THE WATCHTOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY AND THE GOD'S KINGDOM SOCIETY IN NIGERIA, A BRIEF HISTORY, 1923-1934

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> In Nigeria, a major difficulty which the society [Watchtower Bible and Tract Society] experiences was a schism which rent the unity of the movement and which continues to challenge the Watchtower society in that country as to who actually and properly preaches the Good News of the Kingdom.[1]

These are the words of a non-Nigerian scholar who encountered both movements or societies in Nigerian in his field study of some religious sects in selected African countries. This schism from the Watchtower led in West Africa by a Trinidad born, Mr. William Roland Brown, was caused by Gideon Meriodere Urhobo, a Nigerian. Urhobo immediately formed the God's Kingdom Society in 1934. Most Nigerians who are familiar with the religious scenes in this country and are aware of the activities of both societies would undoubtedly share the view quoted above. Clearly, the schism did not only rent the unity of the movement but also disturb greatly the growth of the movement. There have been many years of struggles between the two societies on the issue of doctrines.

Meanwhile, we want to make the history of their emergence, growth and development up to the point they came together, worked together and later parted company, as the main focus of this paper. We will finally mention briefly some of the teachings that are responsible for their tearing apart.

A history of both movements is necessary even for the Nigerian reader because though the activities of both movements are felt, little is known of their beginning. Some church leaders, academicians etc. cannot even differentiate doctrinally between the two groups. Some would say they are

the same Kingdom Society people and that they might settle their differences one day. But from a few hundred pages study by this writer on some aspects of both societies, such settlement is not likely. The doctrinal differences are too great even for the Bible to resolve.

The Watchtower Society and the God's Kingdom Society are millennial movements and as Edwin Gaustad observes of millennialists they see "themselves as possessors of a private truth not granted to society at large", and so as Herbert Blumers noted also, "they feel they have a divine mission to save others and to show them the light."[3] Both movements have been in the habit of claiming this light and even denying the other of it. The result has been conflicts all of which are beyond the scope of this paper.

For sources we are depending on oral interviews, publications of both movements, including letters between New York and Lagos, newspapers and scholarly works on each of the movements.

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Henceforth Society, Watchtower or Jehovah's Witnesses) is one of the most dynamic religious movements in the world today.[4] This movement has been mainly concerned with the preaching of the dawn of a millennial or Kingdom. Its members believe that God created the world as paradise but it was lost to Satan (one of God's creatures who turned evil) through the disobedience of Adam and Eve to the law of God in the garden of Eden. But beginning from Abel, the son of Adam and Eve, (Genesis 4) Jehovah has set up a movement for witnesses or true worshippers to witness to his holy name, Jehovah, so that the lost paradise may be regained to prevail on earth again. They therefore believe that they are the most ancient religious group of worshippers of the true God. They do not see themselves "... in these modern times ... as a new religion but as a climax to the long succession of witnesses that he [God] had had down the past millenniums all the way back to Abel."[5]

The Watchtower believes that salvation belongs only to the membership of their society, all other peoples and movements will, in their

opinion, be destroyed by Jehovah at Armageddon - a battle between the forces of good and evil. Those who want salvation must join them in witnessing because they "are the only ones that have been favoured and equipped with this good news of the Kingdom,"[6] and "to everyone they point out the only way to that Kingdom..."[7]

This society known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, and since 1931, as Jehovah's Witnesses was founded by one "Pastor" Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) of Pittsburgh in the United States of America in 1872.[8] He was said to have been dismayed by the "wrong" teachings of the churches such as the concept of hell-fire and eternal punishment against which he revolted violently. The revolt was a significant one because it marked the beginning of a denial of practically every major doctrine of the Christian faith. Russell was reared a Presbyterian but later joined the Congregational Church. Prevalent in his days was the Second Adventist teachings about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ which was then seen as imminent. He came into contact with the Second Adventists and later developed his ideas (though similar in many respects to the Adventists) about the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world. Russell carried out a detailed study of the prophetic books of scriptures, Daniel and Revelation in particular and drew up a chronology of events called the "Divine Plan of the Ages." This chronology led him to think that the world was coming to an end in 1914, and that Jesus Christ would set up the millennial Kingdom in 1914, which of course, did not take place. More and more dates had been set and had continued to fail thereby giving rooms to atheists and agnostics to look down on the Bible as any other book of tales. Biblical scholars have however asked themselves whether the Bible set date for Armageddon or the battle of the great day of God Almighty. Some, like those in the God's Kingdom Society, would say with Christ that the hour or time is hidden only in God. Russell's chronology is therefore faulty and it has passed into oblivion, but he has created divisions and confusions all over the place.

Russell died in 1916 leaving the stage for "Judge"[10] Joseph Franklin Rutherford who was only secured after some struggles to maintain

himself against close rivals to the Presidency. He was a prolific writer whose "progressive light" set aside much of the outdated teachings of Russell, and through experience, forcefulness and determination, transformed the Society into a theocratic organisation with a central control. From 1917 till his death in 1942, the propaganda system of the organisation has been implemented by a radio network and the sale of gramophone records of his speeches. Like Russell, Rutherford prophesied 1925 as Armageddon's arriving day. The ancient worthies were expected but they could not arrive, maybe God cancelled their flight to the earth. It was Rutherford who gave the present name to the society at Columbus, Ohio on July 26th, 1931 in a huge international assembly.

