



A Quiet Revolution

*Some Social and Religious
Perspectives on the Nigerian Crisis*

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INTRODUCTION

As the crises in Nigeria worsen, foreign writers are calling international attention to the country's merit. Two of these foreign authors deserve particular attention. They are Karl Maier, with his book, *This House has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (2002), and John Campbell, with his work, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink* (2011). Against the international media's tendency to shun Nigeria because of its complexities, Maier insists, "Nigeria truly matters."¹ The outside world, he warns, ignores Nigeria at its own peril.²

Maier sees very clearly the necessity of saving Nigeria, but his reasons are inadequate. They are tailored for the profit of the outside world. In outline, Maier argues as follows: In Africa, Nigeria is the biggest trading partner of the United States. It is the fifth largest supplier of oil to the U.S. market. Nigeria can provide trade opportunities for North America and European companies. If Nigeria fails, he cautions, it could cost American taxpayers millions of dollars.³

1 Karl Maier, *This House has Fallen: Nigeria in crisis* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2002), xix.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

John Campbell's logic is similar to that of Maier.⁴ Campbell admits the importance of Nigeria to the international community. He refers to Nigeria as President George W. Bush administration's most important African strategic partner.⁵ But he has no illusions about the complexities of Nigeria. The country, he understands, is riddled with arduous problems, and tough for Western nations. At the same time, he wants United States policy makers to pay more attention to Nigeria's internal progress.⁶ He even made modest policy recommendations to the Obama administration on how to assist Nigerians working for democracy and the rule of law.

But like Maier, his reasons for saving Nigeria are driven by foreign concerns. In summary, these are his arguments: The United States is increasingly dependent on Nigeria for imported oil and natural gas. Nigeria contributes a large number of troops to the United Nations and other peacekeeping operations. Nigeria is one of the founders of the African Union (AU).⁷ On these points, Campbell is right, for what he says are consistent with the facts about Nigeria.

Today, no nation stands alone. To be isolated from the global economy is suicidal for any country. We know what has happened to nations that sanctions have been imposed on them for their violation of international laws. They have suffered terrible economic losses. Almost everyone would agree that countries should benefit from each other. It is then no surprise that Nigeria shares its resources with the universal community. Nigeria has also gained from foreign technology. Yet, what I contend, and without hesitation, is that the fate of Nigeria should not depend on the interest of the international community as Maier and Campbell appear to argue.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It is home to about 170 million people. Most of these people live below the poverty line. Presently, the majority of Nigerians are worse off than they were at independence, despite their vast human and natural resources. True, Nigerians' suffering is made in Nigeria, for whatever misfortunes have befallen the nation since independence can be blamed on Nigerians themselves. Even so, Nigeria is worth saving, not just for the benefit of the outside world. All efforts should be made to rescue Nigeria because of the people's anguish. Food, housing, electricity,

4 John Campbell was the U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria from 2004 to 2007. His first contact with Nigeria was in 1988 as a political counselor in Lagos.

5 John Campbell, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink* (Lanham, Maxxiiryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), vii.

6 John Campbell, *Dancing on the Brink*, viii.

7 *Ibid.*, vii.

good roads, good health care, safe drinking water, and security, which many nations take for granted, are in short supply in Nigeria.

Moreover, Nigeria is a twenty-first century experiment. Can a nation with almost equal numbers of Christians and Muslims be stable, peaceful, and progressive in the twenty-first century? We only have to look at the Sudan for a recent and sad example. Granted the Christian-Muslim population in the Sudan is not as evenly divided as the one in Nigeria,⁸ for approximately 70 percent of the Sudanese profess Islam, and 20 percent Christianity; yet, the turbulent Christian-Muslim relations in both countries are almost identical.⁹ After decades of civil war in which millions of Sudanese were killed, in 2011, in a referendum deemed fair and free by the international community, the people of South Sudan voted in favor of the South becoming an independent nation.¹⁰ On Saturday, July 9, 2011, there was a formal declaration of independence ceremony establishing the Republic of South Sudan. This parting of ways between the Christian South and the Muslim North, which some people have commended, is troubling for me, since it is indicative of the inability of Christians and Muslims to coexist as a political entity at a time when humanity is converging.¹¹

If Nigeria breaks up like the Sudan, for sure it will not be the end of Africa.¹² However, it will be a major setback for the continent in an age of

8 For more information on the even distribution of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, see John N. Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008), 17–18.

