

The Body of Christ in Emerging Nigeria¹

Installment I

Nigeria is in the midst of profound change. This statement may be little more than a truism, but it remains one of the great facts that the Body of Christ in Nigeria must face in her Christian strategy for the Nigeria of tomorrow. Never before has the Christian community been faced with the exciting challenges such as confront her today. And never before has the responsibility of this community been greater. If Nigerian Christians fail at this crucial hour to bring the Gospel of Christ to bear upon the life of the nation, they will have betrayed both Christ and the nation.

The question is: will the Nigerian Christian community speak *concretely* concerning the various structures of society or will it continue to reduce the Kingdom of God to the traditional triad of ecclesiastical activity, education and medicine? Will Christians make a contribution to the future shape of the rapidly growing industrial enterprise that tends to reduce the laboring man to a mere machine? Is the Christian community going to address itself to the commercial world that, through her advertising agencies, seeks to exploit the very soul-life of the populace for her own benefit? And in the realm of labour relations, what will be the Christian alternative to the class struggle motif? Above all, how will the Christian community prepare itself for the future civilian-type government that we have been promised? Or – or are these concerns not legitimate for the Body of Christ?

There have been those who have traditionally given a negative answer to the last question. The business of the Church, it is argued, is to preach Christ and to see to it that folk repent. Churches that have taken this position – I am a member of one of them – have proudly assumed for themselves the name “evangelical,” intimating that they are operating within the true spirit of the Evangel. These churches have observed the shallowness of the “social gospel” approach in the western world and have vowed to continue to proclaim Christ as the basic need of

¹ The first of a series of four articles under the same title, *NC*—February, April, June, Sept/1971. *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 94-96.

the world. Men must first personally accept Christ as their Saviour, we are told, and the rest will take care of itself as a natural outgrowth of the Gospel.

And here we have the basic fallacy of this approach: the rest has *not*, as a matter of fact, taken care of itself; the facts of history are quite to the contrary. Though one could cite examples from a number of western nations, in this article we will draw upon the experience of the American churches, primarily because they, in view of their numbers, have had *the* opportunity to demonstrate the truth of this assumption – and they are now found to be quite irrelevant to their nation. As a consequence, they are now fighting a losing battle, preaching personal conversion to Christ, but never addressing themselves to the structures in which those people who need conversion find themselves. Their reaction to the social gospel has been to withdraw into ecclesiastical activity and leave other spheres of life to – yes, to whom?

There has been personal evangelism, but no structural evangelism. Few, if any, efforts have been made to relate the claims of Christ *concretely* to the problems of their community. To the ghetto dweller the answer given was: Christ will give you peace. But how? To the man on the assembly line who has been reduced to a mere machine the message was: Christ will free *you*. But how? To the business magnate the exhortation was to be Christian in his dealings. But how? No concrete answers have ever been forthcoming and the typical response is a shrug of the shoulder to such an irrelevant message. In the meantime, the demonic aspects of modern life continued to unfold themselves increasingly clearly. There are those who have raised protest, but not in the name of Christ. Herber Marcuse and his followers are doing their best to expose the demonic aspects of their society, but the church's silence has led the protesters to include her in their list of oppressors.

The over-all effect of personal evangelism and ecclesiasticism has turned out to be self-defeating. The point is not that there should have been no personal evangelism and other ecclesiastical activities: these are needed very much indeed! But, unless they are accompanied by structural evangelism, such activities

end up leaving man out in the cold. They do nothing to demonstrate the practical Christian alternatives to modern structures.

None but Nigerians should decide the future of Nigeria and her churches but certainly Nigerian Christians ought not to forget the lesson to be learned from such history in countries where Christianity has had its chance but failed to grasp it. Nigeria is seeking to industrialize according to modern technique, but may the Christian community raise its prophetic voice in an effort to avoid the demonic aspects of modern industry. Nigeria is rapidly expanding its commercial enterprise, but may the Body of Christ help prevent Nigerians from becoming the exploited victims of such enterprise. Nigerian labour is unionizing, but may the Church help labour to escape the death-grip of the class struggle philosophy that dominates the labour movement in the West.

