

EIR: How are these projects financed?

Eltom: From the government, from self-help—just from inside the country. We do not have any grants or foreign aid from anywhere.

Each state has its own body and they finance their projects. Some states get grants from the richer states. There are states that cannot support themselves, and have a budget deficit. But there is a foundation to help those states which have less financial potential.

EIR: Do you expect this to happen in the southern states as well?

Eltom: Yes, we will concentrate more and more on the development of the south, once peace is achieved. In all walks of life, because the South needs everything.

EIR: All this construction activity must have had a positive impact on the employment situation.

Eltom: Yes. That is why it is no wonder that some people are coming back to Sudan from the oil-producing countries. They are coming back, especially architects, engineers, technicians, laborers. They have gained important experience abroad.

EIR: The last time we were here, we met with the Commissioner for Housing of Khartoum. And he told us of the tremendous housing difficulties for people coming in, such as refugees from the South. Have you been able to alleviate those problems somewhat?

Eltom: Especially in areas where there is stability and peace, we are asking these people voluntarily to go back to their homes.

EIR: The second National Congress has just taken place. Could you summarize what you see as the political and historical significance of this Congress for Sudan?

Eltom: What struck me the most is that there used to be more friction, . . . whereas at this Congress, everything was cordial, harmonious, very well tuned. At the last Congress there were 4,500 people; this time, 6,500. That is a good indication, for people outside or those who are just sitting on the platform and waiting: It is better to come and join, because there is a place for you. . . . People were relieved, the citizens. Because some people had said this would never take place, it would collapse. Now, you can definitely ascertain that people were relieved, and they said, this regime has to be supported, and people should participate. And as a result of this, [Mohammad Othman] al-Mirghani [an opposition political leader from the South, currently in exile] has said that he is coming back. And that is the feeling of all citizens, whether they were taking part in the system or were hostile to the system before. And 80% of those who were previously “anti,” became neutral, if they did not become participants.

Pope in Nigeria makes overture to Muslims

Pope John Paul II visited Nigeria on March 21-23. The official occasion was the beatification of Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi; but, the significance and impact of the Pope’s message go beyond this. Particularly in his speeches to the leaders of the two main religious communities in Nigeria, the Muslims and the Catholics, the Pontiff presented the principles on which reconciliation among different faiths can be reached, and conflict, in the name of religious creeds, can be avoided. This message is not only crucial for Nigeria, but for many countries in Africa, whose populations are divided among Christian, Muslim, and traditional African religions. We publish here excerpts from two of his speeches.

Meeting with Muslim leaders

This speech was given in Abuja on March 22.

1. Although my stay in Nigeria is rather brief, I did not want it to go by without such an important meeting with the highest representatives of Islam in this country. Allow me to express my gratitude to you for having accepted the invitation to come here this evening; I deeply appreciate this opportunity of greeting through you the entire Muslim community in Nigeria. I thank His Royal Highness for his kind words, and in turn I salute you with a greeting of Peace, the peace which has its true source in God, among whose Beautiful Names, according to your tradition, is *al-Salam*, Peace. As you are aware, the reason for my visit has been to proclaim solemnly the holiness of a son of this country, Father Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi. He has been declared a model of a religious man who loved others and sacrificed himself for them. The example of people who live holy lives teaches us not only to practise mutual respect and understanding, but to be ourselves models of goodness, reconciliation and collaboration, across ethnic and religious boundaries, for the good of the whole country and for the greater glory of God.

2. As Christians and Muslims, we share belief in the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day (*Lumen Gentium*, 16). Though we differ in the way we understand this One God, we are nevertheless akin in our efforts to know and follow his will. That religious aspiration itself constitutes a spiritual bond between Christians and Muslims, a bond which can provide a firm and broad-ranging basis for cooperation in many fields. This is important wherever Christians and Muslims live together. It is particularly important in Nigeria,

where Christians and Muslims are present in such large numbers.