Nathan Knorr was elected President in 1942. His time had seen many changes such as the training and establishing the theocratic ministry school and Watchtower Bible School of Gilead at South Lansing, New York. When he took over, Witnessing work was going on in 54 countries and by 1971, 207 countries were involved.[11] The New World Bible Translation emerged under him. The present leader, Franz has shown remarkable quality as a leader of an organisation with such a world wide coverage.

Russellism in Nigeria12

Russell flooded the United States with millennial tracts and articles after organising the Zion's Watchtower Society to spread his plan, "the divine plan of the Ages", a chart of events explaining the history of the world and prophecy of things to come.

Before the millennial Dawn literature was carried to Central and South Africa by Joseph Booth a former Baptist Missionary, around 190813 Liberia in West Africa had received the literature in 1887. It came through a migrant (probably an American) one Brother Samuel W. Seaton in 1887. He came from Pennsylvania in America to Monrovia with two dozen copies of the Millennial Dawn Cloth bound, 4 dozen Millennial Dawn paper bound and some specimens of Zion's Watchtower.14 Seaton preached for a while but his efforts did not yield much fruits. One of the major reasons for his failure was that the Christian Mission Churches in Liberia:

the Baptist, Methodist and Episcopal Churches had previously warned their members not to read such literature. In a circular dated July 28, 1888 the Christians were warned thus:

> The Church of Christ has been hitherto blessed in not having to contend against dangerous heresies such as God's people had to encounter in the early period of Christianity. But recent events warn us that... our faith is henceforth to be sorely tested... Certain publications, Millennial Dawn and Zion's Watchtower written by one Mr. Russell, a citizen of the United States of America, are being scattered throughout our land, which openly declare all Christian churches to be in error and proclaim a false and most pernicious system of religion...[15]

The circular then described Russell as an agent of Satan "to abolish and destroy all that has been accomplished here in the name of Jesus."[16] Though this literature made an impact as the circular seems to show, Seaton had a shortlived success as a preacher.[17] Nevertheless, a recent work on the prophet William Wade Harris of Liberia seems to suggest that Harris was probably influenced by the Watchtower literature "scattered throughout the land" by Seaton. Harris had used the times of the future, great dragon to be bound for a thousand years, etc.,[18] ideas reminiscent of Watchtower teachings.

The launching of the Mission of the Russellites really began in Sierra-Leone in 1923 from where it spread to Nigeria the same year. Concerning Sierra-Leone, the Watchtower Magazine of December 15, 1923 noted, "There was a brother (his name was not given) on the West Coast of Africa in Sierra-Leone deeply interested in the truth."[19] The interest presumably shown by this anonymous brother made the Watchtower headquarters in Brooklyn America to decide to send a missionary to West Africa. A pioneer, Mr. William Roland Brown and his devoted wife, both natives of Trinidad, came to Sierra-Leone and that marked the beginning of the Watchtower religion in West Africa.[20]

In the same year, 1923, W.R. Brown and one other missionary from

Brooklyn came to Lagos to preach. They entered a Nigeria that had seen much of independent thinking on religion and where any religious teacher could attract a large audience.[21] The provision of education in some parts, to many West Africans, paved the way for a readership of Watchtower literature.[22] Brown settled in Lagos and began to distribute Watchtower literature and to engage in lecture which actually involved pictorial showing of Bible characters and events. His pre-occupation was, as was common in his days, to "place books by the millions."[23] West Africa generally and Nigeria in particular responded so favourably that Brown was able to report in 1929 that West Africans had taken into their homes 17,084 books, 17,818 booklets while 1,700 had been given away.[24] Brown did not do much to organize the people who were interested in his book advertising lectures. This aspect, as we shall see and explain later, began in 1933 by Gideon first at Warri and then in Lagos. By 1932, after nine years of selling and "preaching" there were about 80 Jehovah's Witnesses in West Africa.[25] Brown visited a few towns in Nigeria between 1930 and 1932 and it was during one of these evangelizing tours at Benin City in Nigeria, distributing Watchtower literature during public lectures. And from that moment it was Gideon Urhobo's activities which features more in West African Watchtowerism.

After parting with Urhobo, Brown saw the need to expand and began in earnest to evangelize and tour more Nigerian towns to call his literature and to establish branches to which his literature was sent for distribution on a commission basis. In 1935, Brown visited Port Harcourt and preached to the people asking them to flee from the path of untruth for an Armageddon, to destroy all errors, was at the doorstep. In December, 1937 he visited Aba where earlier in 1936 he had preached and converted some people. In 1939, he was in Kano in the North to preach against untruth. He also worked in the Yoruba West, Ibadan and Ilesha in particular.[26] Some Witnesses believed that Brown came to Warri in 1936.

By 1935, according to Parrinder, the Watchtower was in Ibadan and had built a small house for their meetings, though what they were preaching was not helpful as guides through the maze of differing religious beliefs.[27] The Witnesses are not evenly distributed in Nigeria. In the South, the

distribution is almost even and they are especially active in the rural areas where people are less critical of what they accept about Christianity. Very few of them are found in the Muslim dominated Northern part of Nigeria. According to Tony Hodges in 1976, the Witnesses in Nigeria numbered about 105,686 with 1,988 congregations, which has been said to be the largest concentration of them in Africa.[28] However, a recent (1981) internal report of the Witnesses showed Nigeria as having members 95,903 in 2,130 congregation.[29]

There are well to do members among them but the majority, if not all, are not interested in the material wealth and some other luxuries of this world. They are concerned with the Kingdom to come. They have appeared as peace-loving citizens, and as Bryan Wilson describes them in Africa as a whole, they instill the values of hardwork, punctuality, sobriety and self-respect.[30] But for occasional clash with government and people, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Nigeria are quiet and peaceful people, highly respected by employers for their sincerity and devotion to duty.

