

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Stanley Okoro (CN 299, T1)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words which were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

() Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was created by Bob Shuster and Nathan Palladino and was completed in July 2019.

Please note: This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.

Collection 296, Tape 1. Oral history interview with Stanley Okoro by Robert Shuster on 25 February, 1985.

SHUSTER: Mr. Okoro, I wonder if we could start with a little bit of your family background. Who were your parents?

OKORO: Well, I have an interesting family background. Interesting in that, my mother, I...I was told was a Christian. And her parents were also Christians and active members in the Methodist Church. So she took after them. My father, somehow, got into marrying her, I guess, with some kind of deceit, I don't know. But he wasn't a Christian. He was into all kinds of things. My mother...my mother, apart for...from being a local preacher in the Methodist Church (they have what are called local preachers), she's just like any other woman in the village. But my father was the man of different trades. He was a contractor, he was a trader, and a hunter, and farmer [unclear]. He was a very versatile man. But, I didn't know my mother anyways, so that was [unclear]. She died before I was two, so I didn't really know her. But then, my father also died when I was about ten. So, I didn't really know much about my parents except for those few years that I lived with my father.

SHUSTER: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

OKORO: My little brother died after his mother. But I have a half-brother and a half-sister. That means that my father had another [unclear] wife. And my half-brother was older...older than I am. He's also a Christian and also a pastor. But my half-sister is not, so that's about it

SHUSTER: Who told you about your mother?

OKORO: My grandmother, who is still living. In fact, all her brothers and sisters are still alive. So they told me everything about my mother, and then, people...other people who knew my mother told me about her. She...she was a kind of person that I probably would have liked to be like, you know, have his, I mean, her...her personality because I understood that she was the kind of person that drew people to herself. And after today, people still talk about her. Particularly when they see me, they talk about my mother. She was generous, and things generally went her way. Not that, you know, not that she wanted that way, but somehow, whatever she puts her hand in succeeds. And I guess that made people even talk more about her. She was very friendly. She met people's needs. And I guess those are some of the qualities that people can't easily forget, so....

SHUSTER: Do you remember any of the stories that they told you about your mother?

OKORO: One of the things was that my mother was a very generous lady. And she would...she would give people who had need some of her food stuff. And she was always willing to help somebody. I guess, for her also to be...to have been a local preacher at the time she was, as I was told that she was the youngest...youngest among people like her at the time. And having not gone to formal schooling, I take it that she would have been an intelligent woman because she had to...she had to learn to read and write before she could be able to pass the exams. And....

SHUSTER: That was the way she could become a local preacher?

OKORO: Uh-huh. The only way she could have done that was learning how to read and write from her parents who...who became Christians through the missionary work.

SHUSTER: Was it common for women to become preachers at that time?

OKORO: Yeah, in the Methodist Church, yeah. They have...they call them local preachers and the reason is that the way the Methodist Church, at least, was structured, (I'm sure is still the same) is that the...the minister has a whole circuit that is different...a circuit that is...that...that is made up of different church groups.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: And in a church group you might have about four or five local churches and each one of these groups then be...forms the circuit and the minister stays at the headquarters of a circuit. So he never gets the opportunity to preach in these churches. And in order to have sermons and leadership in the...in the church, they have what they call "local preachers" who are then assigned every Sunday to these different local churches to preach on behalf of the minister.

SHUSTER: So they usually preach in the same church every week?

OKORO: No, no.

SHUSTER: In different...in different churches.

OKORO: Yeah. They go from place to place.

SHUSTER: In the American west they had something similar, with Methodist circuit riders, where they would ride the circuit from church to church.

OKORO: I guess it's...it's something that they want to keep in tradition with John Wesley, who...who rode across this...across the country, preaching, yeah.

SHUSTER: After your father died, then who did you live with?

OKORO: I lived.... My...my uncle, one of my mother's brothers, took me. That's how come I went to Lagos, which is the capital city of our country. So he took me down to Lagos and I lived with him there. That was for about...about two or three years that I stayed with them. And then I was on my own.

SHUSTER: Was he also a Christian?

OKORO: I would not say that he is because he's.... Apart from my mother, at the time I was growing up, I didn't know if any...any one of them that was a Christian. But going to church was

a regular thing in the home. But now, two of my aunties, who are the two youngest in...in the...in the family, are Christians. Then they.... My three uncles are not. They are not interested in making that commitment to Christ. Even.... They grew up with it, but they don't want to make that commitment.

SHUSTER: What about your grandmother? Did you have much contact with her when you were growing up?

OKORO: Yeah. I usually spent time with her. And.... Because she sort of...she sort of became the...my...my mother.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: So, I spent quite a bit of time with her.

SHUSTER: And is she a Christian?

OKORO: Yes, yes. She was preaching herself until she could not read any more and couldn't travel, so....

SHUSTER: When you came to Lagos for the first time, what was your impression?

OKORO: Well, it was a different...a different kind of place. It was a cultural diffusion center. What I mean by that is that people from all parts of the country converge in this city. So what I see is diffusion, multi-culture kind of thing. But somehow because it...because it is a city, it is the same as if the other cultures, the culture that you come with, goes into the background, except when you meet in your little groups, maybe on Sundays, and then these cultures come alive. But otherwise, it's just like any other city. I liked it because it offered a lot of opportunities growing up. The school was a lot more different, sophisticated, more so than what you had...what we had in the village. So, my impression of it was, I guess it was good. But I don't know if I made good use of it [chuckles].

