

**THE
AFRICAN
CHURCH
TODAY
AND
TOMORROW**

Vol. 1

Prospects and Challenges

2

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The African Church Today and Tomorrow was first published in 1994 in two volumes. While the first volume treated the modern African Church's Prospects and Challenges, the second volume examined the place of **Inculturation in Practice**.

Many years after the appearance of these two books most of the issues raised in them have never stopped generating debates among leaders of The African Church – Catholics and Protestants, and even more among the leaders, founders and adherents of numerous new 'Christian Churches', often referred to "**Independent African Churches**". As far as most Students of Religion and Theology in higher institutions of learning are concerned "**The African Church Today and Tomorrow**" is an indispensable "Handbook" for research in their further efforts to assess the challenges facing the African Church in the Black Continent in the modern times.

The demand for the re-printing of these books has been overwhelming; hence the re-appearance of "**The African Church**". We hope those who have been in search of this book have ample opportunity now to purchase a copy.

We thank Springfield Publishers, Doris Eke, Ifeoma Igbokwe, and Perpetua Nnoruka for helping out in the re-typing, re-typesetting, and proofreading of the entire book as the old electronic copy has been lost.

Rev. Fr. Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere
St Mary's Seminary Umuowa

FORWARD

(By His Grace, Anthony J.V. Obinna, Archbishop of Owerri)

Fr. Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere's book **The African Church, Today and Tomorrow** is the combined fruit of committed service to the spread of the good news and strenuous research into the agony and excitement of Africa's Christians as they seek to appropriate the joys of the Good News in the midst of many Afro-cultural values which they still cherish.

His earlier work **Prophecy and Revolution (1981)** which focused on Africa's Independent Churches and their large flavour of Africanisms apparently laid the remote foundations for Fr. Ndiokwere's spirited tackling of the issue of inculturating the Good News and its approved liturgical forms within the Catholic Church in Africa.

Fully mindful of and respectful towards the teachings of the Church Magisterium on legitimate inculturation in the Church and very sensitive to the difficulties, challenges and complexities of inculturating the Good News in a multi-cultural world and Church, Fr. Ndiokwere courageously wades into the salient issues and thus makes it possible for all those concerned with and interested in inculturating the Good News in Africa to appreciate his more constructive suggestions.

At the heart of this most stimulating and challenging work are the prayer life of Africa's Catholics and their celebration of the Sacraments which Fr. Ndiokwere rightly sees as still requiring a more spirited re-tuning and re-structuring to resonate into the spirit-depths of the African Catholic to empower him to live a full Christianly human life.

The discussion on the Eucharist and Inculturation with the Zairean format of Holy Mass as special reference point is invoked by Fr. Ndiokwere as a necessary base for the emergence of a pan-African rite of Mass within the Mother Roman Rite of Holy Mass. While raising structural questions about the Holy Mass the entire discussion is very exciting and challenging. Some positive suggestions made could easily be accepted without too much debate or delay.

The stimulus of some sub-themes of the 1994 Synod on the Church in Africa is very evident in the discussions on Para-liturgical celebrations, festivities and title-taking among Africa's Catholics. Bishops, priests and all who preach and spread the Good News in special capacities will find in these and in the discussions and suggestions on "effective preaching" and "the means of social communication" very timely and relevant insights and helps for Africa's explosive inculturation situation.

This is a book to wrestle with for more productive thinking and practice in inculturation. Such agonistic and exciting wrestling with the book will be the best way to appreciate the tons of sweat that have gone into this work.

+ **Anthony J.V. Obinna**
Archbishop of Owerri

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (NRMs)

Preamble:

The impact of the new religious movements (NRMs) on Christianity in Africa is tremendous. Shying away from the realities of this phenomenon can only lead to disillusionment on the Part of Missionary Churches. Likewise, any superficial and hasty conclusions drawn about their successes will not resolve any problem, but will rather lead to more complications. Therefore, some responsible theological investigations have become imperative, and more so, at this stage of crucial discussion and debate concerning the successes and failures of missionary enterprise in Africa. The result of such investigations and evaluations will help towards the establishment of truly stable and flourishing Church in the Black Continent. Facing up to the challenges of the NRMs will ever remain the touchstone for the survival of the church of Christ in Africa.

In tracing the history of the decline and the eventual extinction of the ancient Christian Churches of the North and the Sub-Sahara Africa in the 15th/16th century, Church historians, students of religious studies and

sociologists point at various factors. In fact there is renewed interest in these studies today as it seems that those situations and circumstances which led to the disappearance of Christian churches from those regions of Africa have not changed. The situation has even grown worse today and both old and new factors contribute to the weakening of the Christian religion in those areas of the Black continent where Christianity seemed to have survived? There is cause for alarm.

Recapitulating the African Christian past, in his *Pastoral Letter* of 1990, Bishop Anthony G. Nwedo, C.S.Sp. Bishop Emeritus of Umuahia Diocese of Nigeria, observed, that in fact Christianity in Africa, generally speaking, is as old as Christianity itself. This is true if we realize the fact that when Christianity was root in England, France and Germany, Christianity was already and ancient religion in Africa

Is it not revealing to see that when St. Patrick, the Apostle, the Apostle of Ireland was born in 384 A.D., St Augustine of Hippo was already 31 years old. When St. Martin of Tours went to evangelize the French in 370 and St. Bruno was preaching in Germany, the African Church was already old.¹

The bishop also noted that during the first four centuries of the Christian era, the evangelization activities initiated by the Apostles in Jerusalem, intensified by St. Paul during his missionary journeys, and continued by their successors, went on unabated. By the end of the century what was then known of Africa, had to a large extent become Christian.

It was certain therefore that by the second century the Church was well established in Egypt. By this time too the whole of Roman North Africa, comprising Carthage, the capital, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Sudan was what could be referred to as flourishing mission territory. Similar progress was also registered in Ethiopia (Abyssinia) as the Church was by the 4th century strongly established.

It is certain that the Cross of Christ, in those early days, was not only known. It was also very much welcome, embraced and revered in what was then known as Africa. It should equally be noted that the Church in Africa at that period was by no means immature, poor, inactive or unproductive. In fact, it was very strong, local church, virile, fruitful and courageous.

While, indeed, African Christians can rejoice at the glorious past history of Christianity in mother Africa, it is sad to note that that era of light and progress did not last. Painfully, it has to be recalled that leaving the 5th century of the glories of the early Church in Africa, we come to the sad spectacle of ruins and its demise. The fruitful result of 500 years of evangelization was, following the trails of Moslem invasion and activities, during the next 500 years, completely obliterated. And by the 10th century the magnificent edifice of the Christian Church and culture in North Africa was totally destroyed. Through coercion and persuasion, through commerce and conquest and even through genocidal jihad, Christian Africa became Moslem, and the Cross of Christ, now execrated and tabooed, was replaced by the crescent and buried in the snow of disbelief.

The story is true and sad as the Islamic invasion of the rest of Africa gave a death blow to any possible resurgence of Christianity in the North, its survival and hope. And the next 500 years saw the rapid expansion of Islam, its rapid growth and consolidation. Its protagonists steadily traversed the length and breath of Africa, (from east to west, North and south), and generally using the same method they used against the Christian North Africa. By adapting their method to local conditions, they, as it were, stamped the crescent on the door post of their converts. It was evident that Christianity of the African North of the Sahara had been obliterated and the possibility of its survival in the Sub-Sahara never saw the light of the day. Africa had to wait for another good period of 500 years, the 19th and 20th centuries for the resurgence of Christianity and a more effective evangelization.

The process of Christianizing ‘the dark continent’ in the modern times has not been an easy task, although the results have been encouraging. The problems which the Established Christian religion faces now are somehow different from those of the early centuries. Although the menace of Islam has not reduced, the proliferation of many Christian sects of religious movements is a cause for alarm. This is the topic of this chapter.

From our discussion so far, it is clear that the “Moslem intrigue” in Africa is one of the factors which contributed to the decline of Christianity in Africa. The second factor is what we will call “Ecclesiastical Colonialism”.

Ecclesiastical Colonialism:

After the Berlin conference and the partition of Africa by the colonial powers of Europe, Christian missionary organizations followed the flags of their respective nations to the shores of Africa. Operating therefore under the tutelage of the colonial powers, Christian missions tried to establish their own national Churches. The acrimony created by such divisions has continued with the establishment of thousands of Churches in Africa, often referred to as **African Independent Churches (A. I. C.)**. As Africans saw it, it was not only the Europeans who had the divine mandate to “go and make disciples of all nations...” (Mt.28.19). Discipleship was the universal vocation of every Christian, but Africans are not stopping at founding Churches and religious movements. In the near-absurd extension of their idea of discipleship and mission, African prophets and self-proclaimed religious leaders found and run “Churches” of their grass-root tastes. It is not hard to find a Church run by man and wife or be a brother and sister. Three members are enough to direct one religious movement or the other. At Isiala-Mbano Local Government of Imo State, Nigeria, almost every family there has got its own church directed by a member of the family. There is no name under the sun one may not find. **“Christ”**, of course is the common appendage.

For the founder of the **NRMs**, dialogue or ecumenism does not mean anything. As far as they are concerned, ecumenism, e.g. is the White man’s new trick of gathering together what he scattered long time ago! Africans can found and direct their own Churches. It is not the prerogative of the European. If religion can make one great, it is not only the white man who can be great. **Ecclesiastical colonialism** has therefore influenced the rise and growth of the independent religious movements in Africa. So far, it seems that schism, struggle for leadership and control have weakened the fabric of the established Christian Churches. This time the source is from within its very rank and file. Internal squabbles have threatened its unity, and so made it vulnerable from outside.

Lack of Inculturation:

Lack of inculturation has also contributed to the weaknesses of the early Christian Church in Africa. As the early Christian missionaries remained ignorant of African languages and culture, it was almost impossible to plant a deep-rooted faith embedded in the traditions and mentality of the Africans. The Christian Church of the ancient North Africa was too

foreign and truly an European Church, founded and administered on the patterns of the Western Monasticism. Most of the bishops and priests were **Monks and Hermits**. Egypt was known to have harboured hundreds of these hermits scattered all over the Nubian Desert, and **St. Anthony of Egypt** was known as the **Father of the Western Monasticism**.

In these early days the North African Church was said to have possessed note-worthy centres of learning and enjoyed international recognition and universal fame. One of them was the School of Alexandria, which produced a great number of eminent scholars who were remarkable for their achievements. With nostalgia, modern African writers and historians recall African sons who were renowned saints, eminent doctors, erudite writers and numerous men of learning. In the field of **theology and philosophy**, Christian eloquence, treatises on spirituality and perfection, such names come to mind readily: **Clement of Alexandria, Saints Cyril and Origen**, all of whom were members of school of Alexandria. And coming to the other end of the North African coastline, such figures come to mind – **St. Cyprian, the bishop of Cartage, Tertulian, the first Christian writer to use the Latin rather than the Greek language**, and above all, the great giant, **Saint Augustine of Hippo**, who is described as **one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of eminent saint and scholars**.

While such achievements of the Church of North Africa, on the global level can be reckoned with, it has been feared that the ‘foreignness’ of its missionary strategies did estrange it from the local populace. It represented a Western Church, in a western garb, established in African soil. It was a static, desert Church, perhaps not meant for the local people. With its language, Greek and Latin (not spoken by the local people), it was certain that the North African Church was foreign to the majority of Africans. No wonder then that when the ferocious wind of Islamic crusade arrived, it swept the entire fabric. Surely the native did not rise in arms to defend what they never saw as their church!

