiters a free hand.

I suspect that the official government policy of having religion taught in the schools - of course, I am aware of discrimination here in various states - is aimed basically at inculcating and continuing this servile attitude. The goal is to keep our people passive, religious, docile and to prevent them from becoming radical. Religion in its pure and undefiled forms and radical action are considered to be opposites that never meet. Religion is expected to produce a people with high personal morality, a great sense of duty and obedience, but certainly not inclined to radical social thinking, let alone action.

## ***II. THE UNDERLYING CAUSES***

### **A. Socio-Political Aspects**

I will not pretend to know all that has gone into the making of such servile passivity on the part of our peasantry. Let me suggest that part of it lies in the traditional culture where the chief often is associated with divinity and, consequently, with much power. The stories I have heard through the years of the power of chiefs at various levels convince me that this traditional set up has made for an excessive level of obedience to such rulers on the part of the people. a

colleague of mine, the son of a chief, told me he despises the chieftaincy institution, for he has observed the oppressive rule of his father. My colleague did not recognize the evil in his father's rule until he, the son, became sensitised to these issues as a Christian.

To do a good job in analyzing all the causes, I would need to delve into international factors such as the Arab and Western slave trade enterprises as well as the subsequent incorporation of Nigeria into the international economy of capitalism via colonialism. This project is an essay, not a tome. I can only refer you to some of my other publications (1979, 1984, 1988).

It can, however, be said that the above order of servility was greatly encouraged by the colonial regime, as the authors of *The Kaduna Mafia* have so ably documented. P. Chunun Logams has described how under colonialism the class from which the Kaduna Mafia eventually emerged was firmly entrenched in power and clothed in prestige, which they never relinquished and which they were able to utilize even after the British had left (Takaya:Ch.5). It was that group, among others, that had learned the technique of using and exploiting the peasant class by means of manipulative tools that include religion, tribalism, inculcation of fear, show of power and divide-and conquer tactics. [(Takaya:especially Chs. 9, 10. Cf. also Usman, 1987:Chs. 2, 6 and Appendix D.) This reference, it should be clear, does not imply full support on my part of Usman. When, for example, Usman asserts that missionary organizations are "systematically and in co-ordinated fashion" used by European and American governments to prevent African cohesion (Usman, 1987:32), as a veteran missionary, I can only demand that he back up this assertion with concrete facts and sources. I do, however, know of at least one former Nigerian Christian pastor who claims to be employed by the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Nigeria in order to report to them on developments in Gongola State and to interfere in the affairs of former Muslims who have become Christians by bribing them to return to the fold.]

## B. The Religious Aspect

I want to look further into the religious aspect of the cause. My reference here will be specifically to the Christian contribution to this situation, not because I relish in self-criticism, but because a problem cannot be cured without an objective analysis of its roots. It is my conviction that both Christianity and Islam have contributed to the problems under discussion. The authors of *The Kaduna Mafia* have ably served us in alerting us to the Muslim contribution. That Muslims HAVE contributed is acknowledged by their own sons such as Yusufu Bala Usman and

former civilian Governor of Kaduna State, Abdulkadir Balarabe Musa, who deeply implicated his fellow Muslims when he referred to “the retrograde north of federalists, slave-holders, crooks, parasites and foreign agents” (Usman, 1987:3).

When we ask these questions, we must take care to distinguish between a religion and its adherents, between Islam and Muslims, between Christianity and Christians. I am not prepared to say that Islam *per se* is bound to be oppressive. The adherents of a religion seldom meet its standard; in fact, they often distort their religion beyond the point of recognition. Similarly, when I talk of Christian contributions to the problems, I am not suggesting that the Christian religion inherently leads to the creation of these problems. I am talking about how its adherents have *de facto* contributed and I will in the course of this paper show that their contribution is the result of distortion of that religion, not of the religion itself. In fact, the basic aim of this paper is to show that the Christian religion has formidable resources to overcome these problems. Whether the same can be said for Islam is for its adherents to demonstrate.

As a pastor and evangelist, I have worked daily for over a decade with villagers in southern Gongola State. I have concluded that, as powerful and real as the external causes for such oppression may be, the basic causes for their *continuation* are *internal*: they reside in the minds and hearts of the victims. It is their *attitude* that allows these situations to continue.