Installment II²

Recently a representative of the magazine *Africa Now*, a publication of the Sudan United Mission, interviewed Miss Angie Brooks, President of the United Nations' 24th General Assembly, Assistant Secretary of State in Liberia and an active member of the Baptist Church. The question was put to her: "... what observations have you made concerning the potential growth of the churches in Africa?" Her reply is significant for our purpose:

I sometimes wonder if African Christians, vigorous as they are, are *really* pursuing their religion. I mean by way of their influence, their impact on society. Christians have a lot to do to bring out the true things of Christ that will uplift the lives of human beings.

Though gently stated, this statement contains stinging criticism of the African Christian community. Africans, she suspects, are failing to carry out their calling "to bring out the true things of Christ that will uplift the lives of human beings." And what are these true things of Christ? Of course, those that enhance the salvation of Africans! It is not the lack of preaching, of verbal presentation of the

² NC, Apr/1971.

Gospel that Miss Brooks is criticizing, but the lack of actual and practical impact upon society on the part of Christians.

Miss Brooks did not use the word “salvation.” Perhaps she avoided it quite consciously, for it is not a popular word these days. It is too closely connected with religion and religion, according to the modern mind, does not have any answers for the practical problems facing Nigeria today. Religion, so popular opinion has it, belongs to the church where its adherents should keep it, but it has no place in the market places of the country and even less in the areas of education, technology and commerce. In these areas of culture one needs sober and factual thinking, not mere belief; there we need science, not faith; objectivity, not subjectivity. Regardless of the lack of popularity of the word “salvation,” the quest for salvation is as strong as it ever has been, if not actually stronger in places such as Nigeria. What is reconstruction if not the quest for salvation?

As to the restricted area to which religion has been consigned, this is not merely a conspiracy of non-Christians, but it is actively advocated by many devout Christians in our universities. The narrow role they reserve for their religion is nothing short of frightening and leaves one with very dim hopes that they will be true agents of salvation in the affairs of this nation. Many are caught in the process of secularization that dates back many centuries and to which Christians, under the influence of secular universities, have long since given in – generally quite unconsciously.

Secularization

This process of secularization has more than a single source, but one of its earliest exponents was at the same time one of the greatest doctors of the medieval church: Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aquinas produced a full-fledged philosophical system based upon a combination of Christian theology and the Pagan philosophy of the famous Greek, Aristotle. Philosophy, according to Aquinas, is to be based upon reason, while theology has divine revelation – that is, the Scriptures – as its source. The underlying assumption was that reason has not been affected by sin and therefore does not need the light of revelation.

Aquinas himself was a devout Christian, but the dualism he introduced into the Christian community was to have nearly fatal effects.

As natural science grew and understanding of the so-called natural laws increased, the need for divine revelation was felt decreasingly. What previously was considered miraculous and beyond reason was discovered to be quite in accordance with the normal laws operating within this universe. Thus, under this Thomistic scheme, the area allotted to divine revelation diminished steadily in favour of natural philosophy or science. The church, in parallel manner, diminished in its area of jurisdiction. The final result of a long process is the God-is-dead theology, that ephemeral theological monstrosity that already appears to have had its day of respectability, but which, as a mirror of our age, all too realistically reflects the spiritual state of modern man's "coming of age." Man imagines he no longer needs God as a postulate, for reason through science has revealed the secrets of the universe and continues to do so.

Ignorance of Theology

Few readers of this magazine will be familiar with Aquinas, but that does not mean that his philosophy and its modern offspring play no part in the lives of this constituency. Judging from my educated Nigerian Christian acquaintances, I think it safe to say that the modern Nigerian Christian is seldom inclined to dabble in philosophy or theology, much less take such studies seriously with a view to bringing Christ to our nation. The problems of Nigeria are too urgent for us to spend time on such "impractical" matters. In effect, the refusal to pay close attention to these "impractical" issues is, in fact, a refusal to understand one's spiritual heritage and will lead to an unconscious espousal of a philosophy that, when examined, one might well wish to reject.