Lack of inculturation will ever continue to constitute a stiff challenge to the growth and existence of the Church of Christ in Africa. This singular phenomenon has continued to undermine the evangelizing mission of the church and other Christian churches in the modern Africa. Unless, therefore, a serious attention is paid to the issue of inculturation in the African church, history may repeat itself. Perhaps what will be celebrated sometime will be: **Post Christianity in Africa!** Observes

Father Malachy Cullen, “When the Moslems invaded Africa it was the Churches that were incarnated in the Local Church that survived; the **Coptic, Ethiopian and Nubian**. The colonial Latin Church of Cartage vanished”. “The Moslem invasions”, the Father warns, are not over!²

THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (NRMs)

At last, it seems that the new Religious Movements in Africa have been widely recognized as autonomous movements, which can now be studied alongside other world religions including **Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Judaism, Islam**, and other minor and major religions (ancient and modern), of the Middle and far East countries.

The growth and expansion of the NRMs in Africa has attracted the attention of many scholars and authors, both within and outside African continent, especially, since their massive proselytizing by certain groups has won adherents in some European countries and America. It is therefore not surprising that the Pontifical Council for inter-religious dialogue in collaboration with the other offices of the Roman curia, has included the NRMs in its wide field of interests.³

Recognized as an off-shoot of Missionary Churches and bearing some features of the African Traditional Religion, the proliferation of the Religious Movements is seen on the whole to constitute pastoral challenges in the entire Christian Church in Africa. There could have been no better moment to review the **Future of Christianity in Africa**, re-examine the impact of the NRMs to date, take note of the pastoral challenges they pose to the Established Churches and the Catholic Church in particular. The convocation of the African synod was therefore a right decision on the right direction.

As we have pointed out above, the NRMs have won recognition, world wide, and are no more dismissed with a wave of hand as **neo-pagan, syncretistic** or **hand-clapping** movements. Today, departments of sociology, religion and church history in most African institutions of learning, including seminaries, offer courses in the African NRMs.

Giving an overview of the religious situation in Nigeria, in an article in the **New People magazine**, the one time secretary general of the Catholic secretariat of Nigeria, Monsignor Raphael Anasiudu did not fail to mention the challenges facing the church in Nigeria and Africa. The **First** is the increasing secularization and materialism. The **Second** is the threat of the Islamic fundamentalism. And the **Third**, and of course not

the least in importance is what the Monsignor referred to as **Mushrooming of Religious Sects and Independent Fundamentalist churches**. All these phenomena, he rightly observed, exist throughout Africa and are not peculiar in Nigeria, except, perhaps in their manifestations.⁴

In our earlier studies on Independent African Churches,⁵ detailed analysis of the emergence of these movements have been made. Factors contributing to their growth were also carefully outlined. But since those studies were done, new areas of interest have emerged as these movements continue to grow in number, strength and complexity.

As far back as 1967 it has been recognized that the rapid and overall growth of the membership of the NRMs had overtaken the expansion rate of the Catholic and Protestant churches in most African countries. And this fact alone makes the subject one of the major import for the future of Christianity of Africa.⁶ Today we can safely extend the expansion and growth of the NRMs to all parts of African countries, not yet completely overtaken by Islam.

As for figures or numbers of adherents of the NRMs on the continental level, those offered or suggested about ten years ago are no more reliable. The rate of their expansion in Africa can be likened to the rate of Islamization of Africa and the world at large. Africa is said to be only 13.11% Catholics. The Traditional Protestant church is projected to have about 8% membership, while the African Traditional Religion (ATR) has about 6% adherents.⁷ And if the Islamic religion take the largest chunk of about 40%, it follows that NRMs will have 32% fellowship. It is no exaggeration.

Typology of the New Religious Movements

The task of grouping or classification of the NRMs is a complex one, as they vary a great deal in origin, beliefs, size, and behavioral patterns and of tenets. Is it possible to group them as “Independent Religious Movements”, as opposed to the “Established” or “Traditional” churches? It is necessary to clarify the use of *Established or Traditional* here. The **Established Churches** are also referred to as ‘Mission Churches’, or ‘Mission-planted Churches, or Historical Churches or Orthodox Churches’. These are **Roman Catholic, (R.C.M.), The Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Qua Iboe Mission, Lutheran, Salvation Army, the Baptist, the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA)** etc.

The distinction is important since we have to identify those movements which are said to be **New** and find out **why**. The point to realize is that the Mission Churches view these religious movements with unusual amount of detest. Even to the lay Catholic, it is degrading to find his parish priest sitting together among the prophets of the **NRM**s or even among the protestant ministers. The followers of the **NRM**s are looked upon as imitators of Christianity, but not as authentic Christians. Much Missionary bias has therefore helped to form the attitude against the **NRM**s.

The problems still remain. Should these **NRM**s be even referred to as **Churches**, with the acronym (**A.I.C.**), African Independent Churches or (**O.I.C.**), Organization of Independent Churches? Many authors have all along called them African Independent Churches, and attempts have been made in the past to group them as Churches. **Such names as African United Church or United Church of Africa (U.C.A.), or All African Conference of Churches (A.A.C.C.) with headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.** Efforts have been made to identify them with Christ as the common ‘denominator’. Many authors argue that it is possible to group them together. The underlying principle is their belief in **One True God** and their acceptance of Christ as their redeemer. Most of the movements lay claim to Christ as the founder of their ‘Church’ – *Church of Christ Healing Mission, Celestial Church of Christ, Christ Apostolic Church etc* – all point to the same problem, namely whether to regard them as Churches or religious movements.

This system of classification is however being abandoned by many authors. The reason is that many new forms of the **NRM**s have emerged and these are strictly speaking, not organized as **Churches**. These new forms even outnumber those organized as Churches, with set rules, doctrines and worship.

The modern trend is the classification into categories identifiable mostly through their doctrines or ‘Theology’. Although some groups have no well-developed theologies, it is still possible to identify them through certain names and ‘ideologies’. This method of identification is more useful, simpler than classification according to behavioral patterns. Usually their ‘orthodoxy’ is judged by how closely they conform with to the Established churches and whether or not they would fit into the **ecumenical dialogue**. Truly, considering categories, such as the place of Christ, the role of the bible, sacrament, discipline, and the direction in

which the church is moving over a period of time, should help to place the various classes of the NRMs where they belong. But as **Dean S. Gilliland** observed, “*the need for doing some serious work that will lead to a theological evaluation of the Independent Churches in Africa is obvious. While it is unacceptable to label all these churches ‘Christian’, it is as wrong to ignore them or condemn them as non-Christians.*”⁸

There are however many splinter groups which have broken away from their mother groups. These may not be entirely different from the main group and therefore should be seen as **NRMs (New Religious Movements)**. Most of these splinter groups often referred to as ‘Sects’ by some authors may not have anything new to offer to our investigation, in terms of doctrines. They have broken away from their mother groups as a result of quarrels, disagreements over finances and leadership tussle. An aggrieved ‘minor’ prophet or church leader may decide to break away and found his own Church or movement where he can exercise full control over the affairs of the new faction or rebel group.

More universally acceptable nomenclature

It is necessary to adopt a universally acceptable system of classification or nomenclature of the religious phenomenon, a system of classification which is simple, fair and precise. It seems that the general designation **New Religious Movements**, is a more neutral way of referring to these groups than **sects**.⁹ They are **new** because they came to have their present form after the Second World War, and also because they present themselves as alternatives to the official institutional religions and the prevailing culture.

They are called *religious* because they profess to offer a vision of religious or sacred world, or they offer means to reach other objectives such as transcendental knowledge, spiritual illumination and self-realization, or they offer their members answers to fundamental questions.

Movement, (Instead of Church) is preferred, since these religious groups are born out of protests, reactions, frustrations provoked or unsubstantiated claims that the mother group has fallen out of favour with an aggrieved group on account of scandal or negligent of duty. The new group therefore, united in a common action sets out to achieve the desired goal or objectives or to re-establish the *status quo*. Sometimes their protests are registered in the new names the splinter groups adopt;

Reformed Apostolic Church of Christ, True Holy Chapel of Israel Church, The Remnant Church of the Redeemed.

At last we are able to adopt the new name **New Religious Movements (NRMs)** to designate all the Independent Religious Groups found today in the various parts of the African continent. We will now go to name the types of these movements, describe the features by which they can easily be recognized.

Types of the New Religious Movements (NRMs)

Authors do not agree on the number of the types of the NRMs with reference to the underlying systems of thought. But it is possible to synthesize and unify these systems to arrive at a manageable number. In this work we have found it convenient to distinguish three types of the NRMs, namely:

- The Healing Churches or Groups**
- The Thaumaturgical (magic groups)**
- Evangelical – Pentecostal Movements**

THE HEALING CHURCHES

In Africa, there is the tendency to run to God for succour in times of need and insecurity. People look to religion for answers and as protection against witchcraft, failure, suffering, sickness and death.¹⁰ Some of these NRMs seem to face up to these existential problems openly, and to promise instant remedies, especially physical and psychological healing.

But one may generally assume that most of the ailments successfully treated in this way are of psychosomatic nature. Psychical disturbances are usually ascribed to evil spirits and devils are cast out through exorcism. Evil spirits are generally regarded as responsible even for bodily aches and pains in the stomach, possibly caused by bad food or drinks. The types of sickness successfully treated by the prophet healers include evil spirit possession, gynecological problems, childless marriage problems, epileptic fits etc.¹¹

These healing centers or Churches are generally visited by Christians of every denomination, as well as by non-Christians and even Moslems. Some of them can in strict sense be called **Hospitals** or **Sick Bays**. Large open halls are set apart for sick people, who provide their

own beds and sleeping materials as well as other personal effects. Those who attend to their sick patients (friends and close relations) may sleep in the corridors or elsewhere. Kitchens, canteens, toilets, bathrooms etc are provided for both in -and out-patients. Out patients come on specific days and hours to consult the prophet healer. Often drugs, mainly herbs are taken home. Holy water, assorted types of oil and ashes are used in the healing process.

As we can see in the first group of the NRMs, the emphasis is on healing – both physical and psychological. But there is equally stress on **faith**. Absolute resignation to God’s will is often demanded. The view is that God heals sicknesses, but he could not be forced to. Ailments which linger on for long may be attributed to lack of faith on the part of the sufferer.

In the **Christ Faith Church**, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, sickness and disease are results of sin and guilt. The sick person is one who has gone contrary to the laws of God. The true faithful servant of God is never sick. Those who are sick are therefore healed through prayers and faith. Faith is an essential ingredient in the healing mission.¹² In the **Way of Salvation Church of Jesus Christ**, healing is performed on a wide scale. Prophet Okon Akpan Udo Etuk, the founder of the healing church claims that he could cure diseases, organic and inorganic. According to this prophet-healer, at his Church or healing center, the blind see, the lame walk, the paralyzed are made whole, the dead are restored to life, the barren are made fruitful ... There is no type of ailment the prophet does not claim to cure. In this Church, healings are performed during prayer meetings held daily. Prayers are offered for the sick as directed by God through visions. The prophet uses healing rod, holy water, oil and crucifix.¹³

As Father Vincent Nyoyoko observes in this investigation, all the healing churches he described have their objective as healing. But, “whatever may be their intentions and reasons for undertaking this healing mission, it is an important feature of Christianity in Annang province of Nigeria, and in Africa at large”.¹⁴

“An important feature of Christianity in Africa”, that is the phenomenon which should be thoroughly examined. Many sick Africans, especially those who cannot afford the exorbitant conventional hospital bills, visit these healing Churches. Some go back to their main Church denominations after being cured or after finding satisfactory answers to

their problems. Others may decide to join the new Church which they support both morally and financially.

Orthodox healing centers

These days some ‘Orthodox’ healing centers and Prayer Houses are developing alongside the prophet-healing centers of the NRMs. These healing centres, on which we focus our attention later in this work, are run by Catholic priests and devout lay persons. Here accommodation is provided for patients. For out-patients and other visitors, consultations are held by the “**Man of God**” on specific days. It is presumed that fees are not charged for services rendered, but those who are healed or whose problems are solved are expected to donate generously in support and maintenance of the center or the healing ministry. At some of these healing centres run by Catholic Priests, healing masses are celebrated regularly and clients whose prayers have been answered gives ‘testimonies’ to such events.