An aged retired pastor in Gongola State recalled for my benefit an incident in his village during his childhood that made such an impression on him and the others that it changed the whole community. Traditionally the Fulani had ruled over his people for generations. Whenever a Fulani would ride into their village on his horse, he would jump off and throw the reins carelessly into the hands of the closest bystander, demanding that his horse be taken care of during the night - free of charge, of course. It had become an unquestioned tradition. One day, not long after he had become one of the first Christians in the village, a man who had the reins of such a horse thrust into his hands dropped them and walked off. In a burst of anger, the Fulani pursued him and slapped him left and right. Who was this villager to disregard him, a member of the master race?

A ruckus developed and soon the whole village gathered. The relationship to the Fulani was changed forever. No one ever accepted that traditional responsibility again. Their attitude had changed and it brought them a degree of emancipation. Though their bondage was not by any means broken, the first step had been taken and it set in motion a long process that now threatens the hegemony of the Fulani

over the area. That cause for the profound change was internal: an attitudinal change sparked by a new religious impulse.

The above point was corroborated recently by a chief in that same state who has been quoted as saying that as long as the common man bows before the big man, "so long will the latter abuse the former. It is the same point made by Yohanna Madaki, former Governor of Gongola State, when he said that he fears no man, he only fears **fear**, quoting, I believe, from Franklin D. Roosevelt, a former American President. During his short but turbulent tenure as Governor, Madaki had learned that fear is more destructive than any man. Fear is an emotion, an attitude. The attitudes of servility and fear are still very strong among the peasantry, even in the Christians amongst them.

***Why, I ask, did the Christian religion not help its adherents overcome fear and servility?*** No, this is not quite the correct way of putting the question. For one thing, if the Christian religion is going to encourage the liberation of the poor, the benefits should not be restricted to Christians, for millions of peasants adhering to either Traditional Religion or Islam are equally oppressed and equally in need of emancipation. The Christian religion is not designed to aid only its adherents; it is meant to benefit all citizens. Any attempt on the part of Christians to restrict the benefits of Christ in the area of liberation and rights will eventually backfire and lead to the accusation that, while they seek their own emancipation, Christians trample on the rights of others. A selective campaign for freedom will end up in new forms of oppression.

The second reason the above question is not well put is that the Christian religion did help, as we saw in the story of the Fulani. Without any conscious, official and deliberate programme on the part of Christian leaders, the seed of emancipation did its work in that village through the new Spirit that motivates Christians. It is a slow process that will surely accomplish emancipation as Christians gradually open to the new reality around them. Certainly amongst Christians in Nigeria's Middle Belt, profound changes are taking place. They are moving towards insisting on their place in the sun, on their rights. This is true especially of Christian leaders. The Christian religion *is* helping Christians in this respect.

However, the movement towards emancipation is more a campaign for religious rights than economic and social rights, though such rights are always closely related to each other. And sometimes the campaign leaves one with the impression that it is more an effort to protect the rights and interests of a class of religious professionals with their own political agenda than an attempt to release the poor

from their bondage. Politics being what it frequently is in Nigeria, Christians should not simply assume that those championing Christian rights are invariably operating without ulterior motives. No religion is immune to manipulation - and neither are religious leaders, whether they be Christian or Muslim. It would not be the first time some are operating with hidden political agendas in our country! Sometimes I have heard some Christian leaders describe the present campaign for religious equality with such relish that I was led to think they are enjoying the fracas and would like to prolong it either to achieve their own hidden agenda or simply for the fun of it. I am not accusing anyone; I am merely alerting ourselves to an ever-present danger.

The campaign, moreover, is not the result of “emancipation theology” so much as it is a reaction to alleged Muslim attacks on Christian rights. It is a reaction to perceived external threats rather than the result of insights derived from the Bible and Christian theology. The attitude of the poor towards their ecclesiastical leaders is not all that different from their attitude towards the elite in general. It is characterized by servility while the relationship is basically structured hierarchically. One encouraging exception to which I will refer in more detail later, is the submission of the TEKAN churches to the Political Bureau.

The question still stands: why have Christians not *consciously* tapped their religious resources to affect *emancipation of the poor* when Christians in other areas of the world have gone to great length in this area? That is my real question. For the answer we need to delve into colonial and missionary history.

