

CHRISTIAN SELF-CRITIQUE

Though this volume is mostly a Christian critique of Muslims in the Nigerian setting, it should be understood that Christians do not blame only Muslims for their problems any more than Muslims blame only Christians. Both groups recognise that they themselves have contributed to the problems. This brief chapter provides a taste of what Christians say about themselves.

To start off with, Engineer Salifu, long-time general secretary of CAN in what used to be the ten northern states, put it very strongly. “Frankly,” he stated,

I put the blame of the ills of the country squarely on Christians! Because we have not been the light and salt of the world as we ought. The challenge before us as Christians is just one—to live righteously. Do what is right wherever you are. By the time you find even half the Christians in a state or establishment doing what is right, they will change that place. Unfortunately most Christians prefer to follow the stream. Personally I don't blame the Muslims or those who do not believe. I blame Christians who are not ready to stick to what

*is right. You see, immediately some of them see money—finish. They just go ahead and do what they want. So let us do what is right even if it means suffering for it. Refuse to be promoted. Refuse to take that job. The Christian girl should refuse to give her body just to get that job or promotion. By the time you have people doing this, the society will change. This is the challenge for Christians.*¹

The northern zone of CAN, in its booklet *Leadership in Nigeria*, claims that Nigeria is “more than 60% Christians.” It asks, “How is it that their presence has not been felt in the affairs of leadership in this country? What is it that makes them compromise so much?” The author wonders why Christians who participate in the highest levels of government “remain cowardly silent” as the country is smuggled into the Muslim camp.²

In the same publication another writer asks, “Where have the Christians been all this time?” The answer is:

They have been involved but have hidden their lights under the bushel. The average Muslim, when he gets to a high position becomes more religious—for the Christian the reverse is the case. He becomes less godly. He sees his brothers and sisters as fanatics! He becomes too busy to go to church...—once or twice a year is enough for him. He is ashamed to be seen in his office with a Bible.

The writer mocks his wayward fellow Christians much as do Muslim critics mock their compromisers.

He prefers to chairman many social occasions and functions. He speaks more English than the Englanders themselves. When therefore Christians pray for Christians to be in positions of authority, they should pray for those who will remember their creator...³

These sentiments are widespread amongst Christians.

CAN accused the Christian community of radical failure. The Christian is to be the Lord's "ambassador" on earth and a light and salt to a dark and sour world. Unfortunately, "Christians as a community in Nigeria have failed in their ambassadorial responsibilities." Indeed,

Politics may be a dirty game—but who will make it clean? If Christians distance themselves from politics that lead to leadership, then demons will have a field day as has been the case with Nigeria up till today. If demons govern and rule us and burn our churches and marginalise us and treat us like second class citizens in our country of posting, then why should the Christian community complain? The price honest people pay for keeping silent and not getting involved is to be ruled by dishonest men.

For those who wonder how such a situation of non-involvement in politics could have arisen, CAN points to the missionaries "who planted our feet on solid ground," but who

did not impart to us the technique of governance. For anyone to be interested in the governance of a country was "blasphemous." A Christian should not be interested in politics, we are told. We are often reminded that politics is a dirty game and true Christians should distance themselves from it. Our "light" should be hidden "under" the "bushel" we... have been reminded from pulpit to pulpit... The righteous cannot rule if he is taught not to be interested in governance.⁴

CAN not only criticises Christians; Christians also criticise it. At a launching ceremony in Jos, the former Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations, the now late Major General Joel Garba, a Christian, called on CAN leadership to "reflect on the teachings of Jesus Christ, rather than pursuing selfish interests." CAN, Garba charged, "has abandoned the king-

dom of God for narrow-minded gains on earth.” CAN should “prove that political objectives have not overtaken their vision and the teachings of Christianity.” The chairman of the occasion, Silas Janfa, holder of various high civil service positions, chimed in by stressing that “CAN needed serious surgical operation in order to achieve the objectives for which it was founded... it needs to abide by the teaching of Jesus Christ.”⁵

Amunkitou Dolom is one of the “small people” whom I introduce occasionally. I have no idea as to his/her identity but assume he is a man. He writes that “it is obvious that all peaceful methods by CAN to make the government see reason have been exhausted to no avail.” The government continues to fan religious upheavals. The various reports published by CAN and others on the many upheavals “leave no room for doubt as to which party exhibited intolerance and aggressiveness, and is thus in the wrong.” Governments drag their feet over the recommendations submitted by commissions. “Everyone knows which religious sect enjoys governments’ covert, and even overt, support.” CAN knows “that it is the desire to control the nation’s economic and political power...that drives the rich and hypocritical Muslims to be ready tools in the hands of a social class who unfortunately characterise our government.”

