

CONDITIONS FOR EVANGELISM¹

1992

I. INTRODUCTION

1519 Debate between Luther and John Eck. Local ruler did not want Luther in his city for fear of violence. Read ticked paragraph in *Banner* of 30/4/1990, p. 2.

Can you imagine such fanfare accompanying a theological debate in Jos? Would the chief be informed? The governor? Police? Few people would care to come, except a few pastors and theological students. Theological debate is not generally considered by many people to be interesting or relevant. It has little to say for the lives of most people. And so people will ignore such events.²

Why the change from Luther's time? The change lies in the fact that the issues Luther and Eck dealt with were of interest to the people and had to do with their lives.

My conclusion: if we as Christians really want to draw the attention of people to the Gospel, we must do so in terms that are relevant to the ordinary people or to the specific social group that is your target.

II. EVANGELISM CAN BE DONE AT ANY TIME AND BE SUCCESSFUL

- A. Prisoners, slaves, poor, uneducated all become Christians under trying circumstances.
- B. People continue to turn to Christ every day in Nigeria.
- C. The Holy Spirit can and does call people to God often in spite of our methods and our lifestyles. Even when Christians are among the most corrupt in the country,

¹ This was a talk given in various churches around Jos, Nigeria. Hence the use of some Hausa vocabulary.

² This lecture is being placed on this website in 2016, fourteen years after it was delivered. In between I published my 8-volume series *Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations* as they play out in Nigeria. Like Luther's situation, this series was also birthed during times of violence between two religions, times so violent that publishers who were my personal friends in Jos, at first did not dare to publish the series for the same reasons Luther's local ruler did not want that debate to take place.

God continues to call via our methods of evangelism. He has to, for none of our methods will ever be as good as they should be.

III. MAKING THE GOSPEL MORE RELEVANT AND LESS TRIVIAL

- A. Dualism described and renounced. Bible vs dualism Genesis 1 –creation; cultural mandate. Refer to *Living in God's World*, pp.1-2; Colossians 1.
- B. Dualism has led to trivialization of Gospel.
- C. Dualism has taken church out of society; busy with itself; internal.
- D. Dualism has left thinking people indifferent.
- E. Dualism has left politics and economics outside. *Aikin ubangiji* and *aikin jiki*.³ For one you pray and study Bible; for the other, you don't.
- F. Dualism has encouraged corruption.
- G. Spend much on church buildings, while people live in poverty.
- H. Result: people are afraid of religion instead of seeing it as a help to develop the country, towards peace and unity.

CONCLUSION: Successful evangelism must recognize that the Gospel is for all of life and must be applied to all of life. It must be seen to be dealing with relevant issues.

IV. EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE INSTITUTE OF CHURCH & SOCIETY

- A. External debt conference, 1992.
- B. Oppression – This is very explicit in Bible. *Living in God's World*, p. 53.
- C. Bribery and corruption. *Living in God's World*, p. 51. Tell the story of the League for Action against Bribery of the Institute of Church & Society.
- D. Community Development – dealing with problems of the people.
- E. Organize public lectures on Christian justice; Faith and science; Faith and business, etc.
- F. Publish books and magazines dealing with such issues.

³"*Aikin Ubangiji*"= "the work of God"; "*aikin jiki*"= "physical work," "work in the world."

G. Speak up for the poor – not only vs Muslims.

RESULT: People will recognize Christians to be in the vanguard of positive development, relevant to their problems.

V. CONCLUSION – Evangelism coming from such a community will make more sense. It is inviting people to join the forces of Christ who is the true liberator for Nigeria. It will show that Christ is real, practical and has something to give to the world – useful.