We refer to those healing centers as **Orthodox** because Catholics may visit them without any hindrance. These centers are thought to be safer for Catholics. Some of the well known orthodox healing centers include the following:

The famous Catholic prayer ministry of the Holy Spirit at Elele, Nigeria, run by Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Edeh, C.S.Sp. St. Anthony’s Healing ministry, run by Rev. Fr. C. Usungurua, Afaha Obong, diocese of Ikot Ekpene Nigeria; Jesus is Love and Power Catholic healing ministry, directed by Father S.E.U. Osigweh at St. Augustine’s Catholic Church Ikorodu, Archdiocese of Lagos, Nigeria ;The Catholic Prayer ministry of the Healing Power of God, directed by Father Osilama Obozuwa, Auchu, diocese of Benin, Nigeria End of Time Overcomers Revivalist ministries, run by Rev. Father Murumba Jean Oguogho, diocese of Benin; Ugwu Nso Healing ministry and pastoral center, Eke, diocese of Enugu run by Rev. Fr. Ugonna Igboaja.

We have of course the famous healing ministry at the Holy Spirit Parish, Onitsha run by **Rev. Fr. Godwin Ikeobi**, who claims to be the first priest in Nigeria, ever to be fully involved in this ministry of healing since

1973. We have still a flourishing healing center called **Ave Maria Centre**, run by a devout Catholic woman addressed as **Sister Mary (Oguekemma)** at **Urualla in the Catholic Diocese of Orlu, Nigeria**. **Rev. Fr. Monfort Okaa**, also directs the **Ugwu Nso Prayer/Healing Centre at Orlu town**. **Rev. Fr. Patrick Kanayo Madu** directs another center at Amike, Orlu known as **Friends of Jesus Prayer/Healing Centre**. There are many others we may not have come across or that are gradually taking shape.

THAUMATURGICAL (MAGICAL) MOVEMENTS

The word **thaumaturgical** comes from the Greek word ‘thaumaturgus’; ‘thauma’ – miracle, ‘ergon’ – work. In this group we find elements that derive from humanistic, pagan, occult or Gnostic backgrounds. Some authors prefer to call these movements, ‘**New Magical Movements**’. Here there is a meeting point between the old and new. To a large extent the prophet healer of the NRMs has come to replace the old pagan traditional diviner and fortune teller, like the traditional diviner, he smells out witches which have cast spells on persons, recommends remedies for effective control of diabolical forces. In most cases the neo-diviner’s remedies for problems and sicknesses represent an exact copy of those of the traditional diviners and these adequately serve his ever superstitious clients.

The religious movements of this type are entirely syncretistic in form, borrowing from Christianity, traditional religion, occultism and from Oriental religion. Emphasis is placed on wonder-working, magical manifestations, spirit mediumship, interpretation of dreams, protection against witchcraft, assurance in wide range of mundane enterprises.

Also referred to as **Sandwich religious movements**, with pagan filling and Christian outward form, they result from missionary activities which fail to present the gospel message in terms that speak to the real anxieties and questions of a people in their cultural milieu.¹⁵ Thus what appears as Christian is actually a covering like the outer part of a sandwich for the indigenous mythology, which remains in tact as the content of the religion. Christianity thus provides new forms of expressing the indigenous mythology. The ‘holy’ pastor of the Sabbath

healing mission, Ntueke, Ideato Local Government, Imo State, Nigeria stated categorically that the ‘god we worship is not the same God of the Christians’. He is in short a traditional diviner, a specialist in occultism and priest of the water spirit. He uses Christian sacramentals, prayers etc, as well as the diviner’s incantations and talisman. He prepares both the offensive and defensive bad medicine for his clients. Certainly the cross which he plants at the hills, in the caves, and at river banks, and streams are unfortunately not Christian symbols.

Mammy water (water spirit) homes

In this class of occult religious movements are mammy water homes or ‘Oghu Mmiri’ movement. Here all kinds of occult practice and divination take place. Where the well recognized healing homes may be involved in compounding **protective medicine** and **amulets**, these thaumaturgical homes of mammy water types engage in the preparation of **offensive medicine**, selling of talisman, concoctions for various occult practices. These concoctions usually stored in bottles and containers of various sizes and shapes are sold to clients at very exorbitant prices. Such mixtures (some of them seized and deposited at the orthodox healing centers), contain frightening figures and objects – crucifixes of various sizes and shapes, male and female counterparts, clothed or stark naked, often nailed on both sides of the piece of the wood – male on one side, and female on the other. One will find candles of different sizes, shapes and colours, and these form parts of the concoctions. In these mixtures are also needles and hooks of various sizes, human and animal hairs, fingernails etc. Then a heavy or light liquid is poured into the container or bottle, containing already prepared items and objects. They are labeled and well cocked.

There are many mammy water homes in Nigeria and normally sign boards with drawings of a beautiful woman, holding a sacred python would round her neck indicates that the mammy water priest or priestess lives there for consultation. Thousands of young and unmarried ladies are said to be possessed by the water spirit. The ailment can be contagious! A story was told about an incident of mammy water scare in one girls’ secondary school in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State Nigeria. The school was deserted by the girls for over four days because a mammy water prophetess warned that the water spirit had invaded the school. The entire school, according to this prophecy faced imminent danger, unless

something was done'. In other words, the water spirit needed to be pacified. The girls deserted the school for days and trooped to one healing center directed by a Catholic priest for a solution to their problems.

Mammy Water has become a household word among healers and exorcists of the New Religious Movements in Africa. She is also known as Mermaid, the Queen of the Sea, 'Nwanyi isi ajata', (woman with long unkempt hair). Directors of healing centers in Africa claim to be waging war against this "diabolical" force which many believe perpetrates evil and untold hardship on its victims. There are many Mammy Water healing homes established by the **African traditional** religionists and witch doctors.

About 500 million people in the world today are said to be mentally ill. It is noted that the majority of these people live in the countries of the Third World, particularly in Africa, where mental illness is increasing without the means available to treat them; most of the victims receive 'spiritual rehabilitation in the numerous healing centers – orthodox and unorthodox healing homes'. Healers practice exorcism. Healers always claim that most of their victims are possessed by Mammy Water. A young mother once lightly chained to prevent her from running away from healing center, was said to be possessed by the water spirit. She told a lot of stories about her ordeals with the water spirits.

Many young lunatics are in-mates of the healing homes. They receive various types of treatment including drugs and Holy Water. They wear rings, scapulars and rosaries on their fingers and around their necks. Some victims of evil spirit possession are tied to trees or they are chained. They are often given thorough beating and suffer untold torture under rain and sun.

Mammy Water Possession or phenomenon is regarded by many Nigerians, including the Catholic priest-healers as a reality. Some narrate long stories of their encounters with the water spirit and organize what they call *deliverance sessions* for their clients. One Catholic priest, from the diocese of Orlu, Rev. Father Luke Odinkemelu, has written two pamphlets in what he calls *The Problems of Mammy Water (Mammy Water in the society)* a Hand book for successful deliverance ministry. The first volume which appeared in 1986 treated **Mammy Water in the Society** and the second volume which appeared in 1988 is on **The Problems of Mammy Water**.

The problems of mammy water, Luke Mary Odinkemelu

For Father Odinkemelu the reality of mammy water is beyond any argument – be it theological or philosophical. It is an evil that must be confronted and destroyed on account of innumerable atrocities it perpetrates in society. He writes in the preface to his book, vol. 2:

Mammy water is a household name in almost every part of Southern Nigeria. She is a female deity associated with rivers and wickedness. She has many followers and worshippers. Many sicknesses and crises are attributed to her. She has a male counterpart Merman, believed to be more dangerous and wicked, living in particular streams and rivers. The most stubborn and most wicked ones are said to live under oceans and seas, operating on land from there. Their victims are more difficult to be delivered.

Denying the existence of water spirits, for Father Luke is a mere foolery. Hear him:

The victims of mammy water are so numerous in the society that it is difficult for me in particular to deny her existence. Hundreds of documents submitted by the victims in my healing and deliverance ministry show common signs, symptoms and attacks. Deliverances are always reported by the victims after submitting to deliverance prayers.

Some topics treated by Father Odinkemelu in his book include:

Do spirits live under water?
Face to face with the spirit of the dead;
Deliverance from evil spirits;
Some relevant official deliverance prayers.

Father Luke Odinkemelu is not alone in the battle with the water spirits. Other priest-healers during the deliverance ministry assure their clients that the water spirits, as well as the other malignant spirits have been overpowered and chained. They would do no harm. Holy water and

prayers are antidotes against the power of the evil spirits. Some pertinent prayers and psalms are recommended. Some of these are the **Rosary, Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, psalms 23, 33, 35, 41, 42, 51, 69, 90 and 91.**

Many young girls flock both the orthodox and unorthodox healing centers and prayer houses to be delivered of the possessing water spirits. It is believed that their misfortune in life – inability to get a suitable husband or get pregnant after marriage has been caused by the water spirits. These water spirits, like witches, are believed to enter the bodies of victims and block the reproductive systems. In most cases of the so-called **diabolical attacks**, the **queen of the sea** is believed to have a hand. She sends her agents, damned dead people to lay snares to human beings. She applies all types of tricks to trap its victims and is believed to be powerful – ruling in both land and sea. The activities of water spirits are closely related to those of **Ogbanje** or **Abiku**, the spirit of re-incarnation.

The **NRMs** (The Healing and Pentecostal Groups) condemn the activities of the mammy water priests. Whether the leaders accept the realities of the mammy water phenomenon or not, one fact is clear; it is part of the machinations of the devil and its agents. The **fetish priests in pastor's garb**, for Born Again Churches, are there to deceive people. They are working for the devil. If Christians are being worried by any diabolical powers, mammy water, ogbanje, witches etc, they should **not** go to fetish priests for deliverance. There is an accredited **Man of God** who has the “**divine mandate**” to deal with these diabolical powers of forces. This is what the Christian orthodox healers seem to be telling the harassed victims of devilish powers.

Christians who consult pagan diviners, fortune-tellers, crude herbalist, pagan exorcists and mammy water priests are, therefore condemned in strong terms. Victims of diabolical possession are urged to go to the “authentic” and “approved” healing centers or attend healing crusades for “complete deliverance” from the evil one.

From all indications, there are ample evidence that the **NRMs** in this category (magical group), resemble the old traditional fetish religion; in short they are a continuation of the work of the traditional shrine. A typical example is the **Christ Yoga Church** in Accra, Ghana which advertises occult aids;

The great talisman of King Solomon, made of gold and silver mixed; for all that is gold, proof against all evil and persecutions. Worn everyday, will help you in troubles, make new friends, attract the love of people, more cash, successful marriage, good health and wealth.

Other such movements, in some regards, are in their pre-occupation, continuation of other traditional pagan cults;

Aids are sought for protection against witchcraft and sorcery, particularly by barren woman, or those whose children were continually sick or dying, by impotent men, by anyone sick of an apparently incurable disease, by those who had any reason to fear economic failure, or failures in examinations, all of which misfortune, as well as most others, are ascribed to the evil intensions of others.¹⁶

The springing up, like a crop of mushrooms of these new shrines, as M.J. Field points out, cannot be dissociated from the search for security among Africans. They are all designed to give supernatural protection and to help people, increasingly preoccupied with a sense of insecurity. Among the pilgrim supplicant seen at these shrines are the mentally ill. Some are deluded, hallucinated, some in morbid fear while others are in exaggerated anxiety states.¹⁷

SABBATHARIAN MOVEMENT

Top in the list of these neo-pagan religious movements is the **Sabbatharian Sect** which has continued to flower right from early 70s to the present day. In white flowing gowns, their principal **credo** is belief and acceptance of the Jewish Sabbath observances. But there is more to that Sabbath healing Churches have continued to spring up in every nook and cranny of Igbo speaking areas of Nigeria. Here massive healing activities are conducted and conducted and occult practices thrive with reckless abandon.

