

Propositions for Renewal in Christian Socio-Economic

Thought and Practice¹

Written for and delivered to

Jos-Bukuru Theological Society-- April, 1982

This paper is really a continuation of that of last month. Whereas at that time I presented my thinking on some theological concepts needed for renewal in Christian socio-economic thought and practice, today I hope to propose some concrete measures and changes I consider necessary for a more true and rigorous Christian style. However, before proceeding, I have a couple of remarks to make that emerge out of last month's discussion, not in order to make sure I have the last word, but because they may be necessary for proper understanding.

Last month I presented what appeared to some a diatribe against reason and the legitimacy of knowledge gained through reason. I was questioned, moreover, about what appeared to some an invalid system.

Allow me to repeat what I wrote then, namely that the choice of issues I presented was determined largely by my discoveries of problems in Evangelical behavior and views *vis a vis* capitalism and colonialism. It was to correct these ideas or to propose alternatives that I presented what I did. That mindset included a largely unexamined assumption of the autonomy and sufficiency of human reason in politico-economic affairs. It was that assumption that I opposed. There was no need to defend the legitimacy of using human reason as such, for such use was never disputed by the Evangelicals in question. There *was* a need to oppose the *autonomy* and *sufficiency* of human reason in social affairs.

Though I have no objection to systematic thinking, that paper was no attempt at systematizing. If it looked like I presented a system, perhaps that only serves to indicate that serious mistakes at the foundational level of thought produce a mistaken system. Any attempt to correct such may well appear to be similarly systematic. However, if I had sought to present a system, I would have had to treat the positive aspects of

[1] For the setting of this paper, I refer you to my Every Square Inch, vol. 2, p. 243.

human reason and science etc. as well as issues like common grace. I did not because I was concerned only to correct mistakes, not to present a system.

For the rest, I present you with the following propositions on Christians and economic thought and behaviour:

17. Evangelicals believe(d) paradoxically that one is serving God if one acts in his own self-interest.

18. Evangelical adherence to a system upholding the priority of profits in economic affairs represents a heresy.

19. Evangelicals are caught in a tension between morality and the priority of profits.

20. Priority of profits leads to oppression/exploitation. It cannot bring the liberation missionaries expected of it in colonial contexts.

21. This paper is not a tirade against profits or private enterprise.

22. Christians tend to invest without accepting the accompanying responsibility.

23. There are potential contradictions between Christian economic investments and missionary investments. It is a problem recognized by Lausanne.

24. Christians are in a position to bring about change.

25. Some ecumenical organizations attempt to alleviate economic wrongdoings.

26. We need to go beyond correcting wrongs or ameliorative bandaging by searching for positive alternatives.

27. There is nothing new in ecclesiastical interest in economic affairs. We are simply pleading for a change in emphasis.

28. In addition to OT affirmation with respect to economic concerns, there are a number of NT teachings emphasizing our responsibility towards each other.

29. Christians both in the West and in Nigeria must seek ways to harmonize their evangelistic and economic mission and free the latter from subservience to profit.

30. Though there may be disagreement about the way Christians should be involved in these concerns, these disagreements must not prevent us from tackling the problems, for they are too acute to be left.

31. By and large Nigerian Christians have inherited and adopted a positive attitude towards capitalism and this shows up in the life of the church in various ways, especially in our attitude towards the wealthy and towards success.

32. Church aid to the poor often in effect justifies the charge that religion is opium to the people, while the poor are not taught to exert the power they have.

33. The church's role with respect to the government is not only to teach obedience to the poor, but also responsibility to the powerful. It ought to place a condition on her cooperation with the government, the condition of justice.

34. It is a real question just how long the church in Nigeria will retain the poor in her fold.

35. The above concerns are merely an echo of what African church leaders themselves have said to be true.