During the colonial era, education was “harnessed to the service of British .... interest,” which was first of all economic. The curriculum was designed to meet that interest. It “was evolved to produce clerks needed for the companies and government administration, to inculcate obedience to the colonizing power and respect for its history, language and culture.” It was also to include a moral element so that “the value of Truth, Honesty, deference to superiors, the dignity and pleasure of work, the reward of Unselfishness” would become part of the makeup of the educated and servile elite. One H.S. Scott summarized it this way:

The conception of the aim of education was, that it should make useful citizens ... who would be of use to us. The conception was one of exploitation and development for the benefit of ... Great Britain - it was to this purpose that such education ... was directed (Boer, 1979: 64-65; 1984:16. Scott:737).

Missions supported colonialism in general, including their educational policy. Karl Kumm, the founding pioneer of the Sudan United Mission (SUM), asserted that missions assist “the magnificent work our Government is doing ... in these lands” by means of Christian education (Kumm, *Hausaland*:266-267, 270; *Khont*:229-230. Boer, 1979:136-137; 1984:52).

In a discussion on how the government and missions could co-operate in education, Gilbert Dawson, Field Secretary of the SUM, was happy to have the government supply the schools with textbooks on the various subjects, so that the mission could concentrate on the subject of religion. In other words, the textbooks designed by the government to carry out its educational policy were acceptable to the mission. The SUM was so impressed with the government scheme that it placed some of its own schools in that scheme. This attitude was not peculiar to the SUM, for the 1913 Lokoja Conference, one of a series of missionary ecumenical meetings in the North, expressed interest in training students in the government scheme and favoured co-operation with the government in this area (Boer, 1979:137, 192-194; 1984:77-79).

I emphasize for good reasons that the above goals were adhered to by the ecumenical community, including the Anglican Church. In a discussion based on a pre-publication version of this essay, an Anglican brother denied that the above was part of the Anglican past in Nigeria. He appealed to the heroic work of Walter Miller as an example. Unfortunately, his emotional rejection of the above policies cannot undo well-documented history. His church, no more than the others, can deny its participation in the development of these ecumenical policies. It is only the Roman Catholic Mission that is not covered by this discussion, mainly because of their isolation from the rest of the Christian missions in the country.

The intention of the above educational policy was to produce zombies, creatures at the behest of the colonial regime, loyal, obedient, ready to do its bidding, either directly or indirectly through the local chief or emir. Least of all was it the intention to produce critical and creative graduates who would do independent thinking, for such people could become dangerous to the establishment. It was strictly status quo - and missions bought into it. This was no way to produce a generation of revolutionaries who would advocate radical changes in social relationships.

Another part of the governments’ educational policy was to set up special schools for the sons of chiefs and emirs. Again, the SUM was prepared to co-operate in such a scheme. Dawson, for example, was in favour of the SUM to provide a

missionary principal for such a school planned for Ibi, a town in southern Gongola. He saw it as a scheme where the government would pay missionaries to bring the Gospel to future traditional leaders. The alternative would be a Muslim principal, something the mission obviously would not favour (Boer, 1979:193; 1984:78). Though one can understand such reasons, it is clear that the mission was completely blind to the negative aspects of such schools. The missions concentrated on evangelism with such intensity that they were oblivious of the social consequences of such educational goals. Among these goals and consequences were the further entrenchment of Muslim chiefs and emirs and other northern aristocrats to whom Balarabe Musa later referred as “crooks” (Takaya:34-35, 51. Boer, 1979:211-212, 398; 1988:10-11).

The entire mission approach to education was part and parcel of the general policy to support colonialism in principle. During the early years, the SUM instructed its missionaries to “endeavour to inculcate in the minds of their neighbours and dependents principles of loyalty to the Government and obedience to its demands in this (taxes) and other respects, pointing out the benefits of open roads, cessation of slave raiding, etc. etc, which have been conferred upon the country in return for which but a slight impost is made” (Boer, 1979:185; 1984:54).

Readers of my other publications on missions and colonialism in Northern Nigeria, will have observed that there was a great deal of friction and even hostility between the two (see especially Boer, 1988:7-22). The missions were fearless, though careful, in opposing the colonial regime where they felt it necessary. No one can accuse them of cowardice in this respect. Their support for colonialism was in no way based on fear or subservience. The opposition of missions was evoked whenever the regime adopted policies the former considered to constitute a betrayal of true colonialism. However, the basic educational policies of the government were never the object of such opposition; missions and government agreed on the basics, if not always on the details.