The God's Kingdom Society

God's Kingdom Society (hereinafter referred to as the G.K.S.) is one of Africa's over 10,000 independent Churches or new religious movements.[31] The Society places strong emphasis on the Second Coming or Presence of Jesus Christ and the setting up of God's Kingdom here on earth. Jesus commanded that the good news of this Kingdom should not only be preached but also that people should ask in their prayers to God "may thy Kingdom come." The mission of the G.K.S. is to preach and it believes that it is in possession of the truth of God's word which must be preached to all people. The founder was not only asked to preach about the Kingdom but also to expose "false teachings" of the other religious bodies. In obedience to the Lord's command, the Church, Protestant Churches, the Watchtower Society, the subject matter here, the National Church of Nigeria, debates with Islam and polemical wars with nationalist leaders who spoke against God and Christianity all in public forum and well covered by newspapers of the time. For instance, under a campaign headed

"godless nationalism", the G.K.S. at one point defended Christianity against an alleged move by a political party to outlaw it in Nigeria.

Fifty-two years after its foundation, the G.K.S. has about 50,000 ardent and truly devoted members spread over Nigeria and abroad, Britain, U.S.A. and Western Germany in about 150 branches.

The Society was founded by Gideon Meriodere Urhobo, an Urhobo man, from the area that is now part of the Bendel State of Nigeria. He was born at Ogharegi, a small fishing port along the Ethiope River in 1903.[32]

Urhobo was educated at the Government School, Warri where he obtained his standard six First School Leaving Certificate in 1923. He became a Roman Catholic in his youth, and was a staunch member of the Church, baptised though not confirmed. However, as he himself put it, "I was totally ignorant of the Holy Scriptures."[33]

As he grew up to manhood he became more and more dissatisfied with the ways of the Catholic Church. In the first place he found it increasingly hard to accept certain of her teachings which were opposed not only to his thinking but also to the traditions of his people. Thus he could not understand why God which his people call *Oghene*, believed by the Urhobo[34] to be a loving and protective father, could burn some people with fire forever, or how and why Mary should still be referred to as Virgin after the birth of Jesus Christ and his brothers and sisters. Again, he could not understand why carved and moulded images should be in Church houses, temples or yards when Christians were demolishing the carved and moulded images and symbols of the Urhobo traditional religion.

Secondly, he became increasingly annoyed by Catholic reluctance to encourage laymen in the study of the scriptures. Earlier on he had developed a passionate interest in the study of the scriptures, his Bible studies led to arguments with Catholic priests on their teachings, and the priests in turn responded by forbidding him to read the Bible. According to his son, Dr. Emmanuel Jesse Urhobo,

> At first the Roman Catholic priests answered his question, then he developed an interest and went and asked more questions till they got

fed up with him and said, he should not read the Bible.[35]

Urhobo did not see any reason not to read the Bible and so he eventually resigned from the Church and left the Catholic School where he was a teacher sometimes in 1929.

In June 1930, after remaining without a job for some months, he got an appointment in the Post and Telegraph Department as a third class postal clerk and telegraphist.[36] During the course of his work he came across an advertisement from South Africa on Watchtower literature. He ordered the literature and joined it with his study materials and began to preach about God's Kingdom in various parts of the Midwest, now Bendel State in 1931 on part time basis or after working hours.

In 1932, he came across Mr. William Roland Brown, the Representative of the Watchtower in West Africa, at Benin while he, Urhobo was preaching and distributing Watchtower materials.[37] Brown invited him to Lagos where he collected literature to the tune of £25 on credit. With the literature he began to intensify his preaching and condemnation of some of the doctrines preached by the mainline Churches.

Urhobo did not pay for the first batch of literature he got on credit as he has no such money on him then, but thereafter he began to get and pay and the only link between Brown and Urhobo was the supply of literature which, according to Watchtower sources, he distributed widely in Benin area.[38] Urhobo was thus functioning independently as another group of Watchtower movement in Nigeria. In 1933, Urhobo claimed that he saw a vision of Jesus Christ and that the latter commissioned him:

> to go and preach the everlasting gospel... to all nations and Kings... and to expose all false doctrines which Satan has used to deceive the whole world...[39]

This vision led him to resign his job and he began an active preaching career. Many people, especially those from his family, thought he was mad. As he put it:

> Immediately after I have left the Government service all my relatives and friends (including his wife), forsook me, some said, I was a devil

and I was made and that I shall soon lick the dust.[40]

On his resignation he went to Warri and organised a group of friends into a Bible Study class and came out to attack the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church and his own family members coupled with the Colonial Police, later stopped his preaching. He left Warri for Sapele some 30 miles away to preach the gospel but the Assistant District Officer, believed to be instigated by Father Shine of the Catholic Church, arrested, detained and fined him for preaching without a permit. Urhobo claimed that Father Shine ordered his mansized dog to attack him which it did.[41]

Gideon Urhobo in Lagos

As the Roman Catholic Church continued to persecute him, he left Warri for Lagos where according to Watchtower sources, he joined Brown as a pioneer representative of the Watchtower in Nigeria.[42] Brown's followers joined Brown to place literature in people's hands at home and street corners and also helped in playing phonograph records at the doors at homes.[43] People, as Shepperson and Price noted, sought Watchtower literature not because of what it contained but because it was cheap or often obtained free.[44] This is true as this writer collected some Rutherford authored books from an illiterate.

