

The Mission's Underbelly
Internal Frictions
Correspondence & Circulars

Introductory Note (January, 2016)

The documents in this file are included to show what could be described as the “underbelly” of missions. Like any other organization, mission organizations are not always free from disagreements and rancor within the ranks or from power struggles with their “daughter” churches. This Boeriana page is not meant to be a hagiography; it aims to show the warts and shortcomings as well as accomplishments. This file probably represents the low point of my relationships with my missionary colleagues. I am not proud of it, but there were some good reasons for it, the major one being the co-existence of different, if not opposing, schools of thought within the Christian Reformed Church in North America that were recognized and tolerated but not addressed as to their potential consequences in church and mission policies. My disagreements with my colleagues were the result of that denominational fissure. I must confess that some personality deficits plus some cultural differences with my American colleagues on my part contributed towards it as well. For more details of that story, I invite you to read Volume 2 of our memoir *Every Square Inch*, which you can access from this Boeriana page.

December 28, 1975

Gen. Sec. SUM-Benue¹

¹ “SUM-Benue” was the name of our Mission at the time. “SUM” referred to “Sudan United Mission,” while “Benue” was the partial name of the denomination we were developing, the complete name at the time being “EKAS Benue.” The full explanation of this name will take us too far. I refer you to my publications of 1979 and 1984, both found under the “Missions” section on this Boeriana page.

Dear,²

First of all, to you and your family, a blessed Christmas season and a happy change of year.

I wish to comment on two epistles of yours, one a circular dated Dec. 22 and the other a letter to me – I do not have it before me, so that I do not know its date – requesting me to join you in reconciliation efforts.³ Allow me to first comment on that circular.

The notions explained in that circular are not new, but I suggest to you that you leave out in future communications such explanatory remarks as are contained in the 2nd to the last paragraph, beginning with “At the end” Better yet, I wish you would rid yourself of that attitude betrayed in that paragraph, namely that of mistrust. That paragraph will not be taken kindly, for it indicates that in your opinion the committees concerned have not understood what they have been doing and that they lacked financial responsibility. It is such grandfatherly attitudes towards the church that makes Nigerians grate, and rightly so. It also contributes to continued ill feelings on the part of the church towards the mission. A study of mission history will indicate that such attitudes on the part of missionaries have always been sources of trouble.

Your request for my participation in reconciliation – (another missionary colleague) informs me that when you requested this meeting, (a Nigerian pastor) visited the Benue General Secretary to discuss it. One of them is supposed to have remarked to Haveman that this is not the time for the mission to push for yet another meeting. More informal groundwork has to be done yet by the leaders of the two *lardies*/denominations. That could be construed as an effort to sabotage further developments, but it could also be a signal to the mission not to push too hard at this point. Being in Baissa, I do not often get together with either Nigerians or missionaries who are on the inside on present developments in this area, but I am inclined to give you a word of caution not to push this too hard.

But I have a more serious and personal reason for declining your invitation. During my second term I noticed that I increasingly drifted away from the mission and found myself in decreasing

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I judge it advisable and courteous not to mention the name of the person with whom this correspondence took place, the General Secretary of the Mission at the time.

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One of the denominations that arose out of the work of our Mission, now called “Christian Reformed Church—Nigeria,” had split into two along tribal lines, with the Kuteb having broken away to form their own denomination in reaction to alleged Jukun domination. The Mission, including myself, worked hard to bring about reconciliation, but to no avail. Today, Christmas 2015, 40 years later, the day this footnote is being written, the two remain separate denominations, but with a new generation of leaders on both sides, relationships have become more amicable.

sympathy with prevailing attitudes. I had hoped that my study of missions would have helped me overcome this. In fact, at the beginning of this term I tried my very best to have greater sympathies and a positive attitude and for a while I so managed. However, upon getting into the Benue Liaison Committee (BLC)⁴ I noticed that there were certain attitudes entertained by most of my colleagues and ideas I could not share and sitting in BLC became an increasingly unpleasant experience for me, though I tried to hide that fact. The informal sessions we had that ended up in the death of BLC served to confirm my feelings that I seem to operate with quite a different frame of mind, whether I wish it so or not. This may be partly personality; it is certainly partly the fact that I am more of an international person and have experienced several cultures; it is also due to my missiological⁵ background and theological views; it is partly caused by my increasing hesitation with respect to the average middle class value system. What I am working up to is to indicate to you my negative reaction to your request. Frankly, I do not feel at home much in the SUM-CRC and do not like to represent her in distinction from the church.

Almost every time I attend missionary meetings or meetings in which the mission as a mission deals with the church as two separate entities, I come home feeling extremely frustrated and often bitter. I have begun to notice in myself the danger of bitterness; my wife has more than once prevented me from foolish expressions arising out of bitterness. A bitter man cannot evaluate people and issues clearly. Hence, I ask you to look for someone else, one who is more in tune with the missionary community.

The above must not be construed as a lack of interest in reconciliation, but I simply do not believe we three would make a very good and consistent team in such a delicate matter.

I hope this letter makes some sense. I have tried to write it without bitterness and certainly without any personal malice. At the same time, I thought it well to have it out in the open with the beginning of a new regime.⁶ Perhaps sometime we can talk it over face to face.

