

HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

*The
James Moyle
Oral
History
Program*

LAMAR S. & NYAL B. WILLIAMS

Interviewed by Gordon Irving
Salt Lake City, Utah
May 1981

There was much opposition from the newspapers and from other churches--I'm not going to name anyone, because I don't have the facts on it--that we just couldn't get our visas. They would not give us a permanent visa to go over there. We were a godless people. A student going to college in a city in California wrote an article about the Church and published it and sent it to Nigeria, how Nigerians were second-rate citizens and so on.

All this opposition mounted and we couldn't get in. I took a trip over in '62 to see if I could clear it, after we'd all been called. They just filed our applications right in the bottom of the file. A Catholic was responsible for filing them. I forced their hand, so they had to go down into the file and find the applications, but they didn't intend to give us a visa. I made that trip with a counselor in a stake presidency in Canada, a friend of President Tanner.

On our last trip to Nigeria, in 1963, I made friends with the secretary of state in the eastern part of Nigeria, with headquarters at Enugu. He was desirous of having the Church come into his area. Elder Wright, a young missionary who was my companion, and I rode from the Uyo and Aba area up to Enugu in this man's private government car with him, with a chauffeur driving and with the flags and all on his car. He was determined to help us get our visas and to establish the Church in Nigeria. I, by chance, became acquainted with a barrister, who was something like an attorney general would be here, who took care of the legal matters of the government, and he personally was helping us get our visas cleared.

At eleven o'clock on a Saturday morning in Enugu I received a telegram from the First Presidency instructing me to discontinue negotiations with the government and to return home immediately. By two o'clock we were on a plane headed for Lagos and for London.

I had received some clippings sent to me by my wife that three new counselors had been added to the First Presidency. When I got home, I was called into a meeting of the First Presidency with the five counselors to President McKay. During the conversation and interview I was not really informed as to why I'd been called back home or why they were discontinuing negotiating with the government. I wasn't quite able to discover it. The spokesman for the group was Thorpe B. Isaacson, who had been selected as one of the counselors to the First Presidency. He seemed to be carrying on most of the conversation. President McKay remained almost silent, as did the other counselors, who only asked a few questions. Finally Brother Isaacson stated that we were just asking for a lot of problems. I replied, "Since when did the Church start running away from problems?" He said, "There's no use asking for them."

Within a six-week period of time the Biafran War broke out, and the war was in the very area that I had been doing missionary work or trying to establish the Church. I would have been right in the center of that conflict had I remained. It wasn't until then that I felt that the Lord had something to do with getting me out of

Nigeria. It wasn't the time for the Church to be established. I was on a plane traveling with President [Harold B.] Lee from Los Angeles when he made this statement, "LaMar, it's just a matter of timing in establishing the Church." And he was right. The time was not right.

I: I've heard people say that many of the people who in '61 and '62 claimed to be affiliated with the Church were killed in the Biafran War. Is that true?

W: I don't know how many were killed, but one of the leaders of one of the large groups was shot and killed. And I have never been able to find Honesty John Ekong. I don't know what happened to him.

I: But it wasn't a situation where almost all of them were wiped out?

W: No.

I: But some were.

W: Some were. Some became involved.

I: Brother Isaacson's position that we could be asking for trouble, even without this war, seems to have some merit. It could have presented some real challenges to be working over there.

W: At that particular time, without the priesthood being given to these people and all of the opposition, it just wasn't the time.

Now an interesting thing happened. Back in the 1950s period, there was not too much going on about the problem of minority groups in the United States. But once it was announced that the Church was going to establish a mission in Nigeria, it seemed that there was a wave of problems that arose right here in the United States. We had Martin Luther King and his followers, finally culminating with his assassination. We had the Watts riot in California. There was great conflict, and it became a major problem in the United States. But it was all correlated with the time the Church announced that we were going to carry the gospel to the black man or the black nations. And it culminated in the Biafran War in Nigeria, in the very area where we were considering establishing the Church. When the Biafran War was over, it seems that most of the problem with race just slowed down and practically ceased. And today there's really no problem. Once the Negro was given the priesthood, the Church is now being established peacefully among these people.

Now I interpret that in this respect, that for 6,000 years Lucifer ruled supreme in the dark continent of Africa. When we made an attempt to intrude in his territory, then everything broke loose, culminating in a great war.

Now there's still opposition. Lucifer does not want us in Africa. He does not want us in Nigeria or Ghana, and there's still a lot of opposition, but it's the time, and the Church will be estab-