What I am really showing her is that the Christian church in Nigeria, at least in Northern Nigeria, was a status quo church in terms of social relations from its beginning. Upsetting the social apple cart was far from the minds of missionary and pastor. The emphasis was on loyalty, on obedience to those in authority. That emphasis was due largely to blindness on the part of missionaries to the forces of exploitation and oppression that were given a colonial facelift with the result that they became difficult to recognize, especially by people who were preoccupied with other-worldly affairs - and that certainly was true of Evangelical missions like the SUM. Such is the social legacy of the Nigerian church. It is here, I submit,

that we meet a basic cause for the continued servility on the part of the Christian peasantry. It is also, I suggest, a major reason for the authoritarianism of church leadership, even in churches that have constitutions that were designed to militate against just such hierarchical relations.

In view of the foregoing, I am most happy to report on an exciting and exceptional development on the Christian political scene. The submission of the TEKAN churches to the Political Bureau proposes a very different approach to political affairs, namely from the bottom up. Instead of the peasants being the object of political and social development performed on and for them, TEKAN wants the people at the grassroots level to be involved in the decision making, for, it notes, when decisions are made at the top, developments become elitist, expensive, ineffective and bedeviled by corruption. The argument is backed up by concrete examples in various sectors. This direction is most encouraging. I, for one, hope that the TEKAN churches will begin to apply that same approach to their own ecclesiastical affairs as well as to the political sphere.

But we have still not reached the bottom rung of our search. I have tried to answer the question why Christian peasants in the north of Nigeria have scarcely overcome their traditional attitude of servitude. I later rephrased the question to ask why Christians have not drawn upon the Bible and tradition to create a theology for the emancipation of the poor. I have found at least part of the answer in the colonial/missionary legacy. The question still remains: how could that legacy have developed? What lay behind it? It is to this question that I now turn. It is an important question, for the answer to it constitutes a deep-seated problem in the Nigerian church even today. The answer lies in one short word: *dualism*.

The word “dualism” has a variety of meanings, depending on the context. The dualism I have in mind here has its origin in pre-Reformation history, and is especially associated with and a result of Thomas Aquinas’s synthesis of Christian thought with Pagan Greek philosophy. For our present purposes it is sufficient to summarize the following main features of dualism as it eventually filtered down through the years into the Evangelical community and its missionaries:

- (1) Reality is divided into the spheres of the material and the spiritual
- (2) God is said to be more interested in the spiritual than the material.  
There is thus a hierarchical relationship between the two, with the spiritual taking priority.
- (3) One needs divine revelation, e.g., the bible, to understand the spiritual world, the world of the church and theology. Here human reasoning is insufficient.

(4) For the affairs of the world, human reason is a sufficient source of information.

(5) Working in the spiritual area is often called “the work of God,” while working in the world is not really service to Him. Alternatively, working in the spiritual means one is working “full-time” for God, while working in the world constitutes at best “half-time” service.

With the above points in mind, it is possible to understand H.R. Rookmaker’s description of dualism:

This world is good, but yet has autonomy of its own. The world of faith, of grace, of religion is the higher one, a world for which we have need of God’s revelation. This is where our aims and affections should be set. But the lower world, the world of men the world of “nature,” can be understood by reason, and here in fact reason reigns. It is as such non-religious, secular. Here there is no difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, as both act according to the natural laws of thought and action (Rookmaker:34-35. See “Dualism” in indices of Boer, 1979 and 1984, especially 1979:452-454).

Another description of this kind of dualism comes from Ruben Alves, According to him, this kind of theology has its

ultimate concern in eternity, God, and salvation of the soul. (Its) relation to the world, to life, to history, when it is not negative is purely tangential. Or it puts the world and life in an inferior hierarchical rank: natural/supernatural; the secular world/the religious world; the material/the spiritual; the temporal/the eternal (Quoted in Boer, 1979:453).

In the same vein, R.H. Tawney, a well-known economist,

describes this dualism in terms of relating the religious and secular as “parallel and independent provinces, governed by different laws, judged by different standards, and amenable to different authorities.” It is based on “an attitude which forms so fundamental a part of modern political thought, that... its precarious philosophical basis ... [is] commonly forgotten” (p. 279, as quoted in Boer, 1979:453).