The Holy Sabbath Healing Church at Ezinifite in Anambra state of Nigeria is an extraordinary mixture of traditional religious practices, Jewish traditions and Christianity. The poor state of what looked like a

chapel or prayer house tells much about the centre. In short the entire surrounding can easily be taken for a juju shrine and the *confession* of a deranged Catholic girl, about 20 years old, said to be possessed by the water spirit, in fact summarizes the impression of a critical observer and visitor at the centre. Now listen to the girl, who had been chained to a dwarf tree on the compound, beaten by sun and rain. Shouting, kicking, crying and pouring abuses on the old pastor – healer. She went on:

You say you are a holy prophet of God when you do all sorts of evil and strange things here. You keep up to eight women you call your wives. You pray to devils and evil spirits here and the same time call the name of Jehovah. You concoct offensive poison and give to people and call it medicine. You go to the hills in the night and consult devils. You are a sinner, a devil, a wizard, a fetish diviner. Away with you, you agent of the devil, you evil man. If you do not untie me here, the true God I worship, Jesus will punish you!

The ‘holy’ pastor of the Sabbath Church may be ordering the evil spirit in the young girl to come out of her. Like Christ, it was his duty to cast out devils, and evil spirits disturbing, tormenting the girl. But we remember that in the gospel the evil spirit recognized Christ for what he was “The Holy One of God!” Nothing can be far from the truth, our Sabbath pastor-healer may be an agent of another power, not Christ. There is a high degree of hypocrisy, imitations, deceit and magic in the Sabbatharian sect. Even though the ministry is in the name of Christ, it is simply a veneer of occult practices.

Another group of the new breed of the Sabbatharian sect is certainly anti-Christian and should be lumped together with the revivalist forms such as **Godianism, Ogboni Fraternity** and other secret cults. These are built upon some eccentric ‘messianic’ figures, who command wealth and influence. These include **Godian Onyioha**, founder of the Godian Religion or **Godianism: Hyde Onuaguluchi of God’s Sabbath Mission**. Other such figures are **Obu Olumba** or **O.O. Olumba**, leader of **The Brotherhood of The Cross and Star** and **Edidem Edidem Bassey**. There is nothing Christian about their movements and they can be called ‘false prophets’. These thaumaturgical end neo-pagan religious movements which S. Gilliland chose to call **indigenous – eclectic**

types,¹⁸ resemble Church movement, but in fact they have retained so many features of the traditional religion. Their claim to be Christian is dubious. They are described as **indigenous**, but they conform in every high degree to the rituals, formulas and mannerisms of the local traditional customs. Their leaders have a peripheral idea of what the true church can be and these leaders are nothing less than Shamans and diviners. Crosses, bibles, and other Christian ornaments are visible, but these are paraphernalia of the healing or divining art.

Besides the almost uncritical use of African charms and symbols these churches also employ an assortment of worship articles that are associated with Catholicism and various Protestant denominations. There are vestments of one group, the hymn book of another, various uses of the crucifix, along with dances and other emotionalism of ancestral religion. Very little emphasis is placed on the bible as a code of conduct and almost no attention is given to the moral and ethical implications of Christianity.¹⁹

In this group of religious movements, we are sure all mammy water homes are included as well as all Sabbath healing homes. Much of the **Aladura Church Movement** is believed to have veered off into neopaganism. Some of their curious worship forms and rituals bear simple old pagan colours and can even be branded demonic by orthodox Christians. Some of their pastors or prophets exercise dual leadership function in both traditional religion and in the new Churches. Some branches or groups of the **Celestial Church of Christ (CCC)**, though Pentecostal in outlook or features, share much in common with the thaumaturgical groups. The Celestial Church of Christ is an esoteric type, teaching that the Church was organized in and given from heaven. It claims to have no connection with any other known church, yet it borrows from various Christian traditions. Local Churches are built close to rivers or flowing streams and water is used abundantly along with fruits of various kinds in the special healing rituals for which the church is well known. The Celestial Church of Christ is one of the fastest – growing Churches in Nigeria and is said to be spreading to other Anglophone countries along Africa's West Coast.

THE EVANGELICAL/PENTECOSTAL GROUP

This is by far the largest group of the **NRMs**, comprising both the so-called indigenous and foreign influenced – American and European types. They are generally of protestant origin and some of them can already be identified by their aggressive proselytism and attack on the Catholic Church, its institutions and doctrines. Some have expansionist programme and their use of mass media in a way that looks like commercialization of religion provokes diverse reactions from both the orthodox Christian bodies and non-believers.

Often mass healing crusades and miracle witnessing rallies are advertised in the mass media, as evangelists and preachers of both national and international repute are invited to grace the rallies. Thousands of people attend such rallies, after which some claim they have been physically and spiritually regenerated or born again. It is claimed that at these rallies, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, broken families find solutions to their problems and enemies are reconciled. There is no type of ‘miracle’ the organizers of these crusades do not claim that take place there.

Many Christians respond to the appeals and attend these rallies because they find in them answers to their thirst for scripture reading, for singing and dancing, emotional satisfaction and their need for concrete and clear answers. The dynamism of their missionary drive, the evangelistic responsibilities entrusted to their members and new followers often baffle our look-warn Catholics and other Christians of the Established Churches.

In this class of the NRMs (Evangelical/Pentecostal), we find both groups referred to as *Primary Evangelicals* – those which arose from *western Missionary Movement* – Pentecostal/Charismatic movements and those founded by indigenes – *Secondary Evangelicals*. In this secondary evangelical group we find, e.g. **The Evangelical Church of West African, (ECWA), Faith Tabernacle, AME – Zion, Assemblies of God** and various other groups of the ‘Apostolic Church’.

The term **Primary** suggests that these Churches have had connections with European and American organizations which give rise to African movements, and they still have relationships with their overseas leaders. The leader of the **Church of God Mission** of Benin City, Nigeria, is **Archbishop Benson Idahosa**. Although a distinct

African movement, the Church of God Mission (CGM) has links with the US – based PTL Network. Their trust and means of evangelism include the use of mass media, magazines, pamphlets and radio broadcasts.

The **Secondary Evangelical Group** may be described as indigenous Pentecostal, but are always the same with its **Primary Group** in teaching and practice. The difference is that the contextual African features are more highly developed. This group will include many of the various **Aladura Churches** of West Africa. They include the **Christ Apostolic Church, Cherubim and Seraphim and Zion Churches**. Some of these indigenous groups have branches overseas, in Great Britain and the Caribbean's.

Pentecostals

It may be necessary to draw a little distinction between the Pentecostals proper and the Evangelicals. The **Pentecostals** form a large group and differ a bit from the **Evangelicals** as the former stresses the holiness of life ethic, the mandate to mission as well as the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, while the latter lays stress on preaching and conversion.

The Pentecostal movement drew inspiration from many overseas groups, notably the American Pentecostalism. Within the mission Churches – Catholic and Protestant denominations, they are called **Charismatic**. Within the Catholic Church a big problem has since developed between the two groups of charismatic movements, namely those which operate within the Catholic Church and those who disagree with some Catholic doctrines and in fact challenge some of the Catholic beliefs and practice. So far however, within the Catholic Church, Catholic charismatic renewal movement has been contained since it operates under the guiding eyes of the bishops and priests.

Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement of Nigeria²⁰

The distorting influence of the protestant brand of the Pentecostalism on the Nigeria scene which has drawn heavily its inspiration from the **Born Again** phenomenon within the Scripture Union (SU) has led to the intervention of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (**CBCN**). The conference has issued *Guidelines for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement of Nigeria*. The Booklet published in 1991 contains directives under which the movement will be allowed to operate within the Catholic

Church in Nigeria. It states vividly also the aims and objectives of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, one of the which is, *to deepen the spiritual life of the individual through conversion commitment to Jesus Christ, daily prayers and the reading of the Scriptures and participating deeply in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church*.²¹

As far as the bishops are concerned the “Catholicity” or “Catholicness” of the movement within the Catholic Church cannot be compromised and it seems that with the publication of these guidelines this problem has been finally settled.

If the Charismatic movement is a genuine movement within the Church, such as the missionary movement, it shall be expected to follow a recognizable course, i.e. to rise, to stimulate, and then to settle back into main stream of Catholicism. If it is not truly and genuinely of the Holy Spirit, it breaks off, splinters and fragments.²²

The intervention of the bishop’s conference was necessary because some members were becoming stubborn and extravagant in their application of the charismatic gifts, and especially those **glossolalia**, or speaking in tongues, visions, dreams and the like phenomena. Some who claim that they have been *born again* castigate Christians and even priests as ‘unclean’ and devoid of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some have even attacked some doctrines of the Catholic Church on the Sacraments, especially on the sacrament of penance or confession. For others, **Mary**, the Mother of Christ has no place in their movement.

Their emotional exuberance, especially during prayer meetings, causes uproar in the parishes, and protests from other Catholics and non-Catholics. It was hard time for the Catholic authorities in Nigeria, as parish priest, in anger, closed down charismatic groups in their parishes and banned such stubborn members from the sacraments. Up till today, it is still hard for some priests to recognize and encourage *Charismatism*, meaning certain features for which this group is known – speaking in tongues, mass hysteria and other frivolous antics exhibited by charismatics at prayer meetings.

The bishops have therefore called for obedience and discipline within the movement and condemned pride, arrogance, disobedience, observing that charisms are for the general growth and good of the

Church, and not for self-aggrandizement and show. But whatever the case may be, it seems all the upheavals which set in at that point in the development of the movement have been contained and now under the watchful eye of the bishops and their representatives, directors and of course parish priests. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement in Nigeria operates in a more peaceful atmosphere in almost every parish in Nigeria.

But to remain in the Catholic faith, to function within the ambient of the Catholic discipline, it is of utmost importance that all Catholics and members of the Catholic charismatic Renewal Movement should take note of the following:

The authentic Catholic Charismatic Renewal believer, upholds, practices and defends all that the Church teaches concerning faith and morals. This includes, the Church's teaching on the Blessed Trinity, the divine institutions of the Church, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the seven sacraments, and on the angels and saints. Furthermore the renewal accepts, like all good and loyal Catholics, associations, societies and movements, the Magisterium or the teaching authority of the Church on Scripture and Tradition and all the other truths of faith as proposed and expounded by the Church.²³

Itinerant evangelist groups

Among the Evangelist group of the NRMs are those that devote much of their time to gospel evangelism. They include **The Jehovah's Witness group, The Assemblies of God, The End Time Gospel Crusaders** and many other itinerant groups. These are made up of men and women members, young and old who are always ready to abandon their work and trade and family commitments to bring gospel or biblical message to people of all walks of life. Often seen in small groups, armed with portfolios or hand bags, containing the holy bible and religious leaflets and booklets. The itinerant gospel teachers and preachers, roam about towns and villages, confronting people of every faith and religion, at street corners, road junctions and even in farms, schools and offices to force their new doctrines down the throat of their unwilling audience. They are never deterred by insults or indifferent attitude of the passers-

by. And those who care to listen to them are subjected to a heavy barrage of psychological pressure.

On a higher level evangelical groups organize international religious and soul-winning crusades in which renowned preachers from the United States, Switzerland, Germany and Austria are invited to preach. The tragic religious riot which erupted mid September 1991 in Kano was kindled by the presence of the German born, itinerant evangelist and born-again Christian, Bonnke.

Christian Evangelical Crusaders clash with Moslem Fundamentalists in Kano, Nigeria; Death Toll 500.

