

Book Review¹

The Church and the External Debt

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The Institute of Church and Society (ICS) Jos, organized a conference on the Church and External Debt from 26-30th November, 1990. Dr. Jan H. Boer edited the papers presented during the conference in this book/report.

The book is a pioneer effort of its kind in this part of the world. It is an attempt of amalgamating social gospel and social action. It has done this by providing a reliable and a working document geared towards making the Church and other citizens aware of a major potent killer disease of developing countries; and the need to do something about it. Emmanuel Kumzhi, the Northern Area Coordinator of ICS, in the Preface, maintains that

This compilation of papers (i.e. this report) is an expression of the fact that, in spite of misunderstandings in some quarters, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Lord and Saviour, along with His followers, is deeply concerned with the affairs of this world not only, but also has his own unique contributions to offer for the healing of the nation's economy and politics. ... These papers are offered to all the world as ... the first tentative attempt of the Nigerian Church to come to grips with this major cause of our continued impoverishment.

The conference, consequently this book, is peculiar in many respects. For example, the resource persons were from the ivory tower, research institutions, pews and pulpit, and prominent persons from the private and public sectors of

¹ Reference to this review and its context can be found in our *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, p. 391.

Nigeria and abroad. Very interesting too is the open-mindedness and the multidisciplinary nature of this book. In fact, some of the authors are committed Muslims and Christians.

From their wealth of experiences the various contributors focused on, among others, the origins and nature of the debt burden/crisis in Nigeria and other parts of the world, and their devastating effects as well as on Biblical injunctions on debt, the position of the Nigerian Church and how to solve this problem. Moral and ethical questions regarding the burden of our nation, and the role which the Church should play in addressing this issue are clearly shown in this book. The need for the Church to champion the liberation of the poor and the weak was also stressed by the various contributors.

An adage has it that he who goes borrowing goes sorrowing. It is no overstatement that Nigeria today is in debt. The 1993 budget clearly shows that. On a regional scale, one of the contributors in the book puts Africa's debt at \$256 billion in 1990. Several questions beg for answers. Who actually borrowed all these vast sums of money? What was it used for? Can it be justified that the whole nation be held to ransom for the mismanagement of these loans by a privileged few in the society?

But what do we do? Among other strategies, some of the authors are calling for debt cancellation, rescheduling of repayments, stopping further collection of loans, a national moral rebirth, and, finally, good and purposeful government. The book is a must for any child of God in Nigeria who is committed to the emancipation of the human race.