Thomistic philosophy and its modern offspring is Western, not African, but let no one think that therefore this entire discussion is irrelevant for our Nigerian situation. Our universities are basically Western in their philosophy. In addition, countless Nigerians study abroad. Regardless of the anti-Western spirit our young men adopt at these universities, most of them have fully adopted this dualistic approach to revelation and reason and a considerable number of them no longer

see the need for revelation at all. They have been fully imbibed with Western philosophy – or should I say “Western faith?”

This last question is to the point. Though modern education and science are paraded as having their basis upon pure fact, not on faith at all, this position is being increasingly challenged. It is becoming increasingly recognized that modern technology is based upon certain articles of faith and is designed to bring salvation. Thus, if the Nigerian Christian community is going to make a practical contribution to the future course of this country, it must become aware of the underlying faith that guides most of modernity.

Camera Laye, a foremost African writer, raises a timely warning:

And we ask that one not confuse, as one has too much of a tendency to do, this electronic age and the mechanics of Europe and America with civilization. Civilization is something else; something other than machines and certainly something other than bombs and engines of war. Civilization ... existed before mechanical progress Africa does not refuse all of this progress; on the contrary, she awaits it impatiently, but she will be wise to keep it ... as an accessory to civilization. (“The Black Man and Art,” *African Arts*, Autumn, 1970; pp. 58-59).

I do not know Laye’s faith. Neither do I know whether he has a scheme not only for distinguishing Western civilization and her technology, but also for separating them. This is exactly where the shoe pinches. *Can* these two be separated? *Can* we import Western education and technology, but refuse the faith that has given them birth?

Western Christians have only lately detected the non-Christian faith underlying most of modern civilization. They have tended to identify Christianity with modern civilization and all that this entails. Let Africa beware of this identification, especially in view of the fact that those children of this modern civilization now reaping its ripest fruits are the very ones presently squirming in disgust and revolt at the values of the society that has produced them. That, I submit, is a telling comment.

Installment III³

It is incontestable that this world has never witnessed such universal restlessness and such wide-spread hankering after social development and justice as we observe today. This restlessness is shared by all peoples, whatever their degree of wealth. Furthermore, there is a common recognition of evil embedded in the very structures of society and that, if this evil is to be removed, these structures themselves require changing.

The Scriptures insist that the basic problem of this world has its foundation in the heart of man and that this heart needs to be converted. Hence, the Old Testament prophets promise the day when God Himself will exchange man's heart of stone for one of flesh. The implication is that man is incapable of making the necessary change by his own power, for sin is too deeply embedded in his very nature. *God* has to renew his heart. As a consequence the Christian church has preached individual conversion, a task that remains necessary.

Unfortunately, those that have been so converted became members of a Christian community that had developed a blind spot: it failed to recognize that sin has also found an ingrained place in the structures of the society that these sinful men have built and that saving a man from his personal sin without attempting to redeem him from these sinful structures is presenting him with only half a Gospel and half a salvation. There are many reasons for this blind spot, but surely the most important is the natural development of the dichotomy introduced by Thomas Aquinas as discussed in the previous article. Where a large section of the Christian community has been blind to structural injustice, social philosophers and planners have recently been insisting that individuals are incapable of producing the necessary reforms, and so they have tended to slight the need for individual conversion – even many Christians among them. The result has been polarization.

The so-called evangelical branch of the church berates the cry for social action as an attempt to bypass individual conversion and thus leave the individual with his

³ NC, June/1971.

evil, unconverted heart. **On the other hand, those in charge of social planning find this preaching of individual conversion an irresponsible waste of time and effort in this crucial era.** There are some Christians who manage to compartmentalize their lives sufficiently according to a largely unconscious Thomistic scheme that they can participate in both activities, but without realizing that they cannot plan without taking the Gospel's guidelines into consideration anymore than you can evangelize without the Gospel.

The inconsistency of such compartmentalization is, fortunately, becoming increasingly clear and will, as a wide phenomenon, be only a temporary arrangement that is sure to disappear during the next generation or so – as it already is doing rapidly in Western countries. Men are beginning to realize that one must either consider himself as a servant of the God of justice at all times or disregard Him altogether. The general trend appears to be the latter of the two. *If the Nigerian Christian community is to retain any hearing at all with respect to the direction of this nation, it will have to suggest alternatives to the generally secular plans drawn up for the development of its people.*

Development Schemes

Nigerian governments are busily working out development schemes designed to improve the standard of living of the general population. It will be noted that almost without exception the economic aspect receives by far the biggest slice of the huge sums devoted to these plans. The theory has it that Nigeria's basic illness is poverty and that if only there is sufficient money for all or enough jobs we will have achieved peace and happiness in the new Nigeria. Peace and happiness – the very aims of the Gospel.