9 Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan, and Darfur: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

10 *Ibid.*, xxviii.

11 In a letter titled, “Congratulatory Message from Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria: Independence of Southern Sudan,” and dated July 12, 2011, the president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Most Rev. Felix A. Job, congratulated the Catholic bishops and the people of South Sudan on the attainment of their sovereignty on July 9, 2011: <http://www.cbcn-ng.org/docs/g6.pdf>. Also, in another letter to General Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, conveyed their congratulations and good wishes to the people of South Sudan on their independence. Jul 7, 2011: <http://archived.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/messages-and-letters/congratulation-letter-for-the-independence-of-south-sudan.html>.

12 For a synopsis of the speech given by Yar’Adua’s foreign minister, Ojo Maduekwe, while still the secretary of the ruling party, regarding the possibility that Nigeria could become a failed state, see *This Day* (Lagos), February 13 and 20, 2005.

globalization.¹³ If Nigeria rebounds from adversities, as we hope it will, by having the various ethnic groups and the followers of the two major religions (Christianity and Islam) work together for the common good, it could transform the African continent as a whole. Just as America is the first most successful multiethnic nation in human history, so too, if the “Nigerian Project” succeeds, Nigeria could go down in history as the first most successful country where Christians and Muslims are evenly divided.

Hitherto, the “Nigerian Project” has been a lamentable failure largely because of the conflict of interest. It is either foreign, regional, group, or self interest to the detriment of nation. The colonizers, it would be recalled, came to the area now called Nigeria, not primarily to develop the people, but to extract their mineral and agricultural wealth for themselves and Western capitalist nations. In the first republic of Nigeria, which lasted from 1960 to 1966, as many historians have documented, politics was fiercely driven by the desire to control the Federal Government for ethnic, regional, and religious development. During the second republic, from 1979 to 1983, for the most part, the political class did not see public office as a demanding task, but an opportunity to enrich itself at the expense of the common good. The fourth republic, which spans from 1999 to the present time, has been characterized by a lifestyle of profound selfishness.

Over the years, pundits have proposed several solutions to the Nigerian crisis. The most widely suggested solution is that all the ethnic groups in the country should come under the aegis of a national conference and negotiate three vital questions: (1) How they want to govern themselves; (2) how to share their resources; and (3) whether or not to remain together.¹⁴ There is no guarantee that this proposal will cure Nigeria’s ailment. Fundamentally the scheme fails to take into account what lies beneath the surface of Nigeria’s problem, which, to me, is profound selfishness.

Corruption and misrule, which many think are the major problems of Nigeria, are in fact not the real issues. We must distinguish between symptoms and real problems. Corruption and misrule, although they have inflicted horrible injuries on the Nigerian society, are byproducts in the same way that smoke is the byproduct of fire. The real problem of Nigeria, as we shall see, is unmitigated

13 In its report on Nigeria, The Center for Preventive Actions states: “For Africa and those concerned with it no country poses a greater challenge and a greater risk than Nigeria” (Peter M. Lewis, Pearl T. Robinson, Barnett R. Rubin, *Stabilizing Nigeria: Sanctions, Incentives, and Support for Civil Society* [Preventive Action Reports, Vol. 3; New York: The Century Foundation Press, 1998], xiii).

14 Karl Maier, *This House has Fallen*, xxvii.

selfishness. The nation is still bleeding as a result of this evil. Unless Nigerians cure this “disease,” no system of government is likely to succeed. In vain do Nigerians even seek political solutions as long as selfishness remains their credo!

