

Reflections on the Church in Nigeria (Notes)¹

INTRODUCTION--

Told to give informal talk on my experiences in Nigeria, some reflections. So, no profound lecture or great truths today. Just some memories and reflections.

I. MY FIRST GREAT SURPRISE--in 1966.

Oppression of Nigerians by Nigerians. Not colonials. Of Christians by Christians.

EG--

What did church do about it? Pray. Preach obedience. Respect for the powerful in the church. But no calling to account or helping both powerful and poor what was going on. Both needed to hear the Scripture applied to their situation. The POOR needed to know God's love for them and their right to stand up against all this. Instead, they were told to obey. Opiate to the people? The RICH needed to be warned what God expects from them in terms of their responsibilities. Instead, they were/are honoured.

I began to ask questions how this could have arisen in this way. Why did the church have no resistance to this? I probed. I listened, I studied. I even devoted much of my doctoral studies to this concern. I finally came up with at least one major reason: dualism. A major reason; not the only one. TURN TO CHRISTIANS AND

MOBILIZATION

This dualism is, I believe the reason the church has not taken this bull by the horns.

And instead of the situation improving, it has gotten worse. Today with few exceptions the Christian church, whether leaders or members, are unhappy about our present regime. Complaints--but little action. From what I hear from my Nigerian friends, the reason many church leaders are largely silent is that they have been bought over by cold cash in brown envelopes. In other countries, the church has occasionally

¹ These reflections are expressed largely in notes rather than complete statements. This was my last speech before ending my Nigeria career in May, 1996.

stood up against corruption and oppression. I am a product of such a church that did. Not so in Nigeria. The dualism that I discovered close to 30 years ago is still with us. That dualism is the heritage of Western missions.

II. I believe there is another reason for the state of the church today in Nigeria. And this time an indigenous reason. Christians mostly come out of the womb of ATR. One of the characteristics of ATR and most animistic religions is to manipulate the gods or spirits. Christianity is a religion of service; ATR, of manipulating the powers for your own benefit. Today we see much Christianity that shows little signs of service. Religion either is used to put people to sleep as under dualism or it is used to manipulate and dominate, a heritage from ATR whose basic spirit seems to be creeping back into the church, especially in the form of the “health and wealth gospel.”

III. Something more positive about the church in Nigeria. She is not plagued by the scientific spirit that has impoverished the church in the West. It is very difficult for Westerners to take all the stories about miracles and powers seriously, for they have allowed their spirits to be overwhelmed by [scientism](#)-- an over-estimation of science. That also held for me when I first arrived. However, living among you for all these years has taught me to take those stories more seriously as true stories. There is no reason in the world for miracles to be impossible. God is great and can do things in His own way. And even Satan has the power to do miracles. I thank Nigeria for having opened my eyes to that and for having helped me drop those scientific blinders.

IV. However, there is another aspect to this, negative one. Here also you find Christians who seek to employ these powers of miracles for their own glory and profit. Is this another case of reversion to ATR in Christian dress? I wonder. I am asking you to consider this seriously. I refer, of course, to the extreme wing of Pentecostalism.

V Among my closing remarks, I want to challenge the Nigerian church, the church that I love, the church I have served for 30 years, to prepare herself for the great clean up. Brotherhood is great. Supporting your brother is necessary, but not cover up when he has done wrong. We must learn to become more objective about situations so that tribe and other connections do not prevent us from house cleaning. And after we have completed our housecleaning, we must turn to country cleaning.

This does not need to be done in our own power. It can be done with Holy Spirit power. IT CAN BE DONE!

REVIVALS IN UK

VI Finally, having said all of that, remember that I do not speak as an outsider judging from the outside with some superior kind of knowledge. I speak as a member of that same church of 30 years standing. I have as much responsibility for its welfare and growth as anyone. If there are shortcomings, I share them. If there are sins to be confessed, I likewise need to confess. In fact, since I will soon be leaving the country, that's the status by which I wish you to remember me next time you hear from or about me: A sinner saved by grace. HALLELUIAH.