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BLC was a committee consisting of about a dozen members equally divided into representatives of the "Benue" Church, now "Christian Reformed Church-Nigeria" ("CRC-N"), and of the Mission. They would deal with relationships between the two bodies, relationships that were often strained. They would try to reach a consensus, but if that failed, a vote would usually produce a stalemate, since delegates would vote according to whom they represented. I found my membership very difficult, since I often found myself on the "side" of the church.

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"Missiological" refers to my academic study of missions. I had done post-graduate study of missions and was in the process of writing a doctoral dissertation, *Missionaries of Liberation....* (1979) of which you can find a summary on this Boeriana page under the section on Missions entitled *Missions: Heralds of Capitalism or Christ?* Whether or not the entire dissertation will be scanned for placement on this webpage is still under consideration (January, 2016).

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The Mission had just appointed a new General Secretary.

Yours cordially

John H. Boer

From the General Secretary

December 22, 1975

To: Principal Baissa CLTC, Principal Serti CLTC, Principal Lupwe CLTC, Principal Wukari CLTC

CC: Mr. W. Evenhouse, Miss M. Dykstra, Pastor Isaiah Andemun, Mr. R. Browneye, Mr. A.

Vreeke, Rev. J. Boer, Miss R. Salomans, Pastor S. Galadima, Pastor B. Musa, Director

Wukari Youth Center, Mr. G. Buys

Beginning in 1976, every three months the mission will give a grant representing one-fourth of the money which the mission has budgeted for church ministries. This money will be given to the committees responsible for handling the affairs of the work. The first grant will be paid in January, 1976. Mr. R. Browneye, the Assistant General Secretary will issue a voucher to you for the correct amount. Upon receipt of the voucher you may collect the money from any mission station when the voucher is presented. Before the second grant is paid in April, those who are responsible for the finances must submit a report to Mr. Browneye. A form will be sent to you which must be returned to Mr. Browneye. This form will indicate how the previous grant was spent and how much money the church has contributed towards these ministries. If all is in order, the second quarterly voucher will be issued.

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| Example: | Jukun Literacy | Budget for 1976 is N1,443.33 |
| | 1 st quarterly grant in Jan | N360.83 |
| | 2 nd quarterly grant in Apr | N360.83 |

3rd quarterly grant in July N360.83

4th quarterly grant in Oct N360.83

This money will be given to the Jukun Literacy Committee and they are responsible for the expenditures. All workers employed will be paid from this fund as well as those collected from the church. It is expected that the church will contribute towards these ministries as well.

At the end of the year an audited report shall be given to Mr. Browneye. We hope in this way that the committees will assume the necessary financial responsibilities and also that they may have a better understanding of how the money is being spent.

All purchases for supplies from bookshops should be in cash.

Sincerely yours,

....., Gen. Secretary

January 2, 1976

Jos, Nigeria

Dear John,

Greetings! I have the following comments to make to you concerning your letter of the 28th of December.

1. I don't see why any church leader could feel offended at the statement, "We hope in this way that the committees will assume the necessary financial responsibilities and also that they may have a better understanding of how the money is being spent." This sentence says two things: First, that the committees composed of church leaders will now handle all the funds rather than the missionary. Neither you nor the church should object to this. Is this such a "grandfatherly attitude"? Secondly, the church will have a better understanding of how the money is being spent. The fault in the past has been ours, not theirs. We have failed to expose our expenditures because it was always done by missionaries through mission petty cash station accounts. Now we are going to do it different. We are going to let the committees spend the money. "A grandfatherly attitude"? You have to be kidding! A better understanding ---- YES.

2. The mission is not "pushing" a meeting at this time. EKAN Takum wants a meeting and wants it immediately. As a matter of fact they wanted one before Christmas already. They have been

to Browneye's house several times. According to your letter EKAS Benue does not want a meeting. When I called the meeting I stated that if they have objections to a meeting at this time they should let me know as soon as possible. I have not heard anything so far. So what do you do when one church wants a meeting and the other one doesn't, so you say? I guess you come to the conclusion that the mission is "pushing."

3. I accept your refusal to serve on the reconciliation committee. Your expression of feelings towards the mission and missionaries is not something new. We know how you feel and we are sorry for that. I must add, however, that I do not feel that we are all wrong in our ideas of missiology and that John Boer is all right. I can only say that you are entitled to your opinions but I am not in sympathy with your constant negative criticism of the mission. Let's face it, we are on different wave-lengths and as you say, you have a different frame of mind. I can't understand why a man who doesn't feel at home with the SUM-CRC still desires to continue to work with her. If I had your "burden" I would be on the first plane home. Maybe that is why you want to go into university work. Your intention, however, is still to be a part of the SUM-CRC team. But why? Just because of the fringe benefits of Hillcrest, immigration etc.? If this is all SUM-CRC means to you then I object to your going into university work. If you have no respect for your employer or your colleagues, then you are only using the mission to do your "thing" quite apart from the mission. I object to this and neither can I support it.

I am sorry I have been curt and frank with you but your letters often are too. I will be happy to discuss our differences fuska da fuska.

Yours for SUM CRC

cc. Mr. R. Browneye, Ass. Gen. Sec.