That was the headline of a Newspaper report. As the story went, **Reinhard Bonnke**, the German Christian Evangelist whose group was based in Ikeja, Lagos was in town and precisely in the predominantly Moslem city of Kano. So were hundreds of faithful followers who trooped into the ancient city from the many States of the federation to hear the word of God. The Kano branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (**CAN**), organizers of the evangelical crusade had mounted sustained campaign to get an attendance that will surpass the **500,000** recorded in Kaduna in 1990, when the renowned evangelist Bonnke stormed that city.

It was not to be this time. Instead of the fire of the Holy Spirit, it was fire of death and destruction that swept through the city. As it was reported, it was a police jet that saved Bonnke together with the other evangelists and co-workers, most of whom were Americans. Just as hundreds of people were killed (some reports said over **500**), so also were property worth millions of naira were destroyed in the bonfire that kept the city of Kano enveloped in thick smoke for days. The Islamic fundamentalists would not tolerate Christian crusade in Kano which they claimed was a predominantly Moslem city.²⁴

Radical Evangelist Groups of the NRMs: Militant Christian Evangelists

Among the NRMs of the Pentecostal – evangelical group, there is this fundamentalist and radical group that is always ready to confront its enemies, Moslems and non-Moslems, pitch battles, kill and die in the name of Christ as Moslems will die for Allah. As in the story of Bonnke

and his group above, the crusaders and their Christian followers are always much more daring and ever ready to confront Moslem fundamentalists in whatever terms.

In some University campuses and higher institution of learning in Nigeria, this radical wing of Christian evangelists is strong. They dare to convert Moslems to Christianity and see them as **infidels** that must **come over to Christ**, damn the consequences! For them it is either *Jesus or nothing*. While for Moslems in Nigeria, the slogan is *Islam for all*, for our Christian militant evangelists, the slogan is *Jesus for all by the year 2000!* The young Christian evangelists oppose the Moslem counterparts and assert the superiority of Christian religion over the Islamic faith in Allah.

Religious riots and major scuffles between Christian evangelists and young Moslem fundamentalists and hooligans are regular occurrence in some cities of Northern Nigeria. Many Christians of Catholic and Protestant denominations, express suppressed joy at this development. They feel that the orthodox Christian religion has never taken militant stance before the Moslem fundamentalism. Moslem fundamentalists at the least provocation go on rampage, killing and maiming Christians as well as other non-Moslems, burning Churches and building belonging to Christians. “The era of turning the other cheek” to the aggressor seems to be passing away, some Christians think.

Jesus people evangelists

Among the evangelical groups of the NRMs, we have an important class or group we like to refer to as **Jesus People** because of their attachment to **JESUS** and the type of Christian evangelism they stand for. As far as this group is concerned, only those who accept Jesus as saviour matter. Those who profess unshakable faith in Jesus have got all because the fruits of Jesus’ sacrifice belong to believers, so the plight of non-believers is of no importance to Jesus People. If non-believers choose to remain in the dark, that is their business. The Christians’ duty to deprived unbelievers is merely to convert them so that they will prosper in Jesus name.

Jesus People spread their Gospel message through Christian hymns, but they also produce souvenirs and religious articles with various inscriptions, depicting the various redeeming acts of Jesus. One finds these articles in forms of badges, almanacs, posters, car stickers etc. Some of these stickers are placed at door posts and at various corners of

living rooms and offices. Some T-shirts and head-ties are worn by the people. Sellers of such articles and souvenirs make it a field day during **Jesus people rallies**, healing crusades and conventions. Buyer–Christians and non-Christians believe in the thaumaturgical powers and effects or actions of these emblems or sacramentals. Some believe that faith in these articles can have some healing effects; hence some, like head-ties and T-shirts are worn regularly. Some of these articles proclaiming the superiority of Christ over Satan are believed to chase away evil spirits and diabolical powers and forces and thus protect users from harm. These articles have become **amulets** in the hands of these Christians, and amulets are by the way cherished by Africans in general. Some of the inscriptions read;

**Thank God, I have Jesus at last;
 Relax, my soul, Jesus is in control;
 My case is different, I am born again;
 Jesus is the answer;
 I am a terror to Satan, I have Jesus;
 Jesus is my life
 Praise the Lord, no matter your condition;
 Jesus is real;
 The blood of Jesus covers me;
 Wise men still seek Jesus;
 Fall in love with Jesus;
 You are in chains; Jesus can set you free;
 Man can't help you, but Jesus can;
 Jesus is my rock, my provider;
 Life without Jesus leads to hell fire;
 Who is your master, Jesus or Satan?
 Beware; Jesus is on my side;
 Don't give up; your saviour is on the way
 I belong to Jesus, what about you?
 Jesus is the head of this house.**

In these and so many other types of **Jesus Ejaculatory Prayers**, the saving effects of Jesus action are depicted. It leaves no one in doubt that Jesus the Christ is the redeemer and all should trust in his saving acts. The devil has been overthrown and Christians have been set free.

For the **Jesus People** and **triumphalists**, Christ has saved mankind and all contradictions and dichotomies have disappeared. As in the American **Jesus Revolution** of the early 1970s this brand of **Jesus People** movement has spread throughout Africa, not least in Nigeria, since 1980s. According to them, God met all needs of the human race in the suffering and death of Christ and every Christian should now share in the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty. A believer has therefore a right to the blessings of good health and wealth won by Christ, and he or she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith in Jesus.

Deliverance ministry singers

Another group of “**Jesus People**”, who are called **Deliverance Ministry Singers**, spread their brand of gospel message through Christian hymns and religious theatrical performances. Some of their popular hymns registered on discs and cassettes are sold in many places and are patronized by Christians of various denominations. Their hymns and songs are played in music shops, market places and busy streets adapted from popular biblical texts which are usually given fundamentalist interpretations, these hymns and songs serve their evangelical and didactic purposes. Often other religious groups, including Catholics, indiscriminately copy and sing the hymns in their own Churches and religious gatherings and festivals.

The doctrines which these gospel singers propound show their pattern of life and attitude towards other Christian bodies. They can also be detected from their well composed hymns. Here are some of them:

Jesus tere m mmanu
Jesus tere m mmanu
Were ike ya nye m
Si m gawara ya ozi
Jesus by onye nche m!

Jesus has anointed me
Jesus has anointed me
Has given me His power
And sent me out to preach
Jesus is my shepherd!

Here these evangelist singers trace the origin of their divine call to proclaim the good news of salvation of their master and Lord, Jesus. No one has any right, therefore to stop them like their master Jesus in the gospel, no one has any right to question their authority to preach; **“By what authority are you doing all these things and who gave you the authority?”** (Mt. 21:23) In another popular hymn, adapted from the parable of the prodigal son, the evangelist singers exhort all sinners to repent now, sin no more, that nothing worse befall you (Jn. 5:14).

**I will arise and go to my father,
I will arise and go to my father,
And I will say to Him, Father I have sinned,
Father I have sinned
Father I have sinned ... (Lk. 15:18)**

In the above hymn they exhort sinners to repent or face the consequences of God’s vengeance; they see the end of the world messed up in sin approaching speedily. They thus proclaim **dies irae, dies illa... that day of wrath, that day of terror when the Lord will judge the living and the dead and destroy the world by fire.** In this case this group of **Jesus People** can be described as *Millennial sect*, stressing the imminent Second Coming of Christ and eventual reversal of fortune of the various social and economic groups in our sinful world.

Gospel singers, a puritanical sect?

Also judging from their vocal stance on certain moral issues of religious practices, this group can also be described as *Puritanical Sect*. Their uncompromising stand on matters of sex and morals is a clear example. In one of their hymns they leave no one in doubt about the faith of those who indulge in immoral acts:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom? Do not be deceived, neither the immoral, nor idolaters nor the adulterous nor homosexuals not thieves, not the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers not robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Unlike some other religious bodies that are often silent on these moral issues, these brands of Jesus People are very vocal. In songs and street preaching, including early morning sermons, they condemn all sorts of societal evils and malpractices and prescribe divine punishment for those who refuse to abandon their sinful ways.

Their open and unequivocal condemnation of sex and promiscuity can be disturbing and can often leave passer-by abashed, as our evangelists single out **sexism** in particular as one of the worst crimes and moral offences in the world today. This evil, they insist leads all offenders to hell fire. The Gospel singers must have been encouraged in their crusade against sexism in the modern world. One popular record song is titled *Abomination of Desolation in the Holy of Hollies – House of God*: Like the true prophets of the old, they have no good word for the impostor in the house of the Lord. Hear them again:

Come to the holy of hollies, the house of God, our Churches and quarters and behold what happens there, abomination of desolation! Approach, and see behold what crimes that are perpetrated in those places; some are full of hatred for others, sow seeds of discord. Some poison their fellow Christians, while others indulge in immoral acts; but watch them, watch these people, the very Christians who profess faith in Christ. Even their leaders take part in these criminal offences. What am I seeing! Look, how impostors, hirelings, criminals, dubious and evil fellows have taken positions in the house of God, in the holy of hollies and desecrate the very house of God they are placed in charge of!

References are made in the scriptures as these impostors are condemned in strong terms: “So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, (let the reader understand) Mt. 24:15. Another reference to Ezekiel 22:26ff is well brought out in the hymn:

Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things: they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they

taught the difference between the clean and the unclean and they have disregarded my Sabbaths so that I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst of her like wolves, tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed for them with whitewash, seeing false vision and divining lies for them. The people of the land have practiced extortion and have committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and the needy and have extorted from the sojourner without redress.

The gospel singers have devastating words for priests and leader of the various Churches and Christians who fail to live up to expectation. Equally condemned are members of the Church committees and elders of the various Church denominations, who close their eyes to these evils perpetrated in God's house. Christians are finally admonished to change their bad ways and turn to Christ who saves. Repent now and accept Jesus as your saviour.

Other popular **Jesus Hymns** have recently burgeoned and are freely used by Christians of various denominations during thanksgiving services, offertory processions and other religious functions. These express great infatuation with Christ.

End of time gospel crusader

This brand of evangelism or gospel crusade is the indigenous (or the so-called "Secondary-Evangelical Group") from Jehovah's Witness sect or Watch Tower International. This should be the most disturbing of all Evangelical groups of the NRMs with which dialogue is almost impossible. Catholics should be ready to know more about them and avoid confrontation with them.

Manipulating mankind's natural feelings and fears they predict doom on account of societal evils, including corruption in the high places. The Witnesses claim that they have resigned from the world. The world's problems, wars and politics are so complex, so pervasive, that they no longer concern the witnesses. They claim to be citizens of a better society, "**Jehovah's New World Theocracy**" (or Kingdom), and therefore owe loyalty to Jehovah God. Consequently they refuse the duties of earthly citizenship. At schools and colleges their children and

wards are very difficult to deal with, as these refuse to participate in school and government programme which they refer to as ‘mundane practices’ – prayers, singing of national anthem, recitation of national pledge, observance of public holidays etc. They hate religious bodies or organizations and governments, which they claim are Satan’s organizations.

Thus the **Jehovah Witness sect** worship a vengeful God who plans the bloodiest war in history, ‘**Armageddon**’, in which the wicked and religionists will be annihilated. The “**approaching End of the World**”, constitutes the centre of their message to believers and non-believers, unlike other sects that merely include the ‘**End in –sight**’ slogan as only a part of their evangelist programme.

In times of social, economic and political crisis, this group seems to appeal to people on the fringe of society. In fact in the history of Christianity, there have always been moments of predicting the imminent end of the world. For this group in particular, history is divided into stages, each marked by a different relationship with God. According to their scheme or division, we are now living at the **End of the Last Days** or stage, which will see the tribulation of great suffering on earth, after which Satan and his followers will be cast into hell and the saints will live in eternal happiness.