Brown, it is said, did not organise his followers to study what they were giving out. Urhobo, in Lagos, claimed to have done that job first. He wrote in 1938 when he had parted company with Brown thus:

> Since the past fifteen years (1923-1938) in West Africa, this man, Brown has not organised any Bible study class... The only Bible class here (Lagos) was started and organized by me in 1933 and until recently (1938), it has 309 attendants. The one at Warri was also organised by me in the same year (1933) with 26 attendance.[45]

Whether this is true or not, it is clear from Edmund Gruss, one of the most prolific writers on Watchtower affairs, that the Witness did not

start serious Bible study until 1943.[46]

After Urhobo had settled down properly within a few months, he began, just as he did to the Roman Catholic priests at Warri, to raise objections to certain teachings Brown was preaching or wanted him to preach. It soon became clear to Urhobo that Brown's emphasis on placing of literature in people's home contradicted his own which was on the public preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom. These personal interests created a difficult situation for the two men to work together harmoniously. And though they agreed to disagree they were still together in Jehovah's service for very long.

However, signs of discord began to show themselves in front of the members. When the public preaching method of Urhobo had gained ground, members then noticed that while Brown featured Armageddon much in his lectures as being at the door, Urhobo did not emphasis the imminence of the Armageddon. During question time-for instance, he would simply explain that Armageddon was not a battle any human could date. The first seed of discord was sown. At this time, 1934, Brown had put Armageddon time to 1936 or 1937.[47]

The second seed of discord was sown by Urhobo when he opposed Brown for introducing house to house preaching, a new dimension to street corner sales of literature and phonograph playing. Brown had spoken very seriously in support of house to house preaching as an international method of the Society and without which there would be no salvation. The third seed was sown by Urhobo after he had advised the members to bring their wives and children to group study. When they started, Brown asked their wives and children to join in the house to house preaching since in the Watchtower everyone, old or young must preach. Urhobo opposed this method also. But wonderfully, both men could not come into open quarrel as yet. The fourth seed of discord was sown by Urhobo when he answered a question that there was nothing wrong with polygamy. Brown was definitely furious but he seems to dread challenging Urhobo who as far back as 1932, was described by the Witnesses as commissioned by God.[48] It

is not impossible for Urhobo's Bible knowledge to tower above that of Brown and other Witnesses who began serious Bible study only in 1943. Even in 1938, Nnamdi Azikiwe had described Urhobo as "a brilliant... Bible expositor."[49]

Urhobo became very zealous for the gospel but this zeal from the point of view of Brown, was without knowledge. Urhobo had asked for some items to go on a missionary journey in Nigeria. Brown did not respond to his request. It seems Brown stood on his way to quench his spirit and so he forwarded his requests to New York. As the Watchtower noted later Urhobo was largely motivated by self-interest and was planning to supplant Brown as overseer of their work in Nigeria. For this reason:

> Urhobo wrote to the headquarters of the Watchtower Bible and tract Society in New York and requested a 28 passenger bus literature and funds for use in the expansion of the work throughout the country.[50]

It is clear in the field that Urhobo asked for those items to spread the gospel but he did not receive any of the items. A Watchtower leader noted this fact in 193851 and a West African Pilot editorial of 1951 recounting the history of 1934 noted that Urhobo asked for these items but he was rebuffed.[52] Brown would not support a man who had deviated from some of the main teachings of his organisation. Brown was an intelligent man with enormous capacity for organisation but was unfortunate to meet a man whose superior forte was scriptural studies. Though Brown was known as Bible Brown, public opinion would prefer that appellation to be applied to Urhobo if weight is based on Bible knowledge.

But in spite of the rebuff, Urhobo met Brown with a request to arrange a trip to America for him to study and gain more experience. Brown made jest of the request and in fact Urhobo became a laughing stock to those who were obviously siding with Brown. Urhobo, recalling that event noted in 1938 that:

> On account of my zeal and activity in the field, he (Brown) tabooed my going abroad when I told him that I wanted to

> go to America for further studies and he became very angry and wrote a letter to Judge Rutherford the President of the Watchtower Society in America, stating that the devil is using me to disorganise his so-called faithful workers in Nigeria.[53]

Clearly, Urhobo's review of Watchtower teaching had a disorganising effect. Meanwhile, the Warri Jehovah's Witnesses were unhappy with Urhobo because they felt that he was too ambitious to talk of going to America. They wrote to Brown in Lagos that Urhobo was preparing to go to America with the aim of returning to displace him.[54]

The Separation and Beginning of Urhobo's Independence Movement

We would like to clarify the point that the first congregation of the Jehovah's in Warri was formed by Gideon Urhobo and it was independent of Brown and his workers in Lagos. The only link which bothered Brown was that of literature which was promptly paid for. And so when he, Urhobo, learnt of the hostilities of his own group against him he became worried and decided to go to Warri to see things for himself. He then went there sometime in October 1934. At Warri, he discovered that the leader there, one Clifford Oritshegbeyiwa Omoneukarin, had come to term with Brown and that both were working against him.