SHUSTER: You mentioned the opportunities there with education. What other kinds of opportunities?

OKORO: Well, like, educationally you could...there is...is it sixteen hours? Sixteen or fourteen hours of school time during the day. So there's the first section that you go...session that you go...that goes in the morning and closes at 1:30. And then the afternoon section...session takes over and closes about 5:30, 6. So, every child would have opportunity to go to school at the time. And then the city...the city government provided for...for you to go to school. Where I came from at the time, that is, in the east, you'd have to pay for your school fees from kindergarten - buy your books, you know, everything. But because most of those schools were mission schools, mostly Methodist and Roman Catholic. So you had to pay school fees. And...but there in Lagos it was free. You could go to school without paying tuition. And in fact the...this...the city government schools, you only had to sew your uniform and go to school.



They would supply you with the books that you need. And also there was transportation and you could use the mass transportation to and from school. Whereas it wasn't the same in the rural areas. Besides that the fact that it is a city with all kinds of things, there was...there were a lot more education going on that is outside the school environment, more so than you would...than it was in the village. So, some of those are the things that I considered as a lot more opportunities. And then the older you get, the more you were able to use...utilize the opportunities...make use of the opportunities that were in existence.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh. What about apart from school? What about play? What kind of things did you do for recreation?

OKORO: Well, I...I...I was involved in playing soccer. That was...that was the popular sports activity that we had at the time. And then we had the beach, the Atlantic Ocean. So that was another avenue of recreation.

SHUSTER: And go swimming or....?

OKORO: Yeah, just go swimming. And then there were parks that you could go and play around with your mates, swing and all kinds of other things. And the opportunity of being able to go to the radio studio on Saturday morning for a children's show.

SHUSTER: And what would you do there?

OKORO: There, you just, know, go sing songs and they'll ask some questions, present a program for the kids. And then went until a mission camp [?]. That was another added opportunity, to go and participate in debates, as quizzes, mostly at the time at my age, it was mostly quizzes and then you are told a story or you perform a kind of drama that the organizer would...would have organized you for.

SHUSTER: These are mostly organized through the school or you just...?

OKORO: Sometimes through the schools, but most of the times, you just...you just show up. And you show up with your school...school uniform and that gives you admittance to the place.

SHUSTER: What kind of plans or ambitions did you have for yourself at this time?

OKORO: At this time, I don't think I had any ambitions. Maybe...maybe...maybe...maybe a little bit in a remote...a remote kind of way. At the time, the...the ambition for any young person in...in primary school, or elementary school as it is called now, is to be able to go on to high school, which we call secondary school. But for me, it was a remote kind of thing. Remote in that, my father wasn't there, and so I cannot really expect any other person to be able to pay my school fees, to pay my school expenses for five years. So that was kind of remote. But back in my mind, it was there. I was capable of studying and going on, but I knew that, for me, that was a shut door there. So it wasn't something very...very alive.

SHUSTER: What...what was your attitude towards Christianity, towards the church at this time?

OKORO: Well, I grew up going to church. And in the Methodist...in the Methodist Church, particularly, the...the kids are given all kinds of things to make them want to go to church, go to Sunday school.

SHUSTER: Such as?

OKORO: Sing a lot of songs. And have a lot of Bible drama. So those are basically the things that brought children to...to the church. But there was no...there was no live preaching of, you know, say, Luke. "Jesus died for you. And He is your savior." That kind of salvation story or message communicated. So, for that reason, going to church was just something that everybody did. And that you liked to go, particularly if you loved to sing. You can...you can satisfy yourself in the Methodist church. And if you like drama, you can also satisfy yourself within the Methodist church. So when you go...when you graduate from the elementary group or age group, you can participate in the youth group, youth organization. That is much more of an entertainment kind of social gathering. Then there is the choir that's there. So, if you like to sing, there's an avenue. Something to...that you can....

SHUSTER: Did you join the choir?

OKORO: Yes, I did sing in the choir for...for one year. That was after the civil war [1967-1970]. I joined the choir for a little while.

SHUSTER: Were there any other activities besides church on Sunday like that that you were involved in?

OKORO: No, there was...there was nothing apart from going to the farm [?] and work, come back and eat and.... The other activities, they...they go around and play ball.

SHUSTER: You said that after a couple years, you were on your own. What did you mean by that?

OKORO: Well, I guess, that's...that's...that means a couple of things. One, I...I was very resentful to everything about life because here, I lost my mother, I didn't even know her. And then my father, who is the only person that I had at the time also died. And so, I was very resentful. I wasn't happy. And so that turned into rebellion. I did all kinds of things that my uncle couldn't...didn't want...he was...is a very quiet person. And he didn't know what to do with me, so he...he sent me back home, and I didn't want to stay home, so I came back to the city and tried to make it on my own. So, this was 1964, 1964. Then after I tried to do that, I couldn't...I couldn't make it, I knew that I had to at least finish my elementary school, so I went back home and lived back...back in the home.

SHUSTER: Who did you live with? Did you live by yourself or....?



OKORO: Well, no, I...I lived with one of my uncles' wives. This is not in my own home...

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: ...not my mother's place. So I lived...I lived there and basically, I was a house help. That's what it amounted to. And I was able to go and finish my elementary school. And after...after which there was nowhere to go. And...and then the crisis came where people had to go back to their roots, as it were, so those who were in Lagos had to come back home. Those who were up in the north had to come back home. And then the war started. So, that was an opportunity, so I joined the army.