End times and salvation

The End-of-Times evangelists claim that their theory is the teaching of the bible and they go to quote countless texts that support their stand, particularly from Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation. Naturally the social implications of such hot gospel are great in Africa. Besieged by endless number of problems – *political instability, tribal and ethnic conflicts and civil wars, mounting economic problems, joblessness, poverty, lack of social amenities that make life worth living*, the oppressed Africans look forward to the **Day of Salvation**.²⁵ Even military coups and violent changes in government are greeted with great relief and jubilation. Perhaps ‘true salvation’ can come through the military boys who chase away the corrupt politicians or military dictators from office and government houses. But alas! The new ‘dictators’ do not usher in the era of peace, tranquility and prosperity. Some are even worse than their masters whom they chased away or whom they murdered. What a vicious circle!

The End-of-Time evangelists, one should not be surprised, preach hot gospel of doom for oppressors and sinners. They call on the name of God of the “Old Testament” to re-appear in His ancient form and inflict punishment on the erring and the wayward men and women ‘**as in the days of the Old**’. ‘Tit for Tat, Here and Now’ and in a decisive manner, should regulate the actions of the ‘merciless Jehovah’. Since the people of this age have closed their ears to reason and have continued to sin, they have themselves to blame as the *Doomsday* approaches.

All have been foretold

Since the Apocalyptic texts give great prominence to disasters of every kind, this *End of Time Crusaders* tend to see all kinds of hardship and deprivation as foretold, for what they think are these ‘End of Times’. Of course if these disasters are ordained by God, they are by definition unavoidable. Therefore this way of thinking gives some ‘false relief’ and engenders passivity and resignation among those who have always borne the bulk of suffering, namely the poor and the marginalized. It can even lead to the cult of suffering, in which suffering is seen as blessedness, a proof of being one of the Gods’s chosen **Remnant**.²⁶

Because the end is supposed to be near, nothing else matters, but preaching the gospel of fulfilling the great commission (Mt. 28:19, Mt. 1:14). Evangelism is all that matters and to get involved in anything else is to distract oneself from the one important task of winning souls for Christ.

There are so many such End-of-Time gospel crusaders in Nigeria. Armed with the bible (and possibly public address system) they address their message of doom and repentance to passer-by; ‘repent, the kingdom of God is at hand! The so-called **Early Morning Gospel Crusaders or Horn Criers** direct their message to all perpetrators of evil, community leaders, village heads, town union leaders, heads of government and others occupying responsible posts in the public and private sectors of social and economic life. It is time to stop short of calling names of those they think are enemies of people and God!

The End of Time crusaders have time for their gospel business. Like typical Jehovah Witness itinerant evangelists all over the world, they abandon their daily engagements, take positions at street corners, and mount soap boxes at public places, village squares and markets, preaching the message of repentance and the imminent end of the world.

During important Christian religious celebrations and festivals, like the Easter and Christmas, this group of **Witnesses** in collaboration with scripture union people, *born again Christians* and Deeper Life Christian ministers, organize gospel crusades at market squares and open village spaces to distract Catholics attending services. Large public address systems are mounted and the whole area electrified with fluorescent lights of all colours. The whole set up can be attractive. But the stuff which they preach can only retain the interest of ignorant passer-by or those they hire to swell their audience. They can constitute a nuisance to Christians who go about their business or religious functions. Truly the End of Time witnesses represent a real menace and generally speaking, it is waste of time to argue with them on the doorsteps. There can be little common ground between Catholics and Jehovah's witnesses, and it is wise to take note that the witness or the evangelist visitor is certainly unreasonably prejudiced, ignorant and often idiotic. Perhaps, as Francis J. Ripley suggests, only those Catholics who are sufficiently qualified might hope to gain anything by discussion, for their system is based on the destruction of Christianity, of all organized religion and of all lawful civil authority.²⁷ Their organizational methods and commitment to **witnessing** may interest us anyway for the ordinary Jehovah's witness is expected to attend *five hourly meeting a week and to devote about ten hours a month to witnessing*. And most of them hold tenaciously to this evangelism programme.

Summary

We are now in the position to summarize the main point of our discussion in the part of our work on the **NRM**s, mainly the typology of the **NRM**s. We have adopted the nomenclature *New Religious Movements*, instead of African Independent Churches, since the former is able to accommodate all, including those which can really be referred to as Churches, as well as those groups that have no recognizable organizational structures.

For clarity and easy study of the movements we have classified them into three main types or categories. Splinter groups are accommodated in these large groups as differences are minor. The three main types of **NRM**s are **the Healing Movements, The Thaumaturgical Religious Movements and the Evangelical-Pentecostal Groups**.

There are so many of the Healing movements and prayer houses, orthodox and unorthodox, some being directed by Catholic clergy all over

Africa and in Nigeria in particular. Surely healing ministry is now a force to reckon with in the pastoral care of the sick in the African Church.

In the thaumaturgical group of religious movements, some forms of the old traditional African religions are re-appearing in the name of *culture heritage*. “Godianism”, in Nigeria, e.g., is a new form of organized traditional religion. In this group of the **NRMs** so far described here, we recognized specifically the following, *Mammy Water (Water Spirit) centres, some Sabbath healing groups*. Most of the Nigerian girls who are said to be possessed by the water spirit end up in these healing homes.

In the Evangelical-Pentecostal groups we distinguish the following *Protestant – Deeper Life Christian sects, the Born again, the Scripture Union (SU) sects, Jehovah Witnesses and the Aladura and Pentecostal groups generally recognized as itinerant evangelists and Jesus People*. Next we shall examine the factors which have contributed to the proliferation of these **NRMs** as well as the challenges these movements pose to the survival of Christianity in Africa.

PART TWO

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PROLIFERATION OF THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (NRMs)

Having examined the typology of the **NRMs**, we can now consider the factors which have contributed to the proliferation of **NRMs**. We will also discuss their challenges to Christian established churches, and especially the implications of the investigations for the development of Christianity in Africa.

Socio-political factors

Historically speaking, one may not ignore the Socio-Political Factors, arising from oppression and struggle against colonialism in Africa, which gave rise to emergence and growth of the Independent Religious Movements. The rejection of almost everything ‘African’ by both the early missionaries and colonizers as ‘primitive’, unreliable, dubious and fetish really baffled many Africans who saw such an affront as humiliating. Certain questions were to be asked; *“Are there only white man’s ideas, system, objectives, institutions and mannerism- in a word, ‘culture’, which must be approved and embraced? “Does white man’s system of government resolve all political and economic problems? What of in the area of religion? Are there no religious values embedded in African culture or ways of life? What has gone wrong in Africa?”*

For many however, the struggle for political independence has extended to struggle for religious freedom. Later the political slogan ‘**Africa for Africans**’ would leave its impact also on the Christian religion. More so, because the European brand of Christianity was neither satisfying to the Africans, nor did it provide answers or solutions to certain African problems. Where Christianity has however been accepted, African religious leaders believed that changes were necessary to accommodate African values and cultural heritage. **Inculturation** therefore is not a new phenomenon in the African religious scene.

There has since therefore been great disenchantment on the part of the Africans and their religious leaders. Many therefore decided to found and establish their own Churches or religious movements and organize such in what they consider to be truly African fashion. For most of the leaders of **NRMs**, it was not all important to join the white man’s religion

in order to be saved. The doors were thus thrown wide open and the Africans could not be intimidated. Where political movements were restricted by the colonial- overlords, recourse was taken to religious movements. There has for long therefore been a painful search for something more satisfying and meaningful to the Africans, especially in the religious sphere. It was really to affirm the people's struggle for self-sufficiency and independence to handle their own affairs.

In **South Africa**, for example, where the oppressive system of apartheid had continued to keep the black Africans in perpetual subjugation, it was not possible for Africans to embrace the religion of their oppressors. Their common feelings will be summarized in the expression attributed to a South African priest, William Guba, who in a funeral oration in a South African township declared "**Should I find Boers in heaven, I will turn back**". It was a clear protest against an unjust political and social system operated by government and people who claim to be Christians. It was completely unacceptable to Africans, especially those who have lived under oppressive system of government.

It was clear therefore that an African Independent Religious Movement or Church has set out to handle such questions which other religious denominations could not handle. In short, in the area of Christian vision of doctrine and morals, African Independent Church does not feel inferior to the European brand of Christianity and other world religions.

Search for security

Other factors which have contributed to the growth of the **NRMs** in Africa can simply be described as "*Religious*" and "*Theological*". **Search for Security**, a phenomenon, punishing people around in the quest for healing and for solutions to mysterious problems has been examined in my second book: **Search for Security - Freedom from sinister forces that threaten life African society**. In the book, I observed that as long as one is not in the position to control certain spiritual forces one describes as diabolical, one is bound to feel insecure. Surrounded by hostile forces, seen and unseen, menacing him and often the entire household, the African will cross rivers and mountains in search of answers to his problems. In this type of religious vagrancy, he rarely discriminates. He does not worry about the type of religion he joins. His main preoccupation is to achieve success, get a reasonable

solution to his problem. Misfortune often pushes him to an extreme corner.

Writing in the *Bigard Theological Studies*, on *Pressures on the Missionary Church*, Father Luke Mbefo, makes similar observation, while assessing the impact of the **NRMs** and Traditional Religion on the Christian Church, and challenges posed.

Catholics, he observes, betray instability in their belief. Compared with their contemporaries, who still continue the African Traditional Religion from which they were converted, Catholics betray equivocation and imbalance in crisis situation. Many still consult fortune-tellers when they want to embark on a project. The same is true when a well-thought project flops or there is sudden death or happening that seem otherwise uncounted for.²⁸

Chance is therefore not in their vocabulary. Many prefer the services of native doctors and healers to out modern hospitals. Some find no contradictions in practicing both Traditional Religion and Christianity. Indeed, some claim that Christianity has not succeeded in assuring the security through interpreting their life and world. **Search for Security** has thus contributed to a large extent to growing number of the healing Churches. As long as he is in trouble, the African, searches for immediate solutions to his problems. He looks for protective charms and amulets and other substances from anywhere. There is always the crave for security.²⁹

Theological and moral questions

Other factors which aided the growth of the NRMs can be described as **Theological** and **Moral** issues. These include the questions concerning marriage, including polygamy, Christian burial, meaningful liturgy and inculturation.

The Catholic teaching on **Monogamy** is not entirely acceptable to the African and again the Church's refusal to baptize and accord befitting Christian burial to polygamists could not be tolerated. Childless marriage, as far as Africans are concerned, is indisputably a disaster. This is evident from the number of marital problems which the healing homes entertain. Out of about every ten cases or problems brought to healing centers or

prayer houses, both orthodox and unorthodox types, about seven may have to deal with marital problems.

Moreover, as far as one would like to stretch this controversy, the African does not see anything sinful about taking a second wife, especially when the first wife fails to produce the desired offspring, e.g. the male child. "It is not a matter of *sexual promiscuity*, but is a necessity", they protest. The Moslems, the Africans also reason, are allowed to take up to four or more wives and they are not condemned to death. Therefore for the NRMs, the slender and the biblical basis for *Monogamy* is not enough to warrant the harsh measures meted against the polygamists.

When he decided to found his own new church or Religious Movements, the emerging pastor or prophet does not fail to assure the rejected polygamists that there is hope for them in the kingdom of God. The number of adherents of the NRMs continues to swell as more and more "*condemned sinners*" seek refuge in the NRMs.

There are so many of such *condemned sinners*", also referred to as "*fallen Christians*". Some of them are those who have had serious quarrels with their local Church communities. Some local, parish or Christian community laws have been broken. Some of these laws include laws prohibiting Christians from joining secret societies and unapproved cultural organizations. Those who break serious Church laws are 'excommunicated', usually by their local Church communities.