When Urhobo returned to Lagos he decided to arrange a doctrinal debate between himself and Brown before the members. Brown got wind of it and called an emergency meeting of all members in Lagos to meet in Tom Jones Hall at Victoria Street. Urhobo who thought something was happening to warrant such urgency, took active part in summoning the members to the meeting. But to his surprise the meeting was called to disfellowship him. He was accused of working behind Brown to displace him.[55]

Brown did not allow him to speak and so the members separated into two factions. A group followed Urhobo while the other remained loyal to Brown. Urhobo himself packed out of the official residence where he was with Brown. The 1935 Year Book of the Jehovah's Witnesses reported

the event thus:

> Satan the Devil, tried to disorganise the faithful workers in Nigeria, and succeeded in a measure with a few of them by using one Ukoli (Urhobo's surname up to 1943) to interfere with the Lord's work. Some of the Jonadabs took sides with him but after a while, because of his egotistical manner, many sincere ones withdrew from him, after learning that organisation instructions are not discretionary but mandatory.

Meanwhile, Brown had been reporting the turn of events to America and so in a letter dated 31st October, 1934, Judge Rutherford informed Urhobo, thus:

> Information that comes to this office is that you are trying to interfere with the Witness work of the Lord's people and that you are prompted by a selfish desire. This is to advise you that the Society will have nothing more to do with you and all of our brethren who are loyal and faithful to God are hereby advised to have nothing whatsoever to do with you, unless you fully reform and show that you are devoted to the Lord and are willing to work in harmony with the Society's organisation in the land.[56]

Urhobo was surprised to receive this letter and it became very clear to him that Brown and Warri Witnesses had been after him much earlier than he thought. The letter came not quite long after the separation. People were anxious about the confusion and some demanded to know from Urhobo the cause of this problem. Urhobo wrote later saying:

> I only corrected their wrong teachings about Armageddon, Jehovah's Organisation, Selection and Ordination of the 144,000 chosen and anointed Christians, leadership, memorial supper and marriage.[57]

According to the G.K.S. Urhobo did not believe in setting date or dates for Armageddon because only God can tell the day and hour. On

Jehovah's Organisation, Urhobo doubted if the Watchtower was Jehovah's Organisation for what he saw was a massive book selling company. Jehovah's Organisation should be very much engaged in the preaching of the gospel. Urhobo did not believe that the 144,000 should all come from the Watchtower Organisation nor did he see the Society as the only channel to God if its claims to be are true. God, Urhobo is said to believe, promised to select the anointed Christians from the four wings of the earth. On leadership Urhobo was opposed to their claims that the organisation has no leader but Christ. The memorial Supper did not go well with Urhobo because Christ said it should be done until he comes. If the organisation believes that Christ had come the second time, as it was said to happen in 1914[58], then there was no need for it any more. On polygamy, Urhobo said there was no ruling in the Bible against polygamy, though his own Church does not emphasize polygamy. He accused Brown of imposing American State Law on Africans.

The separation was complete and beginning from 1934 to 1952 when Urhobo died, both movements engaged each other in doctrinal struggles, a process that has continued and the end of which seems not in sight. The cause of separation has been variously understood in both camps though to most outsiders the cause is doctrinal. The average Watchtower Nigerian would claim that Urhobo was driven out of "Jehovah's" Organisation because he stole Watchtower books and money. Urhobo is characterized as Judas, evil servant, withered branch, thief, outcast, wayo man, that is, deceiver and trickster and so forth. Official Watchtower opinion is that Urhobo was stripped of his official role as "a special representative of the Society" because he misused the Society's money or as it is put again, because he "defrauded the Society of some quantity of money."[59] But there seems to be no evidence that Urhobo owed the Society more than the £25 of 1932. Though we are not extending beyond 1934 the year of separation, we may remark that in 1938, the Watchtower published Urhobo's debt to it as £22.19s having confiscated a £2 postal order he sent to New York for literature.[60] This money was paid in the court in 1944.[61] To some individuals in the Watchtower, Urhobo was expelled because he was "a lawless worker... who would not obey organisation instruction."[62] To

some others, Urhobo could not continue "with us that it might be made manifest that he is not of us"[63] and that "dust thou art and unto dust shall thou return."[64]

The G.K.S. version of the cause of separation is that Urhobo left the Watchtower because "there was a disagreement between Brother Urhobo and Mr. Brown over the issues of doctrines."[65]

The God's Kingdom Society and The Watchtower: Some Areas of Agreement and Disagreement

I have not discussed the theology of the Watchtower here because a great deal has been done in this area especially by George D. McKinney Jr.[66] Edmund Gruss has also brought some of the teachings under critical examination.[67] Likewise, I have not dealt with the teachings and practices of the God's Kingdom Society because our concern here has been the brief history of both movements up to their separation. It is then necessary to look at some of the doctrinal issues that led to the break and a few others which did not really feature in the days of Brown and Urhobo.

Similarities

Both movements believe in the Old and New Testaments but God's Kingdom Society is very very bitter against the Watchtower for translating the Bible into a situation where it gives backing to some of their teachings. They agree broadly on the personality of Jehovah, Jesus Christ and on the role of the non-personal Holy Spirit though the G.K.S. has a much more elaborate teaching on the personality of God. They agree on baptism, resurrection, hell, trinity and many similar and identical interpretations of the prophetic books. The Kingdom is said to have come to the earth and that 144,000 would inherit heaven. To a measure both groups do not believe in saluting a national flag and singing of national anthem. They feel it is a worship to inanimate objects or purely idolatry.