This is the dualism that has led to a popular mentality among Christians that would divorce their religious obligations from their participation in political, economic and social affairs - in short, from their participation in human society as a whole. The Christian religion is thus reduced to a personal, private, and spiritual affair that has relevance for personal morality, family relations, and church affairs. It has little or nothing to contribute to social affairs beyond these.

This is the mentality that has dominated most missions in Northern Nigeria especially and prevented them from taking the world and its affairs seriously as missionary concerns. Everything was looked at in terms of evangelistic opportunities. If no such opportunity was recognized, the missions were not interested and paid no attention. Hence, they unwittingly participated in and helped perpetuate practices that eventually turned against the Gospel. The negative reaction of many nationalists to the church can largely be explained from this perspective. Dualism is responsible for an extremely narrow view of the Christian religion and the Kingdom of God and has prevented Christians from participation in politics. This assertion is not merely mine; it has been repeated *ad nauseam* in the literature. Western theologians and African nationalists charged missions with dualism and recognized the same effect I have summarized for you. (In addition to the entry "Dualism" in the indices in Boer, 1979 and 1984, see also the entry "Nationalism" as well as entries including the word "ecumenical" in the Table of Contents, Boer, 1979 and Ch. 7 in Boer, 1984.)

In terms of our immediate subject, it is this dualistic mentality that kept missions in Nigeria from recognizing various forms of injustice not only but even led them to participate unwittingly in them. Missions were prepared to fight injustice when they saw it. They were not afraid. But their dualism blinded them to many forms of it.

This dualism is also part of the legacy of the church of Nigeria, though there are many encouraging signs that Christians are struggling to overcome it, without always realizing what it is they are trying to overcome. This dualism *must* be overcome if the peasants, especially Christian peasants, are to recognize and utilize the resources the Gospel has for a re-alignment of social, economic and political relations. It must be overcome if the Christian religion is to become a positive force in mass mobilization towards emancipation.

### ***III. A RELIGIOUS PROGRAMME FOR COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION***

The rest of this essay is devoted to a description of the development programme of the ICS, Northern Area Office, Jos. It is a programme of radical integration of religious teachings and social realities. The first part of the programme consists of dialogue in which Bible passages and situations are compared with and contrasted to the conditions in which the peasants find themselves. We have prepared a booklet, *Living in God's World*. (Hausa version: *Kai da Dukiyarka*.)

The first point of the dialogue is to enlarge the people's idea as to the scope of the ***Kingdom of God***, of the Christian religion, of God's own range of interest. Biblical passages about the Kingdom of God are discussed to show that God's interest, rule and His Gospel go far beyond the narrow range people tend to associate with the Christian religion. His kingdom is, in fact, co-extensive with all of creation. He rules everywhere and we owe Him allegiance and obedience everywhere. Thus, when a peasant steps into a government office or hospital, he goes where his King is already present with His rule and power. This should give him courage. It also gives him certain rights as a citizen of both our nation and the Kingdom of God.

The next point is the ***Goodness of Creation***. Based on Genesis, we lead them to the awareness that God has declared His creation good and He delights in it. Why, then, is it that Christians have a kind of theoretical contempt for the physical? Why do we think God is not interested in the physical? The point here is to help the people realize God's interest in this world and its affairs. Awareness of God's love for the world helps awaken the peasant's interest in the world and renders it legitimate in his newly developing Christian conscience.

Working in this world is not something that is of dubious Christian value, for the first order that God gives in the Bible is the so-called Cultural mandate of Gen. 1:26, 28. The first task is not something spiritual but very worldly: to take care of the world, to subdue it, to rule over it. Though it is true that in some cultures mastery over nature and the world has tended to degenerate into its rape, in Nigeria our problem has been more an excessive awe for nature that has kept the peasantry from tackling it.

Man is created in ***God's image***, the passage tells us, and that image is, among other things, expressed in ruling and subduing the world. So, away with negative thoughts about doing something about the world as being a sign of illegitimate worldliness. Farming, politics, business, etc., are responses to God's design. Christians should not regard such occupations as being of secondary value in God's eye. They should be there, working there with the aim of serving God and emancipating both themselves and their neighbour.