SHUSTER: How old were you then?

OKORO: At the time I joined the army, it was 19...1968. I was seventeen. So I joined the army then. And that lasted until 1970, January 1970. So, at the end of that, I spent basically a year back at home in the east, after which I went back to Lagos.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: And then, I had to.... I lived with friends, you know, off and on while looking for job. But then, I did not have any...any qualification that could help given me a good job to work at this time. So, I had to do work with construction companies as often...when there is a job to do. So, I did that for about a year. And that was 1971. It was at this time, I was...I encountered Christianity, you know, in the way that I know it today.

SHUSTER: How did you have that contact? How did it happen?

OKORO: At this time, there was...there was a schoolmate of mine who is much older than I am. But we went...we attended the same primary school. He was...he was older, and he was in the...in the higher classes when I was.... But somehow, we got to be friends. So he stayed...he was in Lagos during...throughout the crisis then, so he had a greater opportunity for job. But by this time, he had become a Christian over the years and he was working with the Sudan Interior...for the Sudan Interior Mission bookstores. And he invited me to come to his house, this particular Sunday. It was in February, yeah, about this time. So, I went to his house, and I didn't...he wasn't there. I was very much mad. I was very mad. But then, one of his younger relations, who was actually my classmate said...told me that he knew where he is, that he would not come home until night. Then I said, "Why did he invite me, you know?" I couldn't understand. I was...I was...I was very disappointed. Anyways, he took me to this place and it happens to be the Sudan Interior Mission guest house. And in this place, they have...they have what they call a fellowship service in the afternoon at 4:30. We had the missionaries and transients, Christians and national Christians, everyone. Everybody...everybody get together and worship that afternoon. Then after which, la...later on in the evening, at about 7:30, they have an open air service where they go out...now they go out and invite people from the streets and has an evangelical message given at the end of it. So, he was involved in this; hence, he couldn't come back home. So, when I met him, about...that was about quarter to 6, when the...the...the

other service had finished, and he was arranging benches for this open air. So I...I questioned him. I said, "Why did you invite me and blah, blah, blah?" So he apologized and persuaded us to stay, myself and his cousin, to stay for the service. We stayed. So it was there that I heard the gospel and responded that night. So, that's how I heard the gospel.

SHUSTER: What did you hear that caused you to respond?

OKORO: Well, there were...there were...there were two things that actually happened. One, the preacher was a blind man, and he's still a blind man. And that...that struck me very seriously because as of...as of that time, I have not seen a blind man that was able to read. And here was this man. He read fluently. He had his Braille Bible. I didn't know what it was. But then, I don't even remember the passage that he preached from. Maybe it was from the book of Hosea. I don't know what chapter or what.... I can't...I...I tried to think of what chapter that was but I never could get it. But the one thing that he said was that...that, "Some of us here have...have experimented with a lot of things." And that he invites...invites us to experiment with Jesus Christ. He said, "Experiment with Jesus." You know? And he used some analogies that, like when you try to imitate sugar, for instance, it's never the real thing. But one day when you get the real sugar you know that that is sugar. So he used that kind of analogies, he gave several and made that...that Jesus is the real thing and we can...if we...if we want to, we can experiment with him and that we will not be disappointed. So I was interested because at that time I...I had indeed experimented. I had done quite a lot...I have done a lot of things. Like I said earlier, I was very resentful to the whole...or to life itself because I thought that life wasn't fair to me to have just left me by myself. So I had done quite a few things and spending two years in the military didn't help matters at all. And, it wasn't...it wasn't a peacetime military experience, which is a...a different thing. But it is wartime military experience and that makes matters worse. So, I said, "Okay, let's go ahead and try it," so I went...I went out and committed my life to Christ that night. And that's where it began [chuckles].

SHUSTER: To backtrack just for a second, you mentioned the military. What affect do you think it had on you, your two years in the fighting?

OKORO: Well, one, it...it satisfied my...my desire for adventure. And the effects that it had was introducing me to the kind of lives that I would have not gone into otherwise. Although my...my half-brother was...was indeed (I don't know what to call it) was something that God used...somebody that God used to constantly remind me to keep straight even though I wasn't a Christian. He had become a Christian long before I did. So even through the war time he was a Christian. So he...he would write letters to me and tell me that a soldier is not supposed to take people's property. A soldier is not supposed to get involved with women. A soldier is not supposed to...you know, that kind of thing. He constantly did that. So, I wouldn't say that...but when it came to smoking.... I...I did quite a lot of smoking, both cigarette and sometimes getting involved with marijuana because that was a common thing in the military. But this, my...my brother, God used him to kind of put...restrict me from going, finding women, which was something...which was a common thing. And during those war times, you see, women would come purposely to...to...to find men that would take them in and give them money and provide food for them because there was scarcity of food and money. But that...God used that even



