

Northern Education Advisory Council (NEAC)

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For further background information about the issues of this article, I refer you to the Boer memoirs: J. Boer, Every Square Inch. See Bibliography in Section 2 on this web site page, vol. 2, pp. 215-216.

One of the best-known Christian organisations in Northern Nigeria is the Northern Education Advisory Council, more popularly referred to as NEAC. Pioneered by its first General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Ivan Eikenberry, NEAC has provided most strategic services for Protestant schools, providing coordination throughout the North and acting as the official spokesman with the Government of the Northern Region and, later, of the northern states. However, circumstances have changed. Most schools have been taken over by the various governments and the mammoth Northern region has been carved up into ten states, each of which now shapes its own educational policies. Obviously, NEAC cannot continue her old role. The question has been asked whether or not there remains any role at all or whether the organization should be dismantled.

Some are arguing for dismantling. They feel that since there are hardly any schools left in church hands, there is simply no further need for NEAC. Whatever problems Christians may have in the area of education have to be dealt with on the state level and that can be done better by the local chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN|). Some advance another reason for dismantling. Our schools are so bad they claim, that they are beyond repair. Christians should no longer expect anything from the schools in the way of Christian teaching and should pin their hopes on improving Sunday schools and Bible classes in church.

Others would not want NEAC to be dismantled altogether, but they would like to see the central office scaled down so as to provide only skeleton services, while the recently-organized state branches should take up the responsibility for

coordination and for liaison with the state government. NEAC as a whole can no longer serve that function, for a state government is not likely to take seriously a General Secretary based in another state.

The prevalence of such opinions has caused a drop of interest in NEAC among the member churches. The last General Secretary, who retired only recently, complained of traversing the great distances of the North for meetings, only to find that hardly anybody showed up. Dues have not been paid as faithfully as they used to be. Surely, this all seems to point to the need for scaling down operations, if not a total dismantling.

It seems to me that, in spite of all such negative factors, this is no time to reduce Christian efforts in education. A careful reading of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 in its context should drive us to the conviction that Christians have an *abiding* duty to teach their children about God and the way of life as outlined for us in the Bible. This is a *total* way of life, according to Deuteronomy 6 and its context, covering *all* areas of human culture, not merely some. It is a duty that is *intensive* and to be carried out under all circumstances.

The question is how Christians under the present circumstances can or should carry out this *abiding* and *intensive* task. *In our day of lowering of moral and educational standards should we scale down our efforts or should we redouble them?* And are we seriously prepared to betray our children by forsaking all Christian efforts to bring to bear whatever Christian influence we can, even in schools that appear to be getting worse? Can we be satisfied with a mere two or three hours a week of church classes, while our children are exposed to teachings that totally ignore God for five or more hours daily? Would that really be doing justice to our abiding and intensive duty to educate our children in the way of the Lord under all circumstances? To ask the question is to answer it: NO! As long as our children are obliged to attend these schools, we as a Christian community and as parents have the abiding duty to influence the educational process as much as possible. If we ever come to a stage where we find ourselves prevented from carrying out our God-given task, then it has become time to ask how we can change that situation by all legitimate means, political or otherwise.

The official opinion of NEAC is that we must try our best along the lines just indicated. Thus NEAC is now encouraging suitable people to apply for the post of General Secretary, a fulltime position. This person would not have much to do in terms of liaison with state governments as his original predecessor did. That would be left up to local state chapters of NEAC, possibly in connection with CAN. The work of the successful applicant would be more of a coordinating ministry for the churches and the thousands of Christian teachers now working in our government and other schools. His duties have been described to include the following:

- (1) To stimulate interest among the churches and a sense of responsibility for Christian education in the schools, both primary and secondary.
- (2) To represent NEAC where local state representation will not suffice, for example in national ecumenical or educational organizations.
- (3) To champion and advance the cause of Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) teaching at *all* educational levels and in all institutions where NEAC would regard this as proper.
- (4) To serve as a liaison officer between NEAC and the Fellowship of Christian Teachers.
- (5) To organize workshops, seminars, conferences, etc., for Christian teachers in both government and church schools.
- (6) To coordinate the production of "Christian Perspective" booklets to aid teachers in understanding the relationship between their subject and the Bible and how to insert these perspectives in the classroom.

Obviously, the task described is an exciting one for a person with the right personality and other qualifications. These qualifications have been listed as including the following:

- (1) Be a *committed* Christian and be known as such.
- (2) Have practical experience both in education and in the church.

- (3) Have at least a bachelor's degree.
- (4) Be able to stimulate people and coordinate various activities.
- (5) Be prepared to devote himself/herself wholeheartedly to Christian education in the schools.
- (6) Be able to speak both Hausa and English.

NEAC has had difficulty in finding a new General Secretary. However, could it be that lack of vision on the part of some members may have been responsible for that? Some raise the infamous financial objection. Though it is a legitimate concern, I believe it can deter us only as long as we are not convinced of the necessary priority to influence our children with the Gospel under all circumstances. What could possibly have greater priority than that? This is not the time to stare ourselves blind upon difficulties. It is not the time to scale down our efforts. It is time to redouble our attempts in faith. Matthew reports Jesus' final words as follows:

“Go therefore ..., teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Has God reached the end of His ropes in Nigeria? No, He is with us always, also now. And He will not fail us in providing the necessary finances – unless, unless we fail to challenge Him by staring at our problems in unbelief.