The image of God also means that every person, no matter his economic or social status, deserves, nay, demands the highest respect. Made in the image of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! The low self-image with which the peasant is burdened must be erased from his soul. He has every reason to stand up and be counted. He is somebody! He is a big man, as much as any rich and powerful

person. The fact of the image serves to improve his self-image and reduce his awe for the “big man” not only, but also contains the seed for resisting the “big man” who would cheat him. After all, they are on an equal level: both made in the image of God the Most High!

Then there is the issue of *obedience*. We have already noted the prevalence of an almost absolute sense of obedience among the Christian peasants. They know that Romans 13 prescribes obedience to those in authority, but they have not been shown that the authorities to be obeyed are servants of God and are to behave as such. When they begin to act as servants of demons, the obligation to obey evaporates. Other passages discussed here include Exodus 1, where the midwives disobey Pharaoh when the latter commands them to commit murder. The story of Ahab and Naboth (I Kings 21) is studied. It not only serves to challenge abused authority but also indicates the risk of challenging it. Daniel’s resistance to ungodly authority also comes into play as well as the story of Acts in which the Apostles, including Paul himself, refused to obey when ordered to stop proclaiming the Gospel. Obey authority? Yes, indeed, it remains an important Christian tradition, but there is a limit.... Whereas in the past the church emphasized the main thrust of the tradition, in this particular context we stress the equally important limit.

The concept of *Jubilee* in Leviticus 25 is a powerful one that Christians have yet to explore for its contemporary significance. In a day when peasants are frequently driven off their land and even from their villages for schemes that are often hardly related to their own welfare, the biblical concept of Jubilee gives one something to think about in terms of ownership, distribution and use of land. Should they always move regardless of the stated purpose without asking questions? Is there ever a time they may do more than simply question? This is a question that must be answered in the context of each individual case. However, a mature Christian community will no longer simply get up and leave, for they will have theological, that is, religious reasons to query the demand to move out.

There is the whole question of *bribery and corruption* from which the peasant suffers more than anyone else. We study why the Bible forbids bribery: it is an obstacle to justice. We study what the prophets have to say about injustice and oppression - powerful stuff aimed at all who perpetuate it. All power blocks are openly called to account: religious leaders, politicians and kings. All of them are challenged.

In this context, certain New Testament passages take on a new and more urgent significance. The first is the Magnificat in Luke 1:51-53, where we overhear Mary, the mother of our Saviour:

He (Christ) has shown strength with his arm,  
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,  
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
And exalted those of low degree;  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
And the rich He has sent empty away.

The ICS conducts its conscientization sessions in many denominations. One day it was held in a denomination that frequently recites the Magnificat in their liturgy. When the participants were asked whether they could explain the meaning of this text or interpret it in terms of their own situation, one man blurted out in the Hausa language, "Ah, we only recite it without thinking about it!"

The words of the Magnificat are worthy of weekly recitation. The fathers who instituted the custom clearly understood it. The time has come to think about these words once again. They are powerful and meant to be taken seriously. They ought to be a source of encouragement to the poor and a threat to all oppressors.

Jesus' first recorded speech in Luke 4:18, a self-introduction to His own village, also takes on new significance and power. Christ introduced Himself to His townsmen as follows:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,  
because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed.

These passages identify Jesus Christ as a revolutionary in our present context. It is dualism that has prevented Christian leaders from recognizing the potential revolutionary thrust of these passages and the same has kept them from making their members aware of this thrust. Dualism has led them to concentrate on church and other spiritual affairs---while the country as a whole moved on, leaving a whole lot of both Christians and Muslims a marginalized lot, especially the peasants among them. Instead of the gospel liberating the people, it did indeed become their opium. Instead of empowering the people, they were disenfranchised

economically. And in their false sense of obedience and awe, the peasant accepted his lot, though grumblingly so.

Then there is James 5:1-6, where we read:

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver have corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your field are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

This passage is followed by advice regarding patience in suffering. The Lord will soon return. This advice at first glance seems to support those who tell oppressed people to await their reward in the hereafter. However, such is a gross misreading, for the meaning of patience is explained in :10, where we read, “Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.” This is not the patience of one who passively awaits a heavenly reward. This is the patience of prophets who fearlessly spoke up against oppressors, including priests and kings. These OT prophets were stoned, imprisoned, thrown into wells, exiled, etc. etc., but they had the patience to endure all that suffering. Their reward was indeed reserved for heaven. Their patience was an active patience in suffering that resulted from seeking the freedom of the poor. *That* is the example held before us.