Nigerian planners are well aware that large-scale industry throughout the country cannot immediately be realized, for the prerequisites of transportation, water and electricity are absent, except of course, in the larger urban centres. Furthermore, large-scale industry owned by Nigerians is still a future hope also because of lack of capital and so greater emphasis is given to small industries owned and operated by Nigerians. However, if I have listened and read rightly, the hope is for eventual large industries throughout the nation, industries patterned after those

of the West since they have proved most productive. The larger any newly planned industrial complex is, the more enthusiastically it is welcomed, especially if it is Nigerian owned.

The pattern, it appears, has been set. Any scheme that may increase the financial potential of both the governments as well as of the citizens is almost *uncritically* accepted. And that is dangerous, for the successful industries of the West have inherent shortcomings that have introduced strong tensions in Western societies and have even been said to have caused the spiritual death of the European industrial worker.

The criterion of finance is a false criterion. Christians in Western industrial circles should have known this all along and industrial experience has proved it to be a false criterion. As a sole criterion, the standard of finance has reduced the industrial worker in Europe to something less than human, it has resulted in an upset ecological system and it has produced human tensions in Western society.

What is Man?

The important question planners and industrialists need to face is: *what is man?* Other but related questions are: What is peace? What is freedom? What is man's task before God? What does the great commandment of our Lord imply for industry? We are tempted to disregard such questions as being the proper domain for theologians or social philosophers, but they are not considered to have any practical import for the task before us. Disregarding such questions, however, will plunge us headlong into problems that are very real in the West and which we can still avoid in Nigeria. It is not likely that secularists will give these questions any serious thought, but anyone claiming to follow Christ can disregard them only at the cost of betraying Christ and the industrial enterprise, especially the working force.

Briefly, man is a creation of God, designed to serve Him wherever he finds himself. Though pietism has traditionally distinguished between serving God and so-called secular work, the Bible knows no such distinction. Man is expected to serve God in every aspect of his being and work, not just in some. Furthermore,

he must assist his neighbour in using his talents in the service of God as well. Whatever prevents a person from using his God-given talents fully is evil.

When one applies this Christian principle to working conditions in modern industry one will readily recognize serious defects. Modern industry, instead of enhancing a working man's humanity by affording him opportunity to utilize fully his God-given talents before his Creator, tends at best to tolerate the worker's humanity. The worker's feelings, abilities and interests play no role whatever in industrial planning. Rather they are tolerated as factors of uncertainty in the scientific process to be replaced as soon as engineers can design the necessary mechanism. The worker's task is increasingly reduced to a minimum of movements requiring little or no thought and that are highly repetitive – and meaningless. But what is man without his feelings, interests and abilities? To seek their elimination during working hours is to seek the elimination of the worker's humanity!

A Sad Truth

Joost Havelaar, a European observer of modern labour conditions, has stated that Europeans may boast of the twentieth century as the century of democracy. But the sad truth is that we live in a century which has crushed the soul of the people under the machine. The machine has spiritually murdered the European labouring class.

Industrial planners have traditionally displayed little concern for the humanity of those subjected to their scheming. Efficiency has been the password. Anything impeding that must be eliminated, even if it is man's humanity. Profit has been the overriding goal. If reaching this goal means the reduction of human beings to mere cogs in the industrial wheel, this can be overcome by properly oiling such cogs with green dollars. Cameron Hawley has written a novel about industrial managers entitled *Executive Suite*. Having been a business executive himself for most of his life, he writes as an insider and can thus be trusted to give a reliable picture of the concerns of such men. The novel is most remarkable in its silence. In all of its three hundred and forty-six pages, hardly any mention is made of the working force, their working conditions and their interest. In its silence the book

clearly illustrates that the working force is of no more interest than any other machinery in the industry. Just think of it: hundreds of men devoting their God-given talents to the industry, but hardly worthy of attention.