though I wasn't a Christian to keep me from getting involved with women. And also kept me from trying to loot properties of...of people because one...one of the things he told me that if you get involved in looting people's property, you can be sure that you're not going to come out alive, you know? And I...I definitely...I definitely saw that happen over and over and over again. When people got involved in taking other people's property who were running for their lives, invariably, they are gone, you know? So, my military experience was both maturing and also opened my eyes into wild life, as it were. So that I did not...it's not that I hated it because I went in voluntarily and one of the reasons I went is, maybe...maybe in...at that...in...in this instance it would be a lot easier for me to die because as far as I was concerned there was no hope. You might not un...be able to understand the dynamics nor the things that are at play because a person like me who did...who did not have an uncle who had taken responsibility who said, "It doesn't matter what this boy does, I'm going to see that he does this and this and this and be on his own." Since I did not have anybody like that, my...my...my chances of getting education or getting a professional training was...was remote, very, very remote. So, actually one of the things was that, you know, "If I go into the army, this war, and it will be very easy for me to die and then people like my grandmother will go, 'Oh, it's one of the war victims that I cannot protect.'" But that was...that was my experience in the military. And when I came back to the city, I was involved in going out at night, going to social gathering, dancing, wild parties, that kind of a thing. Even though I did not have the money, but that was the only thing that I knew to do. To go out and try to find some form of happiness and satisfaction. So when this message was preached to experi...experiment with Jesus was...it was a welcomed...wel...welcome idea even though I didn't know if it was going to work.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh. What...at the meeting was there some kind of invitation to come forward? Or how....

OKORO: Uh-huh, yeah.

SHUSTER: And then what...what happened when you came forward?

OKORO: There were...there were people who took you, one on one, and counseled with you. They explained the implications of dec...the decision that you...you are about to make or you want to make. And so, that was what happened. And then those people were also responsible to follow you up, to visit with you and correspond with you and that kind of a thing, and they did that very well, did that well.

SHUSTER: Do you remember who your counselor was?

OKORO: Yeah, I remember. I...the very first...the very first man that counseled me, I still remember his name, Gabriel. But I don't know where he is and then along the way a man who had some...who...who gave me follow-up materials by mail and by personal visits. I...I know where he is. And, he's.... Actually he's in Chicago. He's in downtown Chicago now, with his family. So those were very, very, very crucial, important days.

SHUSTER: In those first days after you became a Christian, what were your feelings, how

wou...how would you regard what had happened?

OKORO: Well, I felt that I began to see things...I...I began to see things differently. At last, I had hope. There was a whole lot to live for. Even with, you know, my handicaps or my obstacles notwithstanding. So, life really took a different turn for me.

SHUSTER: Did you correspond with your brother or your grandmother or your uncles?

OKORO: Uh-huh.

SHUSTER: And how did they react to....?

OKORO: My...my...my brothers...my father's brother is...at the time, I did not even write a letter to him. I went...I went home. I went home and talked with him. And he wasn't too glad with me because before I even left, we had...we had quarreled. There was a strain in the relationship. He had wanted me to...to...wanted...he had wanted to initiate me into the...into the native society. And I refused. I refused on the grounds that he had taken my father's pro...my father's will. He inherited my father's will and refused to send us to school. So what is the use initiating me into...into the native society? So for that, he thought I was rude. And there was a strain in the relationship. But I went back all the same and talked with him and told him what I found. And he wasn't too glad, but somehow, he dismissed me. And that was about it. But then my...my maternal uncles, I never did get in touch with them because at this...at this time, I didn't know where any one of them was...

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: ...because I had gone on...gone off on my own. But my grandmother, I went back, and I visited where she was and told her what had happened. And she...she was...she was genuinely happy for me, and she still is. She's still living there now, so that was the way it went. But then it was a...I guess it was later because by the time they...in 1980, because I had lived in this country before then, I went back home...

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: ...and that was when I was able to seek out my maternal uncles and aunties and they had heard that I had become a Christian, but somehow, they didn't believe it because they thought that I was...I was really ba...I was a bad. They had concluded, every one of them had concluded that I would never be anything and I'd probably end up a drunk or something. But when they heard that I had become a Christian and I had gone on to school and not just that, I had been a missionary somewhere and then gone on to U...United States to do so much studying. In fact, even my grandmother thought that they were making up the stories because.... She thought that probably I had died somewhere and they didn't want to tell her that I had died. So...but it was just a few years ago that I was able to get in touch with all of them.

SHUSTER: What about your brother?

OKORO: H is still a pastor.

SHUSTER: But how did he react? Did he...?

OKORO: He was very...he was very glad. He was very glad. And that was a big encouragement to him.

SHUSTER: Was it also that same year when you were converted that first you went to Bible school?

OKORO: Yes.

SHUSTER: How did that come about?

OKORO: I felt...I...I felt the Lord speaking to me after I became a Christian, just about three months or so that I need to get into the ministry. And I saw what was happening. At this time, actually, there was am SIM [Sudan Interior Mission] missionary...a missionary couple, rather, who were...who are graduates of Wheaton.

SHUSTER: What was their name?

OKORO: John and Jane Didrickson. So, they were...they were running a youth group in downtown where I lived, and I was introduced to them. So they...their lives challenged me greatly into going into the ministry. And...but then I knew that I didn't have the...the training. I didn't have the skills to do whatever it is that ministry is all about. So I began to pray that if it was God's will for me to go, then he had to, somehow, open the doors for me to go. So, by...I guess by June or so, yeah. About June or July, I did Bible study that I attended every Tuesday night. There was some...there were some people that came to introduce a new Bible college that was being opened. So, that was just a week before...I mean a week after I prayed that prayer. So, I...I took their materials and made applications and I was accepted. So by September, I left. I went to...to the school. It happened that we...I was...I was among the first people of that class, the first class of the school. So, that's...that's how...that's how it happened. And the church I attended gave me...gave me some support.

SHUSTER: Which church was that?

OKORO: Evangelical Church of West Africa. So....

SHUSTER: You mentioned that these two SIM workers, their lives really challenged you.

OKORO: Uh-huh.