Differences

The G.K.S. believes very strongly that God has chosen people from all parts of the world to set up the Kingdom. The Society sees itself as representing the true church of God in this part of the world. The Watchtower does not think that there is, apart from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, any other church organisation whereby salvation can be obtained. Their doctrines strongly affirm that only members of the Jehovah's Witness will enjoy the blessed earth.

(a) **Method of Preaching**

The method of teaching and preaching used by the Witnesses is said to have been copied from the Bible. Jesus and his apostles are said to have preached from house to house, city to city, province to province and publicly too.[68] The G.K.S. condemns this method. Christ is said not to have made door to door visits. He visited homes where he had friends or on invitation. He preached openly where the Jews always resort (John 18:20). The G.K.S. frowns at the Watchtower's use of Acts 20:20 to justify indiscriminate visits to peoples' homes. Reading from verse 17 of Acts 20, one would discover that Paul was addressing the elders of the Church of Ephesus not everybody.

(b) **Women Preaching**

G.K.S. women do not preach to themselves and their children and not to men, nor do they speak during worship hours. This idea is drawn from 1st Corinthians 14:34, 35. Women, the G.K.S. says, are not required to preach to get salvation, they shall be saved by child-bearing as long as they remain faithful to God and Christ. Men, women and children take part as ministers of the gospel in the Watchtower Society. Everyone is a Witness ordained to preach.

(c) **Marriage**

Marriage is honourable to both but to the Watchtower it must be monogamous because "a person who wants to serve God and to live in the promised paradise can have only one wife."[69] To the G.K.S. polygamy is a blessing. God did not punish any of the polygamists in the Bible. The

G.K.S. believes that the early Christians practised polygamy for if the general practice was that of monogamy, it would have been unnecessary for St. Paul to advise that only those desiring to be bishop or deacons should be the husband of one wife.

(d) **Attitude to this World**

The Witnesses are convinced that this world is just a place for them to work out their future life which is God's Kingdom. "In as much as Jehovah has chosen his Witnesses out of the world to be ambassadors to the people of the earth on behalf of his Kingdom, they are not a part of the world."[71] Broadly speaking in Nigeria the Witnesses have negative attitude to town and community services, such as building town halls, clearing of roads, plus so many other communal activities. These are things of the world ruled by Satan, they say. The G.K.S. believes that though this world is swayed by Satan, Christians should contribute to its material progress at least for the comfort of man until God's Kingdom would take control.

(e) **Politics**

The Witnesses believe that politics is a part and parcel of the measures the devil is using to rule this world. They say that their allegiance is to Jehovah God and his Kingdom, as such they do not take part in local, national and international politics. They claim the right to use their freedom of choice to do what their conscience tells them. The G.K.S. sees nothing wrong in clean politics. The members of the Church can belong to political parties as long as they keep to God's laws for the good of the masses.

(f) **Military Service**

The Witnesses do not perform military service. They claim that "the preaching activity of Jehovah's Witnesses as ministers entitles them to claim exemption from performing military training and service in the armed forces of the nations wherein they dwell."[72] The G.K.S. has nothing against the member of the Church who opts for the army. The army of a country is equipped with weapons to defend the country against the external enemies of the state. A Christian can take up arms against any one

who threatens his freedom or who sets to kill him.

(g) **Blood Transfusion**

The Watchtower people accord blood an undue respect. They see blood as sacred and so would not allow it to be transfused into a person, even to save life. It is said that blood transfusion may result in the immediate and very temporal prolongation of life but that at the cost of eternal life to whomsoever it is administered.[73] Thus many Nigerian men, women and children have died from the denial of blood transfusion. The G.K.S. allows blood transfusion. The Church does not see any reason why God will kill either a donor or a receiver of blood. The medical science of transfusing blood is believed to be a blessing for which people including the Watchtower should thank God.

(h) **Feasts**

The Watchtower uses conventions to expand their message and have been used to win more converts. Conventions in Nigeria are popular though in most cases only members assemble for the meeting. The G.K.S. uses the Feast of Tabernacles as a yearly events to assemble members and their well-wishers to hear the words of God and to eat, drink and rejoice. This feast, like the Watchtower conventions, is popular for both Societies do not celebrate Christian festivals like Christmas, New Year and Easter. They declare them as paganic. These feasts are said to have originated from pagan practices.

Conclusion

We have provided just a brief note on how the Watchtower from an insignificant organisation in the 1870s, the handiwork of Pastor Russell, has become a huge propaganda organisation of today and its spread from its American home base to Nigeria many years ago. The Society encountered a very strong opposition from a rival group which sprang from it. The group, the God's Kingdom Society, is the handiwork of a Nigerian, Gideon Meriodere Urhobo, who believed that God anointed him not only to preach the gospel but also to expose false teachings about God and Christ. While

in the Watchtower Organisation, Urhobo discovered what he regarded as false doctrines propagated by the Watchtower, and in an attempt to correct these doctrines, separation took place. The separation marked the beginning of many years of struggles over teachings and practices. We have also given brief accounts on areas of agreements and disagreements between the two groups. There is a great deal more to be said about how they are related.