I have been subjected to these industrial indignities for well over four years and thus know something of its meaninglessness. Yet, if one were to ask the average labourer in a factory about these indignities, he might not even understand the question, for in the West these indignities have been canonized as being inevitable in an efficient enterprise and they are legitimized by relatively high wages. The worker is hardly aware of the problem of a devaluation of his work and, consequently, of his humanity, for he knows no alternative: the process has been going on for some generations.

But ask a man the reason for his work and his answer will be a prompt: "Why, money, of course." That is the only remaining meaning to his work: money. That, too, is the only reason he agrees to the dehumanizing process. The work itself is meaningless, but the wages are generally sufficient for him to afford gadgets for after-work diversion and it is here that he establishes the meaning of his life and work.

Christian Industrialist

The initial question for the Christian industrialist is not how he can provide his men with sufficient salary -- though that is needed --, but rather how he can enable his men to find meaning *in* their work that is carried out before the face of his Creator who demands full-time service from all. A Christian industrialist ought to be vitally concerned with how his men can utilize their specific abilities with which God has endowed them. He must not seek to eliminate their humanity, but enhance it – on the job, not just outside of it. The simple injunction to love your neighbour as yourself has the most pregnant implications for the industrialist. It must become embedded in the very basic design of his industrial plant in such a way that the working man can find meaning in his work before his Creator. One's fellow man may not be degraded to a mere cog in a wheel or serve basically as a tool in an efficient and scientific industrial enterprise.

The shortcomings of modern industry has come to the notice of planners and engineers. Modern management has come to realize that it cannot without impunity disregard the humanity of the working man. As a result, industrial relations men are becoming prominent in management, men well trained in psychology, who have learned how to distort even the truth to the furtherance of the gods of efficiency and profit.

James L. Dougherty has provided modern corporations with a recipe for smooth labour relations in his book *Union-Free Management* that is to ensure efficiency in the factory. The primary purpose of a business organization is to enrich its owners, according to him, and the most efficient way of enriching the owner is to “adopt the attitude in every action and communication that today’s ... working man is a child of God, possessed of a dignified and quite unique human soul.” For this reason he advocates a closer cooperative relationship between workers and management and the elimination of such devices as time clocks. The workers are tools to enrich the owner, but tools with souls that must be psychologically understood and manipulated gently to fit into the efficiency-oriented industrial world.

Here we have a cynical recognition of an important truth, but a truth so manipulated that it is turned into a bastard lie. Workers must be treated as human beings not in order to enable them to serve their Creator, but because it is now proving to be more efficient. Workers must be allowed to participate in the making of decisions, not because they have such an inherent right, but because it will increase their productivity. Dougherty’s recipe is nothing short of satanic, but it is only a natural consequence of secular psychology applied to secular industry. His recipe ought not to surprise one really, for it was implicit in the industrial philosophy from the beginning of its modernization. The system has produced a generation of puppets, oiled with green dollars, devoted to the increasing wealth of the employer. That the oil is quite sufficient for a high standard of economic life does not reduce the basic evil of the system one bit: it only means rich puppets who no longer know the meaning of serving their Creator.

There have been Christians – and continue to be – who have been very successful in modern industry and simultaneously hold prominent positions in their churches, on boards of Christian colleges and magazines, and who donate large sums of money to various Christian causes, including foreign missions. It appears that they have never recognized the incongruity of their lives and neither has the Christian community. The Christ they serve is totally irrelevant in their shops where they tend to proceed on the same basis as their secular colleagues. From whence such blindness? Should not the Christian community refuse such ill-gotten gains?

What will be the type of industry developed in Nigeria? Industry still being in its infant stage, it is not too late to ask this question. Thoughtful Christian industrialists have an exciting task: to rethink the modern industrial enterprise and to reform it in order to enhance the humanity of its working force.⁴ It will be no easy task and it could well mean a reduction in profits. But have not Christians all along realized that the economic criterion may not predominate? Today is the time for the Christian community to present a viable alternative to the industrial structure of tomorrow. Today is the time for long-range evangelical thinking with respect to the future state of industry in Nigeria.