SHUSTER: What did you mean by that?

OKORO: Well, they...they...they were out to help the young people on the streets of Lagos.

Not just on the streets of Lagos, but also in the high schools that were...that surrounded the metropo...the metropolis. They would go out and organize quizzes. They would go out...out of their way conseling and had Bible study in their home, which I participated in. And on Saturdays, there was this club meeting, then it was called Christian LifeClub. That has become the YFC [Youth for Christ], which I work for now. So...and their home was always open for us to come, come in, eat lunch, chat, just do anything, you know? So, I was...I was really challenged by...by their...by their service and their dedication. So those...those are the kind of thing, you know, the fact that they're going out to meet...try to meet the needs of the young people and present them with the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those things was...was a...a big challenge to me. I never, until I became a Christian which was at that time few months...

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: ...I hadn't seen anything like it. No, I hadn't seen anything like it. Even though back in the village, where I came from there, pockets of missionaries, they had gone stale. So, whatever it was that Christ had, they didn't give it to people. So that was...that's th...those are...that's....those are some of the things that...about their lives that really challenged me.

SHUSTER: And over the next few years, you went to Bible school, a couple different times. What...what was it that was most beneficial to you in your Bible school education?

OKORO: Well, one...for one thing, I was able to learn how to interpret the Bible. And I...I learned how to...how to teach and it was...it was...I guess it was a maturing time for me as far as Christianity was concerned. And at the time...at that time, w...we had a lot of Pentecostal confusion in the country, particularly in Lagos, and.... Having been first being associated with John and Jane, and then some elder people in my church, and then going to the Bible school, all that gave me the...the foundation that I needed to grow on on my own. And, it wasn't so much of the teachers in the...in the school that...that...that benefited...that I benefited from. It was more, my fellow students. And the fact that we're...even though the teachers...the teachers were not...it's not that they were not of any chll...any help or any challenge because without them I wouldn't have learned what I learned. But, they...they provided the avenue for me to grow as a Christi...as a young Christian. And that was...that was...that was the major thing. And then the thing...one of the thing that the school provided which I would always appreciate was that...was the emphasis on prayer. We prayed every week. Monday is set aside for prayers until...until mid-day. Everybody, both the staff...both the staff of the school, the teachers and students, everybody converged in the assembly and prayed until it is noon. And they go back, eat lunch, have a rest, and then go to do whatever else that you have to do. And, you know, that...that fact at seeing God answer those prayers were...were a real challenge to the [unclear], and is something that will always go with me.

SHUSTER: Do you recall some of those answers to prayer?

OKORO: Do you mean for me or for the school?

SHUSTER: No, just in general, for the school or for you.

OKORO: For me, I remember that, like I have mentioned over and over again, I did not have anybody that would have paid my school fees. And the school wasn't free. So, to...to see God over and over again send money on my behalf, you know, make people from...get people from my church to send checks or cash or whatever, in answer to prayers. Those were really...really days of strengthening. And then, for the school, you know, we...we...there were...there were a lot of answers to prayers, which I cannot catalog now. But definitely, there were answers to prayers, like the school also was running by faith, as it were. And they had to depend on God for money to come in for the teachers to be paid, for instance. For...sometime.... The fees...the fees that we paid were not sufficient to feed the students. So, we had to pray in the money, as it were. And God, over and over again, would provide the money for food to be bought, for a car to be repaired, for a car to be bought, or for money to finish this building or that building, you know, things like that. It wasn't...it wasn't like...like anything fell from Heaven, but somehow, you saw God answering prayers.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that probably, you learned more from your fellow students than from the teachers. What did you mean by that?

OKORO: Well, I...I guess why...why it was so...why it's so, it's like.... My fellow students, particularly about three of them that we...we...that I was friends with. They were older than I was. So, somehow they were...they were like big brothers to me, and they had been Christians much longer than I...I wa...I had been at it So, learning, you know, they...they had...they have a whole lot more than I did. So I learned from them. And their life, their...their consistency of their life was something that really challenged me and built me up very much.

SHUSTER: And after graduating, you went to Liberia for a while, for a year?

OKORO: Uh-huh.

SHUSTER: How did that come about?

OKORO: That happened in...in.... What happened, anyways, was that by the time I graduated, I had admission to go to Washington Bible College, but then, I did not have...I did not have my high school diploma, even though the diploma I had gotten at the time was higher than high school diploma. So, with that, the...I could not get...get visa immediately to...to go on to...to come over to the U.S. So, I was left not knowing what to do. But after having prayed for a long...for a few months, I was convinced that I could be of use to a mission endeavor. So, I contacted the Liberia Youth for Christ. And they said, "Come on over."

SHUSTER: Why did you contact them?

OKORO: Well, I thought that I could work...I could work with the organization. And at the same time, I would be seeking ways to get my visas...

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: ...to go on to Bible school...to Bible college in...in the states. So, I went on to Liberia, and work with the Youth for Christ for one year. At the same time, I taught...I taught in a high school. I taught Bible in...no, junior high...junior high for about seven months. And then, the following year, I was able to work...combine my work with Youth for Christ and working with the radio station, the SIM radio station, ELWA. In the youth...in the extension ministry department. I worked with the...the youth director. So that was...that was a very expanding experience because we were all involved in camping, which Youth for Christ started, and then, youth ministries to the schools. And that also opened the opportunity for us to teach Bible in the high schools. In fact, it was that...that that opened the door for SIM to send in Bible teachers into Liberia to teach Bible in different high schools. So we started that in 1977, teaching Bibles in different high schools as part of their curriculum. And then I also wrote script for them for the radio station for the youth...the youth program, called it, Challenging Youth. So I wrote the script for that program for them.