In Igbo speaking areas of the Nigerian Church, it is a calamity to be expelled from one's Church group. The consequences are great and naturally it has for long been powerful means of controlling laxity in the Christian faith, a very powerful weapon for assuring order, stability and purity of Christian beliefs and practices. Exclusion or expulsion from Christian community means also exclusion from the sacraments and other Christian activities and privileges. The worst is that such a victim of **ostracism** is denied Christian burial if he happens to die in such a state. Such a punishment, in extreme cases can be extended even to other members of the victim's family. Most 'fallen Christians' in this category, often decide to abide by the Church community's pronouncements. They quickly repent and are reconciled to the Church. They do not like to be isolated from the Christian community for long. They may grumble of course or threaten to leave the Church entirely if they were so badly treated.

In some very serious case, anyway, some of the ‘fallen Christians’ or ‘excommunicated’ Christians, decide to abandon the Church, ignoring all admonitions. If they fail in their appeal to higher authorities, they take extreme decision of leaving the Church. In some cases, these controversial fallen Christians join other Churches or even found one. If they are wealthy Christians, they are happily received into the new Church or religious movement which they now patronize. But for the Mother Church Community from which these ‘fallen ones’ have now severed relations, these unrepentant members could go their way. They are no more worthy Christians.

Whatever flaws critics and sympathizers may find in this local method of maintaining disciple in the Church, the phenomena has remained popular with *hardliners* in the local Church communities and at the same time controversial. Some moderate Catholics argue that punishments meted against these fallen Christians are severe and do not tally with the offences. Some weak Catholics even criticize and castigate the Church committees. But whatever the case may be some of these measures taken to keep the Christian faith alive in local communities achieve the desired results. The problems of *fallen Christians* have however remained a thorn in the flesh of the Church in Africa.

The NRMs and ‘fallen’ Christians

Since the NRMs are more *flexible, tolerant, and sympathetic* with the ‘fallen’ Christians, it is obvious that the attitude of these Christians towards the religious movements and the Independent Churches can be justified. In Africa, it is necessary to identify with a particular group in Church and society.³⁰ The leaders of the NRMs encourage those Christians who have been ‘expelled’ from their Churches to join their New Movements. They are urged to come and receive shelter in the new Churches, ‘for Christ came to save sinners and not to condemn them’. A story was told of one Independent African Church of Israel in the Central Africa, Zimbabwe, which broke off from the mother – Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Mission with the expressed purpose of *Helping Polygamists Enter Heaven!*³¹ Thus the African Independent Churches interpret the notion of salvation with the content of freedom from foreign domination. Hence the defection of African Christians to the NRMs is seen as a declaration of African autonomy, and not necessarily a rejection of the claims of God and His Christ.

Inculturation

The impact of the NRMs remains most formidable when it comes to adaptation of the mode of worship to African mentality. This has continued to attract adherents to the religious movements. Although, the Established Churches, including the Catholic Church have made some efforts in this programme of inculturation, there is still a lot of work to be done.

Africans, especially young people love active participation in worship – in prayers, singing and body movement. They like the use of instruments at worship and free atmosphere in which people can worship according to the **Promptings of the Holy Spirit**. No wonder many Catholics join the **Jesus People**, in their open air services and gospel crusades. They spend very busy and noisy hours at these rallies, but sleep or complain at the Holy Mass which lasts for less than two hours.

The failure of the Established Christian Churches to take account of African interest at worship has contributed immensely to the drifting of many to the NRMs. In the NRMs great interest is shown in the members' private needs, and petitions are made to cover a wide area of human endeavours and preoccupation. Of utmost importance is the health interest of the members. It is no surprise then that healing sessions occupy a prominent place at worship. The role and place of sacramentals as well as fasting can never be compromised. These, and other features of the African mode of worship and mentality have continued to strengthen the NRMs.

The crucial questions

At this stage of our discussion some crucial questions are bound to arise: **Is it possible that at long last the NRMs, forming a united front, will emerge as a true representative Church movement for Africa, and taking a permanent place among other world religions? Or, is it possible that all Christian Churches in Africa, including the Catholic and Protestant denominations could unite under one autonomous independent African Church, able to respond adequately to the religious needs of Africans? Or is it possible that the Established Christian Churches – Catholics and Protestants would respond radically to the challenges and demands of inculturation, thereby stemming down or completely putting a stop to the proliferation of**

the NRMs? Yes, these are mere conjectures and perhaps some type of wishful thinking. But what an enormous task establishing a truly African Christian Church which can shade its **foreignness, its Romanness, or Europeanness or Americanness**, in fact not depending on any foreign mission for evangelism and perhaps financial and moral support. The material and human resources are there, although more remain to be tapped. There will be need for African theologians and religious leaders to settle down and discover some rich African heritage which can be employed to embellish Christianity in Africa, so that it can truly wear an African garb. This is what inculturation should be all about.

The pastoral challenges

The African synod of bishop recognized the great challenge posed by the NRMs on the continental level, when in the Synod's **Lineamenta**, it was observed:

The spread of new religious movements in Africa, on the whole constitutes a pastoral challenge for the Church. While offering to the faithful some criteria to be used to recognize 'false prophets' and inconsistency in many of the answers and promises, those responsible in pastoral matters should analyze the nature of inculturation of Christianity in Africa, its capacity to constitute vibrant ecclesial communities, the role of the laity, the response to the thirst for spiritual experience and the word of God and the reply given to the vital questions posed by suffering, sickness and death.³²

It seems that the bishops acknowledged that one of the main problems of the African Church so far is this failure in inculturation. Hence they recommend a close study of this issue. Father James Okoye³³, recognizes the same problem. Making his own contribution in "A case in Christianity and culture", he observes: Those Catholics who go to Prayer Houses seem to be saying that the Catholic Church is for them not a **House of Prayer**; Isaiah 56:7. It is therefore suggested that the main cause for the sprouting of these Churches has been cultural dissatisfaction with the Established Churches;

(1) The NRMs stress the power of God and Christ, the power of prayer. Concern for the Angels and Spirits they borrowed from the African culture;

(2) They have refined the use of fasting and other techniques for endorsing vision experiences; which at the moment enjoy great prestige in the culture;

(3) They stress personal choice and participation. Liturgy is derived from experience, and culturally meaningful symbols are used. Each person is known by name and feels accepted.

(4) Singing is prayer by all, not a cosmetic and impersonal extra by a choir;

(5) The prophet's life-style speaks. He/she studiously avoids social occasions and personal meetings and cuts down on travels and absences. He pays real attention to clients in a non-evaluation listening which convinces his client that 'my problem is his problem'.

(6) The prophet binds himself to a period of fasting and other practices of spiritual training to dispose him to achieve the desired goals with clients.

Whatever may be their deficiencies, extreme and dubious innovations, it is certain that the established Christian Churches can learn a lot from the inculturation patterns which the NRMs movements have evolved. It is in fact the ability of the NRMs to succeed where the Established Churches have failed that has continued to encourage their growth among Africans.

As far as Africans are concerned, no meaningful religious movement can afford to ignore these issues and continue to attract fellowship. As Father Mbefo, also rightly points out, there are informed expectations on the part of the African Christians – a Church which cannot heal diseases was no Church at all.³⁴ Many self-proclaimed prophets of the NRMs have exploited this psychological need for physical wholeness to open up healing centers and prayer houses and these are advertised in the newspapers as being capable of handling many types of problems.

As far as Father Theophilus Okere is concerned, the Established Christian Churches, their leaders and theologians are responsible for this bad situation the Church in Africa is facing. "Since we have been theologically dormant, the faith of our people remains pre-critical and shallow. No wonder we are paying heavily for it by the embarrassing

hemorrhage from our ranks in favour of innumerable sects promising answers to questions we are too timid to pose.”³⁵

In the same train of thought, Father Edmund Ikenga Metuh, in an address to the Catholic Theological Conference of Nigeria held at Owerri, Nigeria, made similar observations which can be summarized thus:³⁶

1. The problems of African established Churches continue to multiply because evangelization programmes, the method, and priorities are defective;
2. Lack of depth in the faith of African Catholics is seen in the tendency to mix up Christian and traditional non-Christian practices and in the frequencies of dissertations from the Church for the spiritual Churches which emphasize this worldly goals as well as fundamentalism.
3. Many also desert the Established Churches because they find their disciplines and liturgy alien.
4. If this is true, then the whole area of inculturation needs a thorough reexamination and a practical implementation of the outcome of such studies.

If these observations are to be taken seriously, it follows that African theologians and Church leaders should discover and analyze the factors that give rise to mixing habits and desertions among Catholics and Christians of other denominations. What are new methods for effective evangelization? If inculturation is seen to be a possible handicap or stumbling block for progress among the established Christian Churches, why the lip service being paid to this all important programme for long? Reporting on the major outcome of a special consistory of Cardinals who met in Rome to discuss **The Proclamation of Christ, the only Saviour and the Challenges of the Sects**, the British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C) News report of the 3rd April 1991 informed the world that *Catholic bishops and Cardinals meeting in Rome had been told that millions of Catholics have continued to desert the Catholic Church on account of the authorities' unwillingness to adapt its ways of worship to the needs of its members. They join other Churches where dancing,*

singing and body movement are allowed. Surely the News items were considered to be of immense world importance and especially to the Church of Christ in Africa and elsewhere.

Pressures on the established Churches

The **pressures** are heavy and therefore there is urgent need for reaction to challenges. Of utmost importance are the pastoral challenges posed by the **NRM**s. The African bishops and Roman Church authorities are aware of these challenges when they called for dialogue with the leaders and the followers of the **NRM**s:

Even if the dialogue is often difficult because of an unyielding fundamentalism or aggressive proselytizing by certain groups, it is necessary in the community to seek to develop a Christ-like spirit in relation to all, making the effort to understand them and enter into dialogue with them.³⁷

The bishops, of course noted that the **NRM**s deserve particular attention, in those cases where they are disposed to dialogue. Here we may ask the final question, whether the predictions of Father Mbefo will come to pass:

It could be that the Indigenous African Churches that are now taking over from the Missionary Churches will be in a better position to meet the objections of the foreignness of Christianity canvassed for by their compatriots. They would then be missionaries to themselves. They are those who accepted the Church as God's will for them and equally accepted their native cultures as the providential matrix within which they have to bear Christian witness.³⁸

FACING THE CHALLENGES POSED BY THE NRMs

Having identified, classified and examined the impact of the **NRM**s and the pressures they exert on the Established Christian Churches, we are now in the position to suggest some ways of meeting the challenges they pose. The **NRM**s are known to have made tremendous impact in the area of inculturation. They are bolder, more adventurous than the Established

Christian Churches, which have for long remained cautious, slow, suspicious and conservative. Such posture has not produced positive results in the development and growth of the Christian faith in Africa.

For the past few years, however, there is ample evidence that the Established Christian Churches, including the Catholic Church have taken interest in inculturation. Some African theologians and leaders of the African Church have taken initiative in studies and in experimentation in various areas of inculturation.

We have devoted the *Second Volume* of our book *The African Church, Today and Tomorrow, Inculturation in Practice* to the issue of Inculturation in the African Church. Various topics have been examined and suggestions on the implementation of completed works on inculturation made. It is hope that our recommendations would further be examined by the authorities of the African Church as well as by those who have shown much concern for lack of progress in inculturation in the African Church.

The purpose of the ‘inculturation project’ is not merely to ‘counter’ the achievements of the NRMs movements. The issue of inculturation should be seen from much wider perspective, in the New Era of Evangelization, on the local and international levels. For long the Second Vatican Council had ushered in this new and deceive phase in the Church’s 2000 years of evangelization, by enacting a project which meant a shift from the Church’s traditional cultural homogeneity to the admission of *cultures* in the Church. The situation calls for the acceptance of other concepts and practices for the Church in areas such as the *spiritual, pastoral and the liturgical*, all meant to deepen the understanding of faith in the various cultures. Inculturation is not limited to the area of public worship. It extends to *doctrine and catechesis, personal devotion, Church discipline, art and music, and of course to formation for the ministry*. “The faith will bear it own flowers and fruit, but in terms of the situation and the needs, possibilities and experiences of the people whose faith it is. There can be no question, then of importing and exporting ready-made and canned liturgies, Church structures and dogmas.”³⁹

In all attempts at inculturation, there is however need to avoid all ‘*cultural disvalues*’ which might distort the gospel message.⁴⁰ The Catholic bishops of Nigeria were aware of these ‘cultural disvalues’ that the Catholic Church must guard against in this programme of

inculturation. The bishops made this point clear in their Pastoral Letter of 1991⁴¹. These cultural disvalues are those cultural elements that are ultimately detrimental to man or incompatible with the gospel. What is intrinsically opposed to man and the gospel ought to be seen as a disvalue.

