

## Starting the Institute of Church and Society, Jos Branch<sup>1</sup>

Below follows a brief report covering the first 3 months of the new northern affiliate of the Institute of Church and Society (ICS) in Jos. We shall be glad to entertain anyone having questions about it. We are even more eager to have you submit suggestions regarding present activities or advice about additional avenues of service. The ICS is a communal agency that seeks to draw from the entire Christian community. Our procedure here will simply be to list some of the main activities in which we have so far been involved as well as providing some glimpses for further advance.

**(1) Visiting** – I have spent a great deal of time visiting various churches or their pastors to introduce the Jos branch of the ICS, to explain our aims and to solicit their participation. It is obvious that the ICS in Ibadan has gained a good reputation amongst most church leaders and without exception they have pledged at least support in spirit. Discussions in general have indicated strong awareness (a) that Christians have a social obligation and (b) that the luxury of going it alone is no longer a real option. I have the distinct feeling that the ICS is coming to the north at just the right moment.

In addition to visiting churchmen, I am also making it a point to attend different kinds of meetings, even if they deal with issues in which the ICS does not have a direct interest in order to expose myself and the ICS to as many different types of folk as possible. I am in regular attendance at the Gideon prayer meetings, even though as a clergyman I am not eligible for membership. I have attended meetings of the Associate Fellowship of Christian Students (AFCS), of the Christian Student Social Movement, the Christian Association of Nigeria and even the Nigerian Field Society. Through all of this I am building up a variety of acquaintances that have already proved useful.

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<sup>1</sup> Report no. 1, 1 Nov/ 1977. *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 166-168.

**(2) Library and Foreign Contacts** – An agency concerned with equipping Christians to be the light of the world in society requires wide contacts so as to profit from the experiences of fellow Christians throughout the world. Thus I am trying to create liaison with various foreign agencies sharing our interests. I have written to a number of them to learn of their activities and publications. Since I happen to be a Westerner, it has been somewhat “natural” for me to begin establishing such contacts in the West, but the intention is to explore similar contacts with organizations in other parts of the world as well. My research has just uncovered an attempt to form some kind of Pan-African movement that would seek to relate the full Gospel to African problems. I heard of it via American sources, but my initial impression is that its inspiration is African, not Western. I have made further enquiries.

By the same token, I am seeking to build up a library consisting of books and magazines relating to various social issues on a university and professional level. However, since this project is financed through gifts from other quarters, we must necessarily be very selective in our choice, since the money is far short of the need.

**(3) Preaching and Speaking Engagements** – 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. These are in direct contradiction to the extraordinary drive for wealth that we see around us currently.

Other speaking engagements have been few so far. I have been invited by the Associate Fellowship of Christian Students, the alumni of FCS itself, to present thoughts on the general topic of Christian social involvement. The president has confided to me that he plans to suggest a series of five weekly talks on that issue and that he intends to suggest my name as speaker. I am waiting. Recently, I was

asked to address a Hillcrest class 12 in government to discuss Christian involvement in politics.

**(4) Evangelism** – My wanderings through the churches are also uncovering the problem of certain churches having no evangelistic outreach. Thus, I find myself prodding pastors, making them restless and uneasy with this lack by undermining the various excuses they offer for this situation. One Baptist church – ironically, the product of Southern Baptist missions, the American church that currently has the “most successful” home mission program – sought help in setting up a program and so I brought them in contact with the Great Commission Movement of Nigeria (known in North America as “Campus Crusade”). They will this week begin to train a small core, who will, in turn, be expected to train and stimulate others, all under the direct supervision of the church. The local NKST church has, in response to my prodding, awakened her evangelistic interest. Recently some 50 or more members spent one Sunday afternoon trekking through the town for some four hours, singing throughout and preaching at selected spots, sometimes in English, sometimes in Hausa. I was asked to participate. However, since they sought busy spots for preaching, the loudspeaker was hardly able to meet the competition of traffic noises. Though I hope to be able to channel their new interest into some other evangelistic projects as well, at least their intentions have been made clear. The local Presbyterian church has similarly been prodded and their pastor and I have agreed to experiment together in some compound evangelism. Thus, we find ourselves also acting as catalyst for evangelism.

