

## **Preface**

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It was Rev. Herbert Eze, a clergyman stationed at Mubi, Adamawa State, who first challenged the Institute of Church and Society (ICS), Northern Area Office, to take up the issue of Nigeria's external debt (ED). The ICS responded hesitantly. We saw it as a technical politico-economic problem of such huge dimension that we were doubtful that a small institute like ours could do anything about it. Remembering how security agents had prevented conferences that would have as participants many citizens of national prominence, we expected that the ICS would not have a chance at hosting a meeting on the ED for pastors and other church leaders, even though some of the speakers and committee members were similarly of national prominence.

However, the challenge refused to fade. When we consulted our Board and other church leaders, we were strongly encouraged to proceed. Our Board Chairman even visited the security people and was assured that the government was interested in hearing the voice of all groups on this difficult problem. With those kinds of assurances the ICS proceeded.

You have in your hands the results of the first conference on the ED hosted by the ICS. This compilation of papers is an expression of the fact that, in spite of misunderstandings in some quarters, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Lord and Saviour, and His followers are deeply concerned with the affairs of this world not only, but also have their own unique contributions to offer for the healing of the nation's economy and politics.

That conference was the first, not the last. Since then, already another smaller conference was held for Jos-based pastors and others are being planned in

various cities. Since then, Rev. Herbert Eze has hosted several smaller gatherings of pastors in the Mubi area. Also, a pamphlet has already been published in which our findings have been summarized and in which the reader is encouraged to take action in terms of his own position and in his own locality.

At the moment, this ED project is one of awareness building and dissemination of information as well as ideas. Somewhere along the line it is likely that the emphasis will shift to that of a campaign to move into this or that direction. Already, the final conference statement contains some serious advice to Government. It is possible that in the future more such statements will be offered, but then based on a greater awareness of the issues. With the Biblical “preferential option for the poor” having been widely recognized throughout the world Church, it is imperative that the Nigerian Church address an issue that has contributed so much to our increasing poverty.

The ICS is very grateful to the following persons who, along with myself, constitute the ED Committee and who have given so freely of their time:

- Rev. Dr. Y. Turaki, General Secretary of the Evangelical Churches of West Africa, ED Committee Chairman and Conference Moderator.
- Prof. E. Osagie, Director of Research, National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru.
- Prof. A. T. Gana, Dean of Social Sciences, University of Jos.
- Prof D. E. Ajakaiya, Dean of Natural Sciences, University of Jos.
- Rev. J. P. Mambula, General Secretary of TEKAN, Jos.
- Rev. Dr. Jan H. Boer, Consultant, ICS.
- Mr. E. Kumzhi, Coordinator, ICS, Jos.

Then, we owe a great deal to all the speakers. Their names are all listed in the Table of Contents and do not need to be repeated here. Some of the ED Committee members are among them. Rev. L. Cishak, at the time President of the Church of Christ in Nigeria and current Vice President of the Christian Council of

Nigeria, the proprietor of the ICS, was outstanding in his support and participation. The conferees were delighted that Colonel Yohanna Madaki (retired), former Military Governor of Gongola State and the people's hero, had consented to be the main speaker at the opening ceremonies. We salute the World Council of Churches for sending Dr. M. Ketsela, for whom this journey represented an African homecoming, at a time they were busy preparing for a world conference of their own in Australia. We are more than grateful to the National Council of Churches of Kenya for releasing their able Director for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation, Rev. J. K. Gathaka, for this event. The ICS also is most thankful to all those who contributed financially to make this conference possible. We also record our deep appreciation for Mrs. Shirley Oyewo for all the work involved in preparing the manuscript for printing.

These papers are offered to all the world as representative of the first tentative attempt of the Nigerian Church to come to grips with a major cause of our continued impoverishment. We assure you that this attempt is very representative of the world Church. We also assure you that, the Lord willing, there will be more to come.

You are encouraged to contact the Institute of Church and Society, Northern Area Office, for sharing information. We also solicit your advice and, above all, your prayers.