However, we want to remark that the presence of the G.K.S. in Nigeria has definitely affected the growth of the Watchtower. Many who would have associated themselves with the Watchtower prefer the G.K.S. doctrines. Some Watchtower pioneers have joined the G.K.S. Conversion from G.K.S. is rare. It has at least affected the house to house preaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The G.K.S. has sufficiently warned the public to regard the Jehovah's Witnesses as counterfeit Witnesses and true to fact many homes do not admit them in areas where the G.K.S. has established. Their open air lectures have stopped long time ago due to questions from the G.K.S. people which the Watchtower seem unprepared to answer. While the G.K.S. occasionally print their doctrines and distribute them free of charge to the public, the Watchtower has nothing to give except to sell the Awake and Watchtower and other books the contents of which many could not explain. That apart the G.K.S. has continued for some years now using the T.V. studios, radios and newspapers to preach and to attack the Watchtower and other Churches occasionally. Viewing the Nigerian situation, we deem it necessary to say that, though the Witnesses may record many hours of preaching from house to house, we would rather feel that much of those hours in recent times should be seen as hours of roaming the streets. In any case, the two movements are still active though the presence of the G.K.S. is felt more by the generality of Nigerians. But the struggle to displace the other continues and these could be examined in other areas beyond our scope here.

References

1. John Maxwell Assimeng, *A Sociological Analysis of the Impact and Consequences of some Christian Sects in Selected African Countries*. Unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, St. John's College, University of Oxford, 1968, p. 178.

2. Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Dissent in American Religion*, University of Chicago Press, 1973, p. 116.

3. Herbert Blumers, "Social Movements", in *Studies in Social Movements: A Social Psychological Perspective*, Mc. Laughlin (ed.), The Free Press, New York, 1969, p. 24.

4. D.J. Hesselgrave has edited a book on *Dynamic Religious Movements*, Grand Rapids, Baker House, 1978. The Jehovah's Witnesses occupy a place in the important study.

5. *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Henceforth WTBTS) Brooklyn, 1959, pp. 8-10.

6. *New Heavens and a New Earth*, WTBTS, 1953, p. 157.

7. *Let God Be True*, WTBTS, 1946, p. 211.

8. "Pastor" was conferred upon him as an honourary title by his Bible Searchers Group. See Walter Martin and Norman Klann, *Jehovah of the Watchtower*, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1953 (This edition, 1981) p. 13.

9. *Let God Be True*, WTBTS, *op. cit.*, p. 211 For Watch-tower's General history I have depended mainly on works by scholars including the following authors though not all are cited in this piece. I hope to use them in future articles. Alan T. Rogerson, *A Sociological Analysis of the Origin and Development of the Jehovah's Witnesses and their Schismatic Groups*,

Unpublished D. Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1972 and *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, London, Constable, 1969; Marley Cole, *Jehovah's Witnesses - The New World Society*, New York, Ventage, 1955; Edmond Charles Gruss, *Apostles of Denial: An Examination and Expose of the History, Doctrine and Claims of the Jehovah's Witnesses*, Presbyterian and Reformed, Philadelphia, 1970. They, excepting Marley Cole, are not foes of the Watchtower, they could be seen as critical scholars. Cole seems to have been too friendly in his history of the Witnesses.

10. The title Judge was attached to him because he was occasionally presiding in the Eighth Judicial Circuit Court as a "Special Judge". He was a lawyer but not a full time Judge. See Bryan R. Wilson, *Religious Sects*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London and Mcgraw-Hill, New York, 1971, p. 110 and J.K. Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, (1972) edition, pp. 259-260.

11. *Qualified To Be Ministers*, WTBTS, 1955, p. 340. See also Watchtower, January 1, 1972, p. 25.

12. I am indebted to John Maxwell Assimeng's important studies on some religious sects, *op. cit.* a great deal on Brown's early days in Nigeria.

13. For a history of Joseph Booth, see George Shepperson and Thomas Prince, *Independent African, John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915*, Edinburgh University Press, 1958.

14. Sholto Cross, *The Watchtower Movement in South Central Africa, 1908-1945*, Unpublished D. Phil., Thesis, University of Oxford, 1973, p. 12.

15. I am indebted to Dr. David Shank who was then a Doctorate Degree Student of Religious Studies Department, University of Aberdeen, Scotland

1978 for a letter captioned "A Letter to the Churches". Dr. Shank, like Gordon M. Haliburton before him has given us so much on the prophet William Wade Harris of Liberia.

16. *A Letter to the Churches, op. cit.*, p. 12.

17. Sholto Cross, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

18. David A. Shank, *A prophet of Modern Times: The groups to William Wade Harris, Part 1, The Making of the Prophet*. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, 1980, pp. 218-231. See especially pages 230-231 and 322.
19. *Watchtower Magazine*, December 15, 1923.

20. That is the imminent expectation of Armageddon.

21. The Beginnings of Religious Independency in Nigeria have been discussed in J.B. Webster, *The African Churches, Among the Yoruba, 1888 - 1922*. Oxford Clarendon Press. 1964.

22. By 1882, in the Lagos settlement alone, there were 38 schools established by the various missions. See L.C. Gwam, "The Educational Work of Missions in the Settlement of Lagos, 1842 - 1882", Ibadan, No. 12, June, 1962, p. 21.

23. William J. Schnel, *Thirty Years a Watchtower Slave*, Grand Rapids, (This edition), Baker, London, 1956, p. 60.

24. Assimeng, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

25. *1933 Year Book of the Jehovah's Witnesses*, WTBTS, p. 77.

26. Assimeng, *op. cit.*

27. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in an African City*, London, Oxford University Press, 1953, pp. 99-100.