In the ICS programme we do not encourage individuals to act alone. We do not force people into a prophetic style. Only God can call a person to that kind of a ministry. The ICS encourages people to act together against oppression. And surely, church leaders - elders, pastors, bishops - have a collective calling to be prophetic, not only for their religious rights but just as much for the economic and social rights of the poor living around them. The ICS programme aims to equip the saints, that is, to equip them with the spiritual tools to resist all those who abuse them. That, surely, is also the task of all church leaders.

Finally, the biblical teaching of the *community or Body of Christ* is adduced to encourage the peasants, especially the Christian peasants, to try to improve their lot together with the new spirit and attitude which they have by now begun to adopt. this is often a difficult hurdle to overcome, for many communities have previously sought to improve their conditions on a communal basis. They would entrust

someone with their money only to find that the money would disappear. There is hardly a village where this has not happened. The culprit may be an individual or a government department, but the result is the same: the money is gone and the desire to work communally has evaporated. Nevertheless, no community has refused to give it one more try after they have gone through the dialogue with us. There are two exceptions to the last sentence. In both cases the local pastors opposed the programme because they felt threatened in their positions. However, pastors who recognize Jesus as the great Emancipator have nothing to fear, unless they prefer to rule over a church consisting of docile sheep.

By the time we have gone through all this, the process of conscientization has begun to make its impact. The villagers then form a co-operative of some sort and begin to determine their needs and what to do about them. They begin to plan their programme, including raising money amongst themselves. They have built medical facilities, roads, small bridges, established educational facilities and more. They have challenged those who cheated them with false measurements and, in some cases, have obtained fertilizers where they previously despaired of access. The role of the ICS representative is to serve as facilitator, advisor and to link them with whatever expertise they need. But it is *their* programme. *They* make the decisions. *They* to the work. *They* raise their own money - with some notable exceptions.

The point here is: *They are moving from being objects of development to that of subjects*. That is development. The basis for development is now there, without which no new skills, government plans and departmental re-organization will have any effect on them at all. The programme is still in its infancy and requires fine-tuning, but the basic blocks are in place. We have practised in Plateau and Gongola States and are now expanding to Kaduna State.

## ***V. CONCLUDING REMARKS***

The above programme is an example of how religion, in this case, the Christian religion, contains the seed for mobilization in a positive way. It is a programme that aims to give Christians *Christian* motivation to mobilize themselves by undermining the negative dualism in their legacy. It is a programme in line with MAMSER and in line with various statements from the Federal Government that have encouraged conscientization of the peasants so they know their rights and resist injustice.

It is therefore a mistake when government officials in charge of the development of co-operatives reject applications for the establishment of co-operatives with an overtly religious overtone, for in so doing they undermine some of the deepest motives that can mobilize the peasantry positively. One cannot blame peasants when they display cynicism with respect to both Government and the civil service. The very civil servants who are assigned to encourage the development of co-operatives undermine their own task by refusing to register co-operatives that have overtly religious overtones. This is happening in Muri and Wukari, both in Gongola State. Dr. Jerry Gana of MAMSER fame promised that his organization would seek to rectify this problem. We will see! To us it appears to be a matter of religious discrimination. To suppress the positive use of religious motives in mobilization in a country as religious as Nigeria amounts to suppressing the strongest of human impulses.

A similar mistake has been made in Plateau State, where a sizeable group of Christian civil servants had banded together in order to pray and conduct Bible studies. They felt the need for this programme in order to encourage each other to do their work seriously and conscientiously--a most positive use of religious motives. However, the government forbade them to proceed with the programme, seeing in it only an effort at religious partisanship. The government thereby deprived its workers and itself of potentially the most noble and most powerful motives among its workforce.

Nigeria has suffered much from religious fanaticism, intolerance and manipulation. An increasing number of people are becoming skeptical of religion in all of its forms. In this paper I challenge Christians, Muslims, Traditionalist and Secularists to bring out the positive aspects of their religions in the service of the people of Nigeria. The programme of the ICS is one way in which this is being developed.

I recognize that the mobilization programme outlined above is largely on a micro-level, rather than national or macro. But the world of the peasant's awareness is largely micro. That is where we begin. Our hope and confidence is, however, that once politics begins heating up again, those who have participated in the programme will carry their new attitude with them into the world of parties and politics beyond the village level.

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