The Christian principle we need to put into operation is simple: man is to serve his Creator through all his native abilities and in all his work. Anyone or anything preventing a person from doing such is forcing him into the service of a false god. In this sense, modern secular industry is demonic in that it has reduced the working man to a mere cog in the industrial wheel for the sake of the employer's profit

Industrial development? Yes, indeed, it is needed urgently. However, let it not be at the expense of the humanity of the working class, but it must be development taking into account the nature and task of man before God – of all men not merely some. The secular way may be to consider the economic factors solely; this may never be the sole criterion for the Christian. If Christian industrialists in

⁴ A powerful example of such rethink is the book *Joy at Work* by Dennis W. Bakke. See preview at www.DennisBakke.com. Bakke is a big-time hands-on industrial theoretician who practices what he preaches with great success.

Nigeria are going to be worth their salt and their name, they must seek to design industry in which the worker can fully exploit his talents in the service of his Maker.

Installment IV⁵

In the third installment of this series of articles, I discussed at length the human indignities inflicted upon the labouring force of modern industrial complexes.

One reaction to this article – and I do invite reactions, favourable as well as unfavourable – was that Nigerians would not be able to understand such matters. This alleged failure to comprehend as expressed by a Nigerian friend is supposedly due to the fact that Nigerians have not yet experienced such industrial indignities. My answer to this objection is that it is partly true, for the number of Nigerians employed in modern industrial plants is relatively low. However, it should not be forgotten that, barring unexpected developments, the automated industrial complex will certainly be an important feature of the Nigeria of tomorrow. The point of the article in question is that if Christians wish to make a practical contribution to the Nigeria of tomorrow, they must develop a new philosophy of industry and technique that is more geared to the Gospel's teaching on human relationships in order to avoid a repetition of the tragedy that has fallen upon the Western labour force as reported by its close observers.

The objection mentioned above could also be voiced with respect to the matter I wish to discuss in the present article: the manipulation of the public for commercial purposes. This, too, is a matter that has not yet reached the threatening proportions it has reached in Western nations, but is one that certainly will become an alarming problem here as it has in other nations. One can therefore shrug one's shoulders in unconcern and turn to the more pressing problems of the day. After all, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof! In the meantime, however, the manipulation I refer to will become an increasing part of the commercial structures of our nation; it will continue to develop in the same direction it has already adopted principally. It is only a matter of time before its real threat and its ugly nature will become crystal clear to the citizens of this

⁵ NC, Sept/1971.

nation, but by that time it may be too late for reform and some sort of social revolution may be required.

Christian Reaction

Such has commonly been the Christian reaction to social problems: they are not tackled until they have become ingrained in our very hearts and institutions and chances for their eradication slight. **By that time, Christians can only protest in a negative way, whereas tackling a problem before it has become an ingrained feature of society provides the Christian community opportunity to present the nation with a Christ-honouring direction and with a positive alternative to those provided by other schools of thought.** Vance Packard, the author of *The Hidden Persuaders*, probably the most popular work on modern advertising techniques and human manipulation, reports that American industrialists “contend that trying to hold back, or argue about, the direction our automated factories are taking us is like trying to hold back the tides and seasons” (p. 225). That may be true for certain Western nations, but I do not think it true for *our* nation. Hence my plea that Christians present alternatives today. NOW!

Status of a Consumer

As already indicated, this article is to deal with the problem of commercial manipulation not of the labour force as the previous article does, but, rather of the buying public, the individual member of which has in Western nations been reduced to the status of a consumer. In order to forestall the objection to the previous article, allow me to illustrate at this point that the problem has already in principle been introduced into Nigeria. Recently I came across an advertisement in the *New Nigerian*, a northern newspaper, of a certain training centre offering literature as well as a 24-week training course on “Salesmanship, Marketing, Advertising, Public Speaking, Public Relations, Psychology and Sales Management” that by the combination of courses listed serves to clearly indicate that the very latest techniques developed jointly by business and certain branches of psychology to manipulate the buying public into a certain mould are now readily available to any interested party.