28. Tony Hodges, *Jehovah's Witnesses in Central Africa*, Minority Rights Group Report No. 29, 1976.

29. *1981 Year Book of the Jehovah's Witnesses*, WTBTS, p. 28.

30. Bryan Wilson, "Jehovah's Witnesses in Africa", *New Society*, July 12, 1973, p. 75.

31. For some scholarly works on independent Churches, See Harold Walter Turner, *African Independent Church* (2 volumes). *The Church of the Lord, Aladura*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1967; James B. Webster, *op. cit.*; J.A. Omoyajowo, *Cherubim and Seraphim, The History of an African Independent Church*, Nok Publishers International, New York, 1982; J.D.Y. Peel, *Aladura: a Religious Movement Among the Yoruba*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968; Rosalind I.J. Hackett, *Explanation, Prediction and Control: The Raison d'etre of a West African Independent Church, The Celestial Church of Christ*, M. Phil. Thesis, Kings College, London, 1978. Also, Professors Andrew Finlay Walls and H.W. Turner, have collected a great deal of information on most independent religious movement all over the world and are stored in the Department of Religious Studies in the Universities of Aberdeen and Birmingham respectively. The reader can also see my work on Gideon M. Urhobo and the God's Kingdom Society in Nigeria, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Aberdeen 1982..

32. Gideon Urhobo, *Eighteen Years Kingdom Service* (A four page autobiography) Sankey Press, Yaba, Lagos, 1951, p. 1.

33. Urhobo, *Autobiography, op. cit.*, p. 1.

34. As regards the name Urhobo, no one seems to know how it came to be identified with the people called the Urhobo.

35. Harold Walter Turner, *Private Papers*, a collection on the G.K.S. including interviews with the founder's son, Dr. Emmanuel Jesse Urhobo and a few others in 1962.

36. Gideon M. Urhobo, *op. Cit.*

37. B.O. Edet, interview, Warri, 1985. B.O. Edet is a foundation member of the G.K.S. (1934). He is at the G.K.S. Headquarters, Warri, Nigeria as an executive minister of the Church.

38. *Watchtower History in Nigeria*, p. 16. This is a local history by the Nigerian headquarters made available to this writer by a popular and active Watchtower leader, Mr. Olugbebi in 1979. Only 3 pages were typed out for my attention. When I was at Aberdeen, I wrote to New York to grant me interview and the use of their archive but I was turned down.

39. Urhobo, *autobiography, op. cit.* See also *Daily Comet*, August 8, 1946, p. 4.

40. Urhobo, *Autobiography, op. Cit.*

41. *Ibid*. Obtaining permit to preach was not emphasised.

42. *Watchtower History, op. cit.*

43. This method was not peculiar to Nigeria. It was in common use. See Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults* Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1963, p. 230.

44. Shepperson and Prince, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-232.

45. *West African Pilot*, August 6, 1938, p. 7.

46. Edmond Gruss, *op. cit.*, p. 68. 47. *West African Pilot*, August 1938, p. 7.

48. Clifford Omoneukarin, *West African Pilot*, July 25, 1938, p. 3. In late 1932, Omoneukarin asked Urhobo to collect the debt owed by subscribers to enable them buy more literature from Lagos. Urhobo could not collect money from two of his friends who collected a third part each. Urhobo gave out much of his third part free of charge. Omoneukarin was not happy with Urhobo and the two friends. However, he did not show resentment, and Urhobo on his part had to give up a percentage of his salary for the literature.

49. *West African Pilot*, September 18, 1938, p. 11.

50. *Watchtower History in Nigeria, op. cit.*

51. *West African Pilot*, August 5, 1938, p. 7.

52. *West African Pilot*, June 26, 1951, p. 4.

53. *West African Pilot*, July 30, 1938, p. 3.

54. Benjamin Urhobo, interview, Warri, December 1985. Benjamin was Gideon Urhobo's junior brother who became Urhobo's follower in 1951. He was Urhobo's closest family member who observed Urhobo's activity from beginning to 1951 when he became a minister of the G.K.S.

55. B.O. Edet, interview.

56. *Watchtower History, op. cit.*, *West African Pilot*, August 3, 1938, p.

7.

57. Gideon Urhobo, *autobiography, op. cit.*

58. This means *Everlasting Life*, WTBTS, 1950, p. 222.

59. *Watchtower History, op. cit.*

60. *West African Pilot*, August 3, 1938, p. 7.

61. Gideon Urhobo, *Autobiography, op. cit.*

62. *West African Pilot*, August 5, 1938, p. 7.

63. *West African Pilot*, August 3, 1938, p. 7.

64. *West African Pilot*, August 5, 1938, p. 7.

65. *G.K.S. Weekly Sermon*, Vol. 1, No. 24, Sunday, February 16, 1969,

p. 2.

66. George D. McKinney Jr. *The Theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1962.

67. Edmond Gruss, *op. cit.* (See Footnote 9 above)

68. Wilton M. Nelson and Richard K. Smith. "Jehovah's Witnesses" in *Dynamic Religious Movements*, D.J. Resselgrave (ed.) Baker House, Grand Rapids, 1978, p. 114.

69. *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*, Brooklyn 1958, p. 247.

70. Consider 1st Timothy 3: verses 1, 2 and 12.

71. *Let God Be True, op cit.*, p. 229.

72. *Ibid*.

73. *Blood, Medicine and the Law of God*, WTBTS, Brooklyn, 1961, pp. 54 - 55.