In this context Dolom asked,

Why is CAN, through Today’s Challenge, its major mouthpiece, wasting its time explaining over and over again, persuading, begging, crying and shouting over the obvious, knowing that the Federal Might is deliberately keeping mute? CAN should have known long before now, that it is nonsense to flog a dead horse. They should look elsewhere for deliverance.

CAN has been turning the other cheek for over a decade. “How many cheeks has CAN? Perhaps CAN has 70 times 70 cheeks, but death toll, destruction of property, maimed Christians...have risen

to well over the 70 times 70 illusory goal, which is 4900.” CAN should simply “return fire for fire. They need not be discreet about it.” Dolom socks it squarely to us:

It is sheer cowardice for CAN to fill the pages of dailies and electronic media calling on the government to punish their foe. It is absurd, too, for CAN to bother us with claims of governments’ partiality. If CAN is such a weakling that it cannot help its members in defending their faith, then it is too bad, because the government has overtly said “No!” to CAN’s calls for redress. If CAN can’t fight, I would advise that it lie down and die without further noisy disturbances of the society. No heavens will forgive you for inaction.... Rhetorics have never saved in the past, do not save now nor will save later.⁶

You can hardly bite harder.

Dakum Shown was a member of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), a major church in Plateau State, and Speaker of the Plateau House of Assembly during the civilian regime of Governor Solomon Lar. He chided his church and its members for failing to play their proper political role. They have divided reality into religious and political sectors in such a way as to abandon their responsibility in society. He warned that “on the last day God will ask His followers”:

Where were you when the nation’s treasury was looted? When those who looted the public treasuries came to church and even made donations? When you refused to vote for the upright candidates, were you not allowing the wrong people to get into government to manipulate and destroy the rapid growth of the church? When decrees and edicts prevent God’s faithful servants from spreading His Ministry, where were you? When justice, truth and fair play were murdered and God’s innocent children made to suffer, where were you?

Shown called upon COCIN to “chart a new course of action.” She is “to come out in full force to re-educate its followers to the importance of their civic responsibilities.”⁷

Tanko Yusuf, one of our “fathers,” demanded that Christians “cleanse” themselves. He was especially emphatic on the need for Christian unity. In fact, it became his “consuming mindset.” Christians need to be united, he argued repeatedly, but that will not be easy. “Too easily do Christians pursue their own narrow interests, private or tribal. Too often they put individual or tribal goals above our communal mission...” He took several Christians to task for preaching false doctrines “that are the antithesis of the Christian faith.” He faulted Christians for being blind to “the rottenness in...Nigeria’s social, economic, political and spiritual life since our independence.” Christians must take up the challenge of clean politics and civil service. Unfortunately, leaders fail to challenge their members at this very point. He has, he alleged, heard bishops and pastors preach against political involvement, because, they said, “politics is sin.” Yusuf countered, “False. False. This critical misunderstanding of politics has kept too many Christians from becoming involved. How sad! In so doing we abandon our fate to unjust, unscrupulous leaders.” Yusuf did not hesitate hanging out Christian dirty laundry. Partially to clear himself, he publicly wrote about corruption in CAN in connection with a government grant for the building of the national ecumenical centre.⁸

Though these sentiments crop up many times more than the above paragraphs indicate and though they are to be taken seriously, they do not represent the dominant tone in relationship to Islam. This in-house critique is not meant for the outside world, least of all for Muslims. It is similar to tribal self-critique that will not tolerate the same from the outside.

Over against Islam, the late Alex Fom expressed the dominant tone well:

It is true that religion continues to play a destabilising role in the socio-economic life of Nigeria. But the first question we should ask is, what religious sect constitutes the destabilising factor? At no time do the Christians get up in arms to destabilise the politico-economy of the country. At no time do the Christians get up to riot. No. The Maitatsine groups for instance are Muslim groups. All this burning of churches, who did them? They are Muslims.

This is the driving sentiment in the Christian community, even in the minds of Christian self-critics. And that therefore inevitably is the main tone for the rest of this book.

▲ NOTES

¹ J. Tsado, *TC*, 5/87, pp. 8-9.

² P. 5.

³ CAN, *Leadership...*, pp. 36-37.

⁴ CAN, *Leadership*, pp. vii-viii. The background to these problems is explained in some of my other publications. See Boer, 1979, Chapter 10; 1984, Chapter 8; 1989, pp. 10-13.

⁵ H. Hassan, 9 Feb/94.

⁶ Dolom, *TC*, 6/88.

⁷ It is significant that in the 2003 elections three COCIN members are running for governor in Plateau State. Politics being what it is in Nigeria, this presents the denomination with a whole other pastoral challenge, the opposite from the one under critique in this section.

⁸ Grissen, pp. 9, 98-100, 107, 113-114.