SHUSTER: Were these programs in English or....?

OKORO: Uh-huh. Yeah.

SHUSTER: And, you mentioned some of the kind of things you did for YFC. What.... Were you like a counselor for a particular group or did you....?

OKORO: I was, for the most part at the time, I was a judge of the correspondence courses and counseling...and counseling of the Youth for Christ meetings, so I had counselors that I trained who did the counseling every Saturday. I tried to follow, the people that I counseled, up. That was...that was my major responsibility, and then, at the...the youth center, which...which YFC eventually started, that was my brain child as...as...also. I...I never saw it took off. But I made...I made all the plans for the coffeehouse to start at the place. And eventually, all the mo...before the...all the money came in, I had left. But it eventually started and is still going on.

SHUSTER: Well, what had suggested that idea to you?

OKORO: One, I...I was...I was very keen in seeing young people grow. It gives me a lot of joy. And then, well...the...the...the house that we owned, that Youth for Christ owned, with the...in conjunction with another...with some missionary endeavor, was just down the road from the university. And, I had been involved also, through you...through the...the e...the radio station to give devotional messages in the mornings at the university. So with that, and then, supplying them with purpose, supplying with...to the Christian organization in the campus, and seeing...being there and seeing that come evenings, Saturday night or whatever, you just see that there's nothing...nothing wholesome that the young people can do apart for go to movie houses. And the movies are not anything wholesome at all. If they don't go to movie houses, they go whore houses. If they don't go to whore houses, they go have illicit sex with their girlfriends, that kind of a thing. So it was a burden that came...grew out of the non-direction...the...the directionlessness of the young people downtown. So, I thought, if this house that is here at this strategic place, if we can have a coffeehouse where they can come and play ping-pong, listen to music, and just feel free, take a hot cocoa or something, we can interact with them and provide

them with an atmosphere that is wholesome. And we can also present them with the message of Jesus Christ. So that's how that came about.

SHUSTER: Why did you decide to go to the U.S. for schooling?

OKORO: Well, that's because we didn't have any...we didn't have any...any school of...any...any better school of training Christian workers in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the SIM mission and the...the SIM and UMS [United Missionary Society?], CMS [Church Missionary Society], and the Anglicans and some others, they...they have schools they call...they call Bible school, then they say Bible college, then they say seminary. When you...when you hear about this terms, you would...you at least, when you hear Bible college, you would think that it is a degree graduating institution. But it is not. And the seminary, you would think that that's where you earn your second degree. It is not, either. So what happens at the Bible school is where they train people on a primary level. They may not necessarily be children.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: But they may be old people who never went to school, so they train them, give them primary education plus a lot of Bible. Then the Bible college is where they train people with...who have finished the elementary level education. And that too, gives a lot of Bible and perhaps, with a lot of English, but not other things. Then the seminary, they...is where they train, evidently, people with both high school training, and they offer...they offer the bachelor's degree which was not recognized by the government. And there weren't any general educational things involved in their curriculum. And I did not want that kind of a thing. I...I felt that if I came to U.S. and did my studies, that I would be able to get the...the kind of quality of education that I was interested in. And, besides that, I wasn't prepared to go through the...the system to be able to get my high school diploma because that would have...that would have stalled me for many, many years because it's...they don't make it easy and studying at home to try to take equivalent of GRE, I mean GED [General Education Diploma] here...GED here, would have been...would have taken me many, many years. So, when I... I did very well at the...the Bible college I went to. The Washington Bible College felt that if I did well, because it was their curriculum that we used, if I did well with the courses, then there's no reason that they couldn't give me the opportunity to finish my...my bachelor's degree. So I felt all...putting all this together, with the quality...it was more of the quality of the training that I would get that got me interested in coming to U.S.

SHUSTER: How did you travel to the U.S.?

OKORO: How do you mean?

SHUSTER: Well, did you come by plane or....?

OKORO: Yeah.

SHUSTER: Did you fly directly or from Europe or....?

OKORO: When I came, I flew...I had a direct flight to New York, and then transferred to...to D.C.

SHUSTER: What...what were your first impressions of the U.S.?

OKORO: [Laughs] One of the very first thing that happened was that, I had been given a...a wrong impression about how people can mug you when they get to New York.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: So when I got to New York, I was really paranoid to the extent that when a...a cab driver beckoned me, I went the opposite direction [chuckles]. But on the...the other hand, I...I had interacted with a lot of Americans. So that...and then having worked in Liberia for almost two years, most of my colleagues were Americans and it wasn't a strange thing. And my teachers, where I went to Bible...Bible college back home, were Americans also. So I...I didn't...the only thing is that I just had the opportunity of seeing America physically...

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: ...but I had had interaction with many Americans that when I got here, I...I did not feel as though it was strange. And be...having lived in the city also, I didn't...I didn't...I didn't find any...anything out of the ordinary, as it were, when I came here. \

SHUSTER: What about churches, worship service, and just the way that Christians related to each other? Was it pretty much the same as at home, or was there...did you notice contrast?

OKORO: Well, the things that I noticed was that the relationship here, even at the churches...in the churches, were very shallow.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: It...it...that'sthat's just...that's just all...was...was very shallow for me. It's different at home. People...people cared for people. Words were not something that you just say. Words had...words were...words were said with their meanings...with their meanings attached to them. So that was...that was the...one of the things that I had discovered that wasn't quite the same.