Manipulating Creatures

Furthermore, in order to avoid more misunderstanding, it should be pointed out that *all of us* are by our very natures manipulating creatures: we manipulate both nature and our fellow men. On this score the Bible and modern psychology agree. Everett L. Shostrom's *Man, the Manipulator* leaves us without doubt on this score. But as Scripture calls us to a change of personal commitment to service of God and man rather than to control God and man, so does Scripture call us to reform the commercial and other structures through which a society expresses its deepest values and to transform them into servants of society rather than reduce man to a consuming animal that can be controlled in all his actions and thought in order to induce him to purchase the article(s) offered by a particular company. At the same time, awareness that Christians are not free from the manipulating tendency helps prevent the notion that we are speaking from a higher spiritual pedestal down to a wicked class of people known as businessmen.

Mere Gimmicks

The traditional methods of customer persuasion and manipulation are fairly obvious to any intelligent reader of newspapers or radio listener. Words such as "finest," "best," "greatest;" phrases such as "everybody uses it;" pictures of the latest idol in music or sports recommending a certain product; all these can be readily identified as mere gimmicks and are fairly easily resisted. Such traditional methods, however, were found insufficient in a nation like the United States where the large middle class already possessed more than it could possibly need. These methods were not effective in inducing people to continue buying more items far removed from even tertiary needs. How could the already overheated economy of such a nation be kept expanding in order to avoid a recession? This threatening problem forced advertisers to turn to more subtle and sophisticated methods of convincing the public to continue and even increase their spending habits and to make them regard pure luxuries as dire necessities of life.

Emotions

As advertisers turned into psychologists, it soon became clear that the public's reasons for preferring one brand to another were far more complex than previously suspected and that the reasons adduced by the customer were seldom the actual reasons. In fact, it was discovered, the customer himself seldom knows the real reason for his purchasing habits, for his motives are largely subconscious. In cases where they are known, they will seldom be confessed, for these are not usually motives in conformity with the confessed standards of his society. Emotions such as fear and guilt play a large part in deciding on a purchase. Sublimated sexual desires often enter into the picture. Prestige is one of the most powerful factors. Colours have deep psychological impact unknown to the customer. All of these were called into the new ploy of modern advertising to urge the public on to more grandiose buying sprees.

Seduction

Of course, in this massive effort, all the media were called into action: newspapers, magazines, radio, television. Nothing was considered sacred or subject to morality. Even, or especially children were exploited through supposedly innocent TV programs geared to mould the child into a dutiful consumer once he achieves financial independence. The following is Packard's quotation from Clyde Miller's *The Process of Persuasion*:

It takes time, yes, but if you expect to be in business for any length of time, think of what it can mean to your firm in profits if you can condition a million or ten million children who will grow up into adults trained to buy your product as soldiers are trained to advance when they hear the trigger words, "forward, march" (p. 136).

On the following page Packard quotes from a trade journal:

Where else on earth is brand consciousness fixed so firmly in the mind of four-year old tots? ... What is it worth to a manufacturer who can close in on this juvenile audience and continue to sell it under controlled conditions year after year, right up to its attainment of adulthood and full-fledged buyer status? It *can* be done. Interested? (p. 137).

Packer is right in dubbing such practices “seduction of young people” (p. 136).

Legitimate Practice

The aim of this article is not to describe *how* this seduction of children is taking place, but, rather, to point to the fact that this is now recognized as a legitimate practice in the advertising world. For the sake of the non-god mammon there is no hesitation to condition young children by invading the privacy of homes through the most subtle trickery ever devised on TV right under the nose of unsuspecting parents who are not trained to recognize the symptoms. It is necessary to realize that this sort of seduction will increasingly become a moulding force of the living and thinking patterns of Nigeria as communications improve and the level of affluence rises.

Half Truths

This manipulation of fellow human beings, accompanied as it frequently is by half-truths and falsehood, is so difficult to recognize that Christians and their publications are frequent participants without their being aware of it. A group of Christian Canadians have devoted themselves to a Christian approach in the realms of labour, industry and related areas. This group publishes a monthly magazine of very high caliber, but even this magazine succumbed by featuring an advertisement of a provincial labour department that was designed to place its political head in the most favourable political limelight, but was full of half-truths. However, it was composed so subtly that even the usually perceptive editor agreed to its insertion in a magazine that has constantly fought this type of manipulation.