Just recall George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. The animals labor slavishly for long hours with nothing to show for their hard work. Soon they realize how their misfortunes originate from human tyranny. They decide, as a solution to their woes, to get rid of man.¹⁵ In what turns out to be a forecast of Africans’ rebellion against their colonial masters, the animals depose their human oppressors in a well coordinated revolution. Following this victory, leadership of the animal kingdom falls to the pigs. In an astonishing turn of events, the pigs go against the Seven Commandments of the animal society by eating, drinking, and dressing like human beings. Worst of all, the new rulers revise the basic tenets of their community so that “all animals are equal” now becomes “some animals are more equal than others.”¹⁶ In an unexpected animal-human fraternity, the pigs form an alliance with their former dictators, making themselves superior animals, enjoying the prosperity of their world, dining with human beings while the rest of the animals are without this luxury, though they are subject to long working hours.¹⁷

As we can see, the real problem of the animal world is not man per se, but egoism. Before the animal revolution, human selfishness is the cause of animal misery. After the rebellion, animal greed is the bane of the animal kingdom. I fear greatly that if Nigeria breaks up, Nigerians will step, not into the broad future prosperity that lies before them, but back into the past, like the animal society, with the selfishness of new tyrants replacing that of former despots.

To repair and restore Nigeria, the government and the people need to be altruistic. The United States of America, although not a perfect society by any means, serves as a guide in this regard. On January 1, 2013, the White House and the Senate Republican leadership secured a tentative agreement to allow tax rates to rise on affluent Americans.¹⁸ Under the agreement, tax rates would jump to 39.6 percent from 35 percent for individual incomes over \$400, 000 and for couples over \$450, 000, while tax deductions and credits would start phasing out on incomes as low as \$250, 000.¹⁹ This was to avert

15 George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (Signet Classics; New York: New American Library, 1996), 9.

16 *Ibid.*, 24, 134.

17 *Ibid.*, 135–141.

18 Jonathan Weisman, *New York Times*, Tuesday, January 1, 2013, 1.

19 *Ibid.*

the so-called “fiscal cliff” that threatened the American economy. Of course, it was not an easy road for Congress. It took weeks of debates down to the very last minute. Finally, self-sacrifice, benevolence, and nationalism prevailed over personal gain as Congress voted for a tax increase on the rich to save America from economic crisis.

During the “fiscal cliff” debate, the operating principle for Congress at that moment was country first, and self last. If only Nigerians would adopt this philosophy, most of their problems would go away. If it is asked, what would make Nigerians live by the philosophy of country first? The answer would not be economic or political reforms. On the contrary, it would be individual transformation. As long as love is curved to the self, and Nigerians live by “me,” not “us,” hardly could anyone, no matter how well-intentioned, restore Nigeria to its former glory.

In 1981, Ft. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings appeared on the troubled Ghanaian political scene. His purpose was to “clean” the country of corruption, from the military to civilian regimes. He staged a coup and executed much of the traditional Ghanaian establishment.²⁰ Though Rawlings and his associates were later accused of corrupt practices, today Ghana is on the path of a new social and economic order. Its political and economic progress so far has been impressive. After his election victory in 2008, President Barack Obama visited Ghana and skipped Nigeria. Many commentators interpreted Obama’s action as carefully designed to send a clear message that Ghana is a model of democracy for Africa. History repeated itself in 2013, when President Obama and the First Lady, Michelle, travelled to Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania from June 26–July 3, among other things, to broaden and deepen “cooperation between the United States and the people of sub-Saharan Africa to advance regional and global peace and prosperity,” but Nigeria was omitted from their schedule.²¹ Once more, the popular rumor was like before: Nigeria was left out because of the growing indications of its lack of transparency and corruption.²²

20 LaVerle Berry, *Ghana: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, 1994), 46–49.

21 “Statement by the Press Secretary on the President’s Travel to Africa,” May 20, 2013: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/20/statement-press-secretary-president-s-travel-africa>.

22 Some have even said that President Obama omitted Nigeria in order “not to give credibility to the hugely corrupt government in Nigeria,” Babs Ajayi, “Good News: Obama Will Not Visit Nigeria,” *Nigeria World*, Tuesday, May 28, 2013: <http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/publication/babsajayi/052813.html>.

But Jerry Rawlings-style revolution need not be a model framework to reform Nigeria. There is a way to change Nigeria “without Armageddon”.²³ In what follows, I shall propose an alternative to a bloody revolution for Nigeria. It is what I call a quiet revolution. It is not a violent “surgery” to treat Nigeria’s “cancer.” It is a peaceful solution to a systemic problem. The starting point of this revolution is not the government, nor is it political or economic reforms. Quite the contrary, the quiet revolution starts with the self, as we shall explain. If only individual Nigerians will reform their lives, sooner than later we shall see a New Nigeria.

23 John Campbell, *Dancing on the Brink*, 33.