SHUSTER: Can you recall an example?

OKORO: I guess the thing that I have done is, I'd rather not let it bother me. So, I just go on with my life. But what I did was, instead of complaining, what I did was, I spent time to develop relationships with people. So that way, I...I'm not judgmental.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: But I say [?] it to...well, I guess that's the way society functions generally. But then there are exceptions. There are people who would want to sit and spend time...spend time with another person. [Unclear] what it takes to help...to be of service to that person. So, that's the way I looked at...that's the way I approached...that's the way I go about it.

SHUSTER: When you returned to Nigeria, 1980, is that when the Nigerian YFC was organized?

OKORO: No, the year YFC was organized in 1975. And....

SHUSTER: Had you had any connection or any part of it?

OKORO: Yeah, I was...I was...I had always been part of it.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: But at the time that...at the time that it was officially launched, I wasn't there. I guess I was in the southern...the other part of the south going to school.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: But 1980, when I got back, was the first time that they considered a full time staff. And....

SHUSTER: How...how had it run before then?

OKORO: Well, it was run voluntarily. Most of us, at the time, was giving whatever time we had in running the organization.

SHUSTER: And why was it then decided to go to a full time staff?

OKORO: Well, one of the reasons was that the young people that we...we had left behind, had been influenced by different kinds of doctrines that was not conservative.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: More are Pentecostal, different shades of Pentecostal movements. So the...the...the board did not like that. And it also...since we were using...we're still using SIM mission property, it wasn't going over well with the mission.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: So they wanted a...so the board desired to have a full time staff who would...who would put things in order and be able to teach the Bible as it's supposed to be taught, you know, that kind of a thing. So, [clears throat] I happened to be the one that was hired, 1981, when I

finished my national service. So, I was hired to do the job.

SHUSTER: Now you say your national service, that was in the army or....?

OKORO: No. It's so...it's something like the Peace Corps that you have. It's something of that nature. But in this case, it's restricted to the country. So once you have a bachelor's degree, you...you...it is compulsory to serve the government for one year...for twelve calendar year...twelve month cal...twelve calendar year. And you will be sent to any part of the country other than your

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: area of origin.

SHUSTER: So where were you sent?

OKORO: I was sent to [chuckles]...to the east part, the eastern portion. What happened was that, those of us who were foreign graduates had the privilege of choosing a state that we would go. And I'm not fluent in...in...in the language...in my language.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: So the state that I went to was just the next state to mine. And we spoke the same language. So I thought that would help me to learn a little bit more of my language. So....

SHUSTER: Which was Imo?

OKORO: No, Imo is my state, but I went to Anambra which is the second half of the Igbo...Igboland.

SHUSTER: And your language was Igbo?

OKORO: Uh-huh.

SHUSTER: And what did you do during that [unclear]?

OKORO: I taught...I taught in a teacher...in a teacher training college for that period of time.

SHUSTER: How would you describe that experience?

OKORO: I...I would say that it was [chuckles]...it was...it was a good experience. It was good and bad. It was good for me in that, that was the first time I would be able...I...I taught in a school setting. And it was also a challenge because I was teaching people who...who had very little education. And somehow, I...I taught Bible, but it...my...the Bible I had to teach is not the kind of curriculum that I would teach in a Bible college.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: It's very...very elementary kind of things. Things that you teach and it s...it would seem as if there is no life to...to it. It's just a bunch of morals and good literature. And you have to teach it in such a way that the students will be able to pass the national exams, which is nothing Christian.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: But that posed a challenge. Here I w...here I am, my...I believe that the Bible is the word of God and is life, and I couldn't bear to teach it the way that it has been prescribed. So I had to...I found my...myself spending a lot more time because I would teach what the curriculum says to teach, but then I would also teach what I believe that the Bible is saying. And it was...it was a rewarding experience, even though.... And then I had...I had to organize a Christian group within the school and ran it like I would run a Campus Life club [a type of Youth for Christ organization]. So that was very, very rewarding because at the end of it, the principal didn't want me to go. He wanted me...he wanted me to take an appointment with the state, so that I can teach....I can continue teaching in the school.

SHUSTER: What.... YFC now, is that...are there clubs throughout the country?

OKORO: No. Actually, we have a central...a central meeting place in Lagos for YFC, one central place. But we have different...we...we have services...ministry services, as it were. We...we...like, we have ministry facilitators to different groups in the university and at the churches and that kind of a thing. But then we have in the...in the Cross River state, we have two...two...two clubs in two cities which is in the south...in...in the south, south of the country.

SHUSTER: Does YFC then mostly work in cities?

OKORO: Yes, as of now.

SHUSTER: What is the reason for that?

OKORO: Well, the reason is there hasn't been...there hasn't been staff to do the job. And too, the...the YFC have lacked money to be able to expand its ministries.

SHUSTER: In the U.S., the YFC works pretty much with high school students.

OKORO: Uh-huh.

SHUSTER: Is that also true in Nigeria, or is that different?

OKORO: No, it's not the same. But in the Cross River state, yes, they...they close their works...work very much with the high school students. But in Lagos, we work with all kinds of...we all [?] work with a cross-section of people. So there are sec...high school people that

come to participate and there are college people that participate and there are career people that participate.

SHUSTER: How would you describe the church in general in Nigeria? What are its strengths and weaknesses there?