The Nigerian Christian

For those desiring a more national example, let me hit a target right at home: *The Nigerian Christian*. *The Nigerian Christian* usually features an advertisement on its back page of a prominent Nigerian publishing company. The July installment claims with bold letters: “Education is the key to Nigeria’s future” And, of course education begins with the publications of this company. Now this may not be an example of the very latest in advertising subtlety, but certainly appeals to

the deeply felt desire of the average Nigerian for more education and it exploits the national Nigerian desire for further development in order to have people buy books from them. Many people, upon seeing the name of this company frequently associated with those individual and national desires, will slowly and subconsciously begin to associate the fulfillment of these desires with this company and – presto! The company has achieved its aim by cashing in on this subconscious but widespread identification.

Closer Analysis

Such advertisements are not meant to be rationally analysed by the public, for the public is assumed to be basically irrational, an assumption that appears to be true to fact. However, upon a closer analysis of this advertisement, one will soon detect statements that are completely false. Not only Scripture, but our own history should by now have demonstrated that education is by no means the key to a better Nigeria, for education has often been simply the tool to make devils even more clever in their designs. Education of most people has not begun with this company. Not all the finest libraries begin with this company. Am I pushing a good point too far or too close to home? I think not. Such ads ought not to be found in a magazine that claims to speak in the name of Christ.

The above examples are cited not to blacken anyone's good name, including that of *The Nigerian Christian* or of its advertisers, but to indicate the difficulty in escaping the clutches of modern advertisers and their subtle methods. Allow me to cite one more example, perhaps the most ironic of them all. No group is more vocal in its abhorrence of Western materialism and the controls upon the public by the large corporation than the sizable group of young people in North America who have become self-styled revolutionaries. However, it has been pointed out that one of their main symbols of protest – rock music – is not something these young people simply stumbled upon but it has been carefully created by commercial artists out not only to exploit this sense of aversion, but even to mould it into channels most lucrative to the music industry, and all according to a planned pattern. The very symbols of protest are actually mere moulding tools in the hands of manipulating marketeers!

Pavlov's Dog

Slowly but surely modern man is more and more treated like Pavlov's dog and, what is worse, modern man increasingly responds like one too. The engineers of human consent have only to pull the proper trigger or display the right colour or symbol and his victim will usually respond according to predictable patterns. This moulding effort is no longer confined to mere advertising of certain products, but is growing into a massive effort to change civilization's entire life style and the individual's habits, hobbies, values and even his experience of life itself. Packard quotes Ernest Dichter, one of the pioneers of human engineering: "One of the basic problems ... is to demonstrate the hedonistic approach to his life is a moral act not an immoral one" (p. 226). In other words, marketeers are now out to change the very basic outlook upon life and are ready to even destroy that most holy of all man's moments, his relationship to God. Hedonism is not something one can adopt in addition to one's devotion to Christ: it is a long-time rival and a hostile alternative to the Christian faith.

Industry has brought untold blessings and, if designed according to the basic laws of God with respect to human relationships and man's task, it could develop into a blessed tool of Nigerian development. However, if we simply accept it in its modern forms and its modern assumptions, it will in the long run bring endless tragedy to human lives. Similarly, manufactured products must be brought to the people if anyone is to benefit from them and for this advertising is a necessary link. However, let the Nigerian Christian community, or at least that section of it engaged in marketing, think deeply and Christianly about Christ-honouring methods and goals.

Methods are the result of a set of goals. If one's goal is simply and purely greater profit, then, of course, no degree of human manipulation will be considered illegitimate. However, if the goal is a more Christian one of service to the people, then Christian marketeers and advertisers will have to think hard and long before they adopt the methods and techniques of modern advertising. Man is to serve his brother not only in an ecclesiastical setting, but he is to serve his God and his brother in every realm, and that excludes turning him into Pavlov's dog or its

equivalent. It means to help him serve his God, to help him develop his talents to the utmost limits in the service of God and man, to provide him with any product that will enhance his style of life before God, to encourage his developing into a mature adult who makes his own mature decisions with a Spirit-formed conscience. Modern persuaders attempt the very opposite.