Among the important convictions which we share, both Christianity and Islam stress the dignity of every human person as having been created by God for a special purpose. This leads us to uphold the value of human life at all its stages, and to give support to the family as the essential unit of society. As a result we see as a sin against the Creator every abuse against the weaker members of society, and against women and children in particular. Moreover, our religions lay emphasis on the responsibility of individuals to respond to what, in conscience, they see that God wants of them. It is a disquieting reflection on the state of human rights today, that in some parts of the world people are still persecuted and imprisoned for reasons of conscience and for their religious beliefs. As innocent victims, they are sad proof that force, and not democratic principles, has prevailed, that the intention is not to serve the truth and the common good but to defend particular interests at any cost. On the contrary, both our traditions teach an ethic which rejects an individualism that seeks its own satisfaction without paying attention to the needs of others. We believe that in God's eyes the earth's resources are destined for all and not just for a few. We are conscious that the exercise of power and authority is meant to be a service to the community, and that all forms of corruption and violence are a serious offence against God's wishes for the human family.

We have in common so much teaching regarding goodness, truth and virtue that a great understanding between us is possible. And indeed necessary. In the Message that I addressed to the Muslim Community in Kaduna during my first visit to your country in 1982, I said: "I am convinced that if we (Christians and Muslims) join hands in the name of God we can accomplish much good. . . . We can collaborate in the promotion of justice, peace, and development. It is my earnest hope that our solidarity of brotherhood, under God, will truly enhance the future of Nigeria and all Africa" (14 February 1982, No. 4).

3. In any society, disagreements can arise. Sometimes the disputes and conflicts which ensue take on a religious character. Religion itself is sometimes used unscrupulously to cause conflict. Nigeria has known such conflicts, though it must be recognized with gratitude that in many parts of the country people of different religious traditions live side by side as good and peaceful neighbors. Ethnic and cultural differences should never be seen as justifying conflict. Rather, like the various voices in a choir, these differences can exist in harmony, provided there is a real desire to respect one another.

Christians and Muslims agree that in religious matters there can be no coercion. We are committed to teaching attitudes of openness and respect towards the followers of other religions. But religion can be misused, and it is surely the duty of religious leaders to guard against this. Above

all, whenever violence is done in the name of religion, we must make it clear to everyone that in such instances we are not dealing with true religion.

For the Almighty cannot tolerate the destruction of his own image in his children. From this place in the heart of West Africa, I appeal to all Muslims, just as I have appealed to my Brother Bishops and all Catholics: let friendship and cooperation be our inspiration! Let us work together for a new era of solidarity and joint service in facing the enormous challenge of building a better, more just and more humane world! When problems arise, whether at the local, regional or national levels, solutions must be sought through dialogue. Is not this the way of African tradition? When Nigerians of different backgrounds come together to pray for the needs of the country, each group according to its own tradition, they know that they stand together as a united people. In this way they truly give honor to the Most High Lord of heaven and earth.

Meeting with Nigerian bishops

The speech excerpted here was given in Abuja on March 23.

6. The members of the particular Churches entrusted to your care are citizens of a nation which must now meet several serious challenges as it attempts to implement political and social change. In this context, ever greater significance accrues to your role as leaders in the Catholic community, leaders who recognize the desirability and need for constructive dialogue with all sectors of society regarding the just and solid bases of life in society. . . . It is of the utmost importance that all Nigerians should work together to ensure that necessary changes may be brought about peacefully and without undue hardship to the weaker segments of the population. . . .

7. This atmosphere of dialogue and cooperation must likewise extend to Muslim believers of good will, for they too try to imitate the faith of Abraham and to live the demands of the Decalogue (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 66). Today, as I meet you, the Catholic bishops of Nigeria, I repeat the call that I made yesterday in my meeting with Muslim leaders: the call for peace, understanding, and mutual cooperation between Christians and Muslims. The Creator of the one great human family to which we all belong desires that we bear witness to the divine image in every human being by respecting each person with his or her values and religious traditions, and by working together for human progress and development at all levels.

Christians, Muslims, and followers of African Traditional Religion should continue to pursue a sincere quest for mutual understanding. This will ensure that all citizens will be truly free to work for the good of Nigerian society, united in the common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom (*Nostra Aetate*, 3). . . .