**(5) Ministry to the Business Community** – We are trying to begin a ministry to the business community by devising a course for its members that should take about three evenings. The local NKST church has agreed to this venture and we have scheduled the fourth week of November for it. COCIN Gigiring has also expressed interest, but the exact time has not yet been determined. The course will include concerns or topics such as follow below:

- (a) The relation of business to the Kingdom of God
- (b) OT teachings directly or indirectly related to commerce

(c) NT teachings directly or indirectly related to commerce

(d) Specific issues:

(i) Stewardship of property and wealth

(ii) Fair profits

(iii) Advertising

(iv) What to sell or not to sell

(v) Caring for employees and customers

**(6) Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN)**-- We have offered to assist this school by teaching social issues as they affect pastors. Though for the moment there is no room in an already crowded schedule, they requested that we begin by cooperating with them in devising a correspondence course for their pastoral graduates that would deal with issues such as communism and capitalism. Presently we are in the initial stage of preparation for this project.

**(7) University Students** – The opening of the University of Jos was postponed till this week. Thus our contact with that community has not been extensive so far. Sometime ago I was requested by a staff member to teach one course in Old Testament History. Initially I responded negatively, for it would take too much time, especially since my graduate studies are in missiology, not OT. However, upon the advice of various folk, I changed my mind, offered my services, even spent quite some time preparing, only to be turned down on the same ground on which I first turned it down, namely lack of academic qualifications in OT! It is not serious, for there are other doors into the community, both through individual students who can introduce me to others and through staff members and I am now beginning to cultivate both. Simply picking up a student on his way to his dormitory can prove fruitful. I have thus become friend to one who is appointed as the science editor of the projected Catholic student paper. This evening I hope to visit him in his dormitory. Through such, I am confident other contacts will almost automatically follow.

One project I will attempt is to invite small groups (4-6) of students in a specific discipline to our Zaria Road house to read and discuss some Christian literature directly related to their specialty.

I have written a small tract on the relevance of the Kingdom of God that will hopefully serve as a discussion catalyst amongst and with students. It is couched in general terms. Plans are to follow it up later with tracts dealing with specific academic disciplines. We tried to get it printed but found the cost prohibitive. We now plan to stencil it.

**PROBLEMS** – 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.

Another problem and related to the first is that the ICS and my seconding agency, the SUM-CRC, had not completed or finalized some of the terms of my secondment prior to our return. With Rev. Adegbola out of reach, this means that we are presently running up bills, especially travel expenses, that continue to mount but which we cannot submit at the moment. It is one thing to offer to use one's private vehicle for such a project and even buy one that is specifically suitable for it. It is another to be expected to pay subsequent travel expenses also out of one's own pocket. We trust that the cooperating agencies will soon come to a conclusion regarding this matter.

**CONCLUSION** – In spite of the problems mentioned above, we go about this new ministry with a sense of excitement and regard it as an adventure with the Lord. It appears that its limits are determined only by our own imagination and courage. Throughout, we keep in mind the evangelical purpose of it all: to aid Christians so to live and work that men may see their good work and give glory to our heavenly Father.

There are various ways in which you can help. Those of you that are on the committee overseeing this work, I would appreciate your showing enough concern that you visit us occasionally when you are in Jos. Other readers can help by constant prayer and by volunteering the suggestions and advice we have mentioned earlier. Another way of helping is to give us information regarding books, magazines, pamphlets or organizations that deal with the issues of interest to the ICS. If you are professional, perhaps you know of some publications that discuss the issues of your profession in Christian terms. Secular works can be obtained at the university library. Perhaps you want to draw our attention to such Christian professional publications or organizations. Perhaps you wish to donate some such publications, e.g. a subscription to a professional magazine. At the very least, you might agree to lend us some of your holdings for our library. The last suggestion holds more for people here in Nigeria.