

The Kingdom of God

More Than Myself, Morality, Church

An Invitation to Discuss¹

Why do some see Christianity merely as a personal religion rather than an alternative to Secularism, Communism, Capitalism or Islam?

THE REASON – Many Christians have implicitly adopted this narrow view because of the form in which Christianity has been brought to Nigeria. Non-Christians have reached this conclusion from observing Christians.

Islam was not brought to Nigeria by Muhammed himself, but via a circuitous route it was spread by open propagation, commerce and warfare. Likewise, Christianity was not brought to Nigeria by Christ Himself, but by missionaries it was spread from the Near East via North Africa and southern Europe northward and to the Americas. From there it was introduced in Nigeria.

Neither Christianity nor Islam comes in pure form; both are partially coloured by the local cultures in which their adherents participate. Occasionally, local cultures so influence them as to cause religious degeneration. Local philosophies are then absorbed uncritically and certain aspects of the religion are neglected. It happened in the first few centuries with Greek philosophy and in modern times with humanistic ideas. The influence of these two related philosophical currents has been identified by Christian scholars as having caused an

¹ This stenciled tract is the first publicly distributed document of the Jos ICS, 1977. For more about the purpose and history of this tract, see our *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 178-179.

understanding of the Kingdom of God that is narrower than the Bible teaches. The effect is a reduced vision of the breadth of Christian concern in this world.

Specifically, the application of Christianity is often restricted to the church and individual morality. Religion is seen as a private matter that should not be allowed to influence science, economics, history, politics. Jesus saves one's soul. Doing God's work means doing "religious work," while Christians in other occupations are assigned a secondary place in this scheme. The "spiritual" is all-important; the material world is at best tolerated. God is King of my soul, of my personal life and of the church, but His relation to the rest of creation receives minor attention.

THE RESULT—The result has been nearly fatal. Of course, the church, the soul and personal morality are important, but over-emphasis on these at the expense of other teachings has left Christians in "non-religious" work without Christian teaching and fellowship related to their daily work. Only church workers are thought to have a divine call to their work; others are regarded as merely working for money. Their work is sanctified by the amount they give to the church or by the opportunities they take to evangelize on the job. Though these forms of service are not to be despised, the Gospel is not brought to bear on work itself. Profits are the prime motive of business. Industrial engineers design factories that stifle workers' creativity. Advertisers turn latent materialistic desires into felt needs. EVEN THE MEDICAL AND LEGAL PROFESSIONS BECOME PRIMARILY AVENUES TO WEALTH. Work is not seen in terms of service to God and His relevant laws are not seen to apply. No wonder that many regard Christianity as irrelevant for their lives or for the nation. Nigeria has suffered deep scars because of it.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The church has not lacked wise men who warned her of the danger of this one-sided approach. A long tradition of visionaries exists who have expressed their concern, also in Nigeria. One recurring note is insistence on a wider understanding of the Kingdom of God.

When God created the universe, He created His Kingdom. His rule extends to the animate and inanimate, to the physical and the spiritual, to heaven and earth. When He completed His creation, He described it as beautiful, ALL of it. Who then are we to berate the physical?

Man was given a central position in this Kingdom to tend it, to care for it, to exploit its potentials positively. The first assigned tasks were those of agriculture and animal husbandry. These were man's original SERVICE to God that were to be performed according to the laws the King had devised for His realm and that man was given the privilege of discovering.

Sin was man's revolt against God's law. Man continued to develop the earth but no longer in obedience to the King. The memory of the King and His laws faded and man began to enthrone kings (gods) after his own image. He no longer understood the constitution the King had imposed on His realm. Brother oppressed brother. Everyone for himself. The entire creation groaned under abuse.

The revolution did not abrogate the Kingdom or its laws. Temporarily concentrating on Israel, the King sent a series of prophets to explain His

laws that cover business, hygiene, marriage, agriculture, religion and politics. They are there for all to read in the Bible. Disobedience to them has throughout history spelled disaster.

JESUS CHRIST—Christ represents God's insistence on restoring His Kingdom. Jesus came to redeem the original creation, the constitution of which was still in force. He explained the original meaning that had been forgotten. Especially in human relations, He emphasized the priority of love and service as basic to God's constitution and the communal nature of human existence.

VISION AND TASK—Christian students! Awake! Study your Bible anew without the restraints of this narrow vision. Remember how the King created His entire Kingdom and revealed laws that cover both culture and nature. Nigeria finds herself in distress partly because we have flaunted the *divine* constitution. Only a deep study of the Bible *and* of the basic ideas that have shaped our present culture, together with much prayer and *united* reflection, can help us re-discover these laws and apply them to our present situation.

We are not suggesting an easy course. These laws require application in terms of our own culture, while the latter is not to dictate which we will select to obey or to ignore. We must stand open to correction of our favourite theories and practices. It will not do to simply choose one of the alternatives men dangle before us, whether that of capitalism, communism, secularism or Islam. We have a constitution that has its own peculiar implications for every discipline and profession. The study and application of these is the definition of your specific Christian contribution to the healing of Nigeria as a Christian scholar or professional.

INSTITUTE OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY—This Institute in Ibadan has for a decade sought to awaken this larger dimension among Christians. An affiliate is now opening in Jos. Both stand ready to be of service in providing a forum and literature to equip ourselves for full obedience to our King.

CHRISTIANS! STUDENTS! PROFESSIONALS! AWAKE! REFLECT! STUDY AND PRAY! PREPARE FOR COMMUNAL OBEDIENCE TO THE KING AND HIS CONSTITUTION! There is none better or more practical.

“Set your mind on God’s kingdom and His justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)