OKORO: Well, the church in Nigeria, you have to look at it against...maybe in...kind of put it...it in three sections because you have the Roman Catholic, and then you have the Anglican or the...the Anglican would...would also encompass the established d...denominations.

SHUSTER: The Methodist.

OKORO: The main...the mainstream denominations. The Methodist and some others that you don't even have here. And then you have the live church which would...I will call the Evangelical Church. And then fourthly. Which would probably be three and a half, you have the...the occult movement that...that call...lend the name...the name of Christ...we know they go about with the name of Christ. Okay. So, but...when if...if...if...to talk about the live church in Nigeria, I would say that the strengths that the church have is that the church has a great people...a great number of people with enthusiasm to serve, who are willing to do something. They have a lot of zeal. But when it comes to.... They have a lot of zeal, and then, weaknesses. I guess the weaknesses are more, because most of these people who are willing to serve people are career people, professionals who have been to college and some haven't, but many have been through college. They do not have any Biblical background at all. And it seem as if that they just...simply they do not have...they do...they don't have the background, what it takes to be a solid Christian who can go out and teach solid...teach the counsel of God with integrity. So, that is lacking. That is one of the weaknesses. And then the other part of it in...within the Evangelical movement is that there is this antagonism, particularly between the...the...the Pentecostals against those and the...the conservatives. So that there is no unity...there's no uniformity in an...in...in the...in the activities of the church. Rather, there is this fighting against one another.

SHUSTER: What is the basis for that hostility?

OKORO: Well, the basis for that is wh...the Pentecostals call the Evangelical...the conservative, he is not...he's not spiritual and since he doesn't speak in tongue, doesn't do that, doesn't do this, doesn't do that, he's not a Christian. So, he will react that he is a Christian and you don't have the right to call him that kind of a thing. That is basically the kind of thing that it is. The other part of it is that that, from the Pentecostal side also, is the fact that they have some...a lot of teachings that doesn't...I wouldn't...that...that is not completely true. I guess it's what you would call...what you would call the Holiness movement.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: And as far as I'm concerned, the Holiness movement is not completely true because a false notion. It gives people a false...a false...false.... (What is it? What would I call it?).

SHUSTER: Impression?

OKORO: False impression or false confidence, so that they go out pretending to be what they are not. And invariably, they will fall, and fall very flat on their faces. And that has happened several...and happened over and over and over again. And with that kind of thing going on - the young people would go and tell their parents that they are not Christians, they are not this. And so, the...the parents will react. With all this kind of things go...going on within the church, I see the church in Nigeria not being a strong church because of all the...all the differences in doctrine and lack of ability to be able to deal with it and say, "That....," and say, "This is...that's your own conviction, and this is my...my conviction. And you can stay on your own, I can stay on my own, but we can also cooperate..."

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: "...as far as the essentials is concerned." Until that happens, the church in Nigeria will still be a weak church.

SHUSTER: What is the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria?

OKORO: The...the relationship is not...is...for the Christians...on the Christians part, I would say it's culture. But for the Chri...for the Muslims, they would rather ha...have the Christians be done away with. So for mostly in the North, where Muslim is dominant, we have seen churches burnt down, Christians killed, and, you know, that kind of thing. And if you a Christian and you are into any business, you can be...you will be victimized or you will be....Your business can be stifled because you are not a Muslim. You know, those kind of things. So on their part, there is hos...hostility, but on the part of the Christians, I don't think that there's any hos...hostility even though we would want them to become Christians, but there's no hostility in pursuing that.

SHUSTER: Not even in reaction to the death of Christians and the persecution of the North?

OKORO: They did not...they did not...the Christians, they don't react violently in any way. I don't even remember if there was any...any...any organized front that was...that was put up. I don't...I don't remember.

SHUSTER: How does the government react to Evangelical churches, or just Evangelical Christians?

OKORO: Sometimes...the government doesn't...the...the...the...the government, even though it is mostly Muslims that are at the government because they happen to be the majority....

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: The nature of our country does not give the government the...the...the powers to victimize anybody on account of his religion. So with that...with that, the government doesn't do anything to the...to the Christians. Even though, in many cases, government would dole out

money into Muslim endeavors...

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: ...and you know, and not to the Christians, that kind of a thing. But I would say that it's not...we don't have any...any hostile environment with them, as far as the government is concerned.

SHUSTER: Are you familiar with the Cherubim and Seraphim Church?

OKORO: Yes, that's...that's the class that I put...that's the...four and a half year....

SHUSTER: Occult?

OKORO: Yes, yeah.

SHUSTER: Is that.... I've heard a little bit about that. Is it a growing or....?

OKORO: It is very...it is growing.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

OKORO: In fact, I think I understand that they have a church here in the states now and missionaries here in the states.

SHUSTER: What is their basic doctrine? How does it deviate from Christianity?

OKORO: They have a man that is deified, as it were. And he is the...the...the a...the almighty prophet. And it is not...if you g...if you walk into the place, they...if you walk into any one of their churches, they would sing, and if you understand the language that they're using, you will think that it is another Christian church, but there are a lot of things that they practice, like going to the...to the river side, and praying, sacrificing, and then they claim that the waters that they...the water that they put in the bottle has healing powers. And they use candles a lot. They use incense a lot. They...they definitely do a lot of...a lot of practice with...is it magic powers? Or I will call it so.... So they're...this kind of things that are going which is not apparent when you see...when you just look at....

END OF TAPE