Some of the expressions used by some authors and critics of 'African Independency' confirm the fears of the bishops:

Christianity: To Save or Enslave
Post Mortem for Christianity in Africa;
Post Christianity in Africa;
Disfigured Christianity in Africa;
Not the Christian Religion!

The Ecumenical Documentation and Information Centre for Eastern and Southern Africa (**EDICESSA**), based in Harare, Zimbabwe has carried out a research on the *Contemporary developments in African Christianity in Eastern and Southern Africa. An important part of their project was the publication in 1990 of Christianity To Save or to Enslave.*⁴² The research group identified some of the forms of 'ideological Christianity' whose doctrines are found to be incompatible with the message of true Christian religion. Those who are engaged in experiments in inculturation in the African Church should therefore take note of these studies.

On account of the 'extravagances' of the NRMs, there are not a few critics of the NRMs who are strongly convinced that a **Requiem** should be sung for Christianity in Africa. For these critics, Christianity is dead and what is needed was an official declaration or certificate. Some authors on African Independency manufacture new terms and titles to prove their stand. G.C. Oosthuizen's *Post Christianity in Africa* makes an interesting reading.⁴³ Other interesting title are Buhlmann's '*The Coming of the Third Church*',⁴⁴ Barrett's '*African Initiatives in Religion*',⁴⁵ Lanternavi's '*The Religion of the oppressed*'⁴⁶ and a host of others. These authors and critics see traces of non-Christian practices in the activities of the NRMs. Some of their doctrines, they insist \$do not resemble those of the Christian religion established by Jesus Christ. Among these 'cultural disvalues' found in some of the NRMs are those that are anti-human and anti-social.⁴⁷ We have seen most of these practices which are incompatible with the teachings of Christianity when we described the

various NRMs and their practices. In order to avoid the danger of syncretism, what authors are saying is that the Established Christian Churches should intervene particularly in the area of inculturation in order to *save what remains of Christianity in Africa!*

FACING THE CHALLENGES: THE CATHOLIC POSITION

At last most Catholics, including the hierarchy in Nigeria and elsewhere in the African continent have come to acknowledge the realities and the impact of the NRMs. Many are changing their attitudes and impressions, seeing that calling of bad names, pouring abuses and condemnations have not resolved any of the problems arising from the proliferation of the NRMs. It was no more possible banning Catholics from attending prayer houses and healing homes, which are run by self proclaimed prophets and healers.

Sometimes stories told our troubled Catholics are frightening and their worries and ailments seem to be real. In some cases our conventional hospitals are helpless as some of the medical doctors and specialists refer some of the suffering and troubled patients to the healing homes. There are many cases of sick people who have been sent to overseas – London, Germany and America for serious ailments, but these were brought back to Africa in stretchers with the instructions from the white specialist doctors ‘*to try African medical solution*’. Some diagnosis which read ‘*nothing abnormal*’ still recommend that *An African solution should be sought!*

What should Catholic authorities do with thousands of their members who flock the healing homes to seek solutions to ‘*these incurable ailments*’? What should the pastors of souls do with their Church members, men and women, boys and girls, who complain of various diabolical disturbances? Should these be sent away, perhaps to the white man’s hospital or clinic? Should their worries be regarded as unreal, perhaps only psychological malady or simple hallucinatory disturbances? Some of their complaints include diabolical disturbances giving rise to states of insecurity. An entire building can be virtually abandoned because it is believed it has been bewitched. Some sicknesses and diseases are believed to have been a result of poison (Nsi, in Igbo language). Here the western medicine has nothing to offer. Many young ladies who troop to prayer houses and mammy water centers claim they

are worried and harassed by the water spirit. No white man's drug may be useful here.

Certain misfortunes, including childless marriages, impotency, loss of job and accidents are believed to be caused by evil spirits. There is therefore need to get a **Man of God** who can confront these evil forces, cast them out as Christ did, and restore good health to oppressed victims or families. Their stories, therefore may not be taken to be fairy tales or dismissed as nonsensical. Today steps are being taken to respond to these needs of worried Christians.

Catholic deliverance ministry: the healing ministry

Many Catholic priests and pastors of souls having realized the seriousness of the situation have established healing ministries and prayer houses in response to the yearnings of the faithful and also to curb the growing influence of the healing centers of the NRMs. This phenomenon is not entirely new, dating in Nigeria to early 1970s. Elsewhere in Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia, we know of priests and even bishops who have taken up the **Deliverance ministry** as a full time pastoral engagement.

We have referred to these healing homes as **Orthodox** since they are run by the Catholic clergy and are virtually tolerated by the local Ordinaries. "**Healing Mass**" is now in vogue in many parishes in Nigeria and is popular. As in the NRMs, Holy water, oils and other healing materials are used lavishly.

The ecclesiastical authorities in Nigeria are aware of the development which many see also as 'development in the right direction. This awareness reached a turning point in the *National Theological Conference on Healing Ministry* organized by the Theological Commission, Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, at Enugu, 1992. Various papers were presented at this conference by Nigerian theologians, priests and laymen. Some of the issues raised and discussed included:

**Priests and the healing ministry in the Nigerian Church;
The Healing Apostolate of the Church, in the light of the
modern healing;
Healing and liturgy;
Scripture and healing**

**Healing care ministry in the Church;
Modern medicine and the healing apostolate.**

But the hallmark of the conference was the invitation extended to the priest-healers, most of whom have established flourishing ministry for long. They were there to tell stories, clarify issues, and answer certain questions from fellow priests and enlightened laymen and other professionals. They were offered ample opportunity to respond to certain criticisms to which their healing apostolate has been subjected, since not all Catholics accept their authority and methods.

The scope and purpose of the conference was highlighted by Bishop Albert Obiefuna of Awka Diocese in his opening address.⁴⁸ According to the bishop, certain questions are bound to be asked with regard to the gift of healing which an individual priest exercises and how individual methods correspond to St. Paul's teaching on the gifts in the Church. Other important issues raised were:

- **Whether one's healings are in line with those of Jesus and what was the nature and role of miracles in the healing ministry of Jesus.**
- **Whether the image created in the minds of people about an individual's healing ministry is in keeping with sound ecclesiology;**
- **Whether the healing ministry is part and parcel of the entire church's ministry or is it a private affair of individual.**
- **Whether the healing ministry as practiced by the individual priest helps to foster unity in the parish or diocese or does it create divisions and acrimony;**
- **Whether the fanfare which accompanies healing ministries in our Church today could be said to be in line with Christ's constant injunction that those healed should make no noise about the event.**
- **Whether priority should be given to healing services than to the pastoral assignments in the parish or elsewhere.**

There were also many other important points that should be taken note of if this healing ministry in its present scope and attention given to it by the priest-healers should receive support from the local ordinaries, that is

from the bishops. For example, what amount of support should a priest-healer expect from his bishop, if the priest is disobedient to his ordinary, goes about his own and does his things as he likes. How does the gift of healing affect the practice of the virtues, especially, that of humility? What is the relation between these gifts of healing imagined or real in the life of the healer? Are there contradictions?

The conference was truly pegged to produce answers to so many questions asked by people about the role of healing in the pastoral life of the priest. It was meant to produce good results by eliminating all misconceptions and contradictions. Perhaps some guidelines could be established in the exercise of the healing ministry in the Catholic Church in Nigeria and all over Africa. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria had intervened in several occasions and in controversial issues in the local Church thus restoring order by issuing guidelines. There may be need for such guidelines in the healing apostolate. These guidelines should come at this auspicious time to reassure both priests and lay people that the Catholic Church supports such a ministry as long as it is exercised according to the directives of the Magisterium and in the spirit of the gospel.

Happily enough the outcome of the conference was encouraging, also taking into consideration the challenges posed by the NRMs, who respond to people's yearnings by establishing healing centers and prayer houses. Such positive contributions of the conference can be summarized thus:

The priest-healers are committed to healing ministry which they regard as part and parcel of their pastoral ministry and care of the sick. This is a responsibility which every pastor of the soul must embrace, for Christ came to give life and give it abundantly. Priests cannot abandon their flock to roam about like sheep without shepherd. If the shepherd does not take care of the flock, gather them together and feed them, they scatter, some may equally be lost to thieves and enemies.

This is exactly what happens when sick people and worried Catholics fail to receive attention from their priests. They troop to the healing centers of the NRMs, even to those centers run by 'Jesus freaks', false prophets and

charlatans, who come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Mt. 7:15). When Catholics do not receive adequate religious satisfaction they run to the Pentecostal crusaders where they are *born again!* In the Old Testament, a legitimate type of *divination*, popularly referred to as *Iniquity of the Lord*, was an 'approved and recognized activity of the prophets of Israel. Although there were many false prophets and equally 'legitimate' type of 'Inquiry of the Lord'.⁴⁹

The Recognized “Man of God”

In our present situation, there is need to establish **approved** healing centers and prayer houses where Catholics and other people in need can go and consult or *inquire of the Lord*. If this is not done, the people are bound to turn to the '*god of Ekron*', perhaps! The *vagrant* nature of our people's religious affiliation and commitment would prove that this suggestion should provoke fear and therefore must be given serious consideration. The Zairean poet depicts the situation vividly in these lines.

***OH! UNHAPPY CHRISTIAN,
MASS IN THE MORNING,
WITCH DOCTOR IN THE EVENING,
AMULET IN THE POCKET,
SCAPULAR AROUND THE NECK!***⁵⁰

The traditional Igbos of Nigeria may condone such a contradictory religious attitude and hypocrisy by maintaining that ("*anaghi ano ofu ebe ekiri mmanwu!*"), (literally, one does not stay at a spot to get a good glimpse of the masquerade). That simply means that when one tries one solution and the problem is not solved, one could try another, until, perhaps a solution is found. The method adopted in arriving at the solution may not be subjected to any strictly approved moral judgment. They may not therefore see anything morally or religiously wrong or unchristian in going to the spiritual Churches and mammy water healing homes to find solutions to their problems. Looking at the problem from a Nigerian perspective, one might find the troubled Christian at the weekends at *ELELE* – Catholic Prayer Ministry of the Holy Spirit, with big jerry cans of water for blessing. He buys assorted *Elele souvenirs* – car stickers and other stickers for door posts. These stickers are placed at all

imaginable places and even on trees, no doubt for protection of the materials and all who use them! At the same time our worried Christian may be a member of a secret society or other unapproved cultural associations.

At his home town our ‘beloved Christian’ may be a notorious litigant with several cases, including land disputes in court. He may associate with dubious fellows whom he may often hire their services to commit evil and do harm to his enemies. Perhaps he is a politician and does not practice fair play and tolerance in politics.

The same Christian may be a knight of the Church! He may be involved in chieftaincy squabbles with his people and traditional rulers. Unfair play, lies, hypocrisy, contradictions and other dubious phenomena are found in the lives of African Christians. These evils are enormous. This goes to confirm our fears. Perhaps some order can be restored if Catholic authorities established approved Prayer Houses and Healing Homes and other sodalities which may help to control the vagrant religious attitudes of our Christians.

Priest-healers are to be recognized and encouraged in this type of pastoral care of the sick. The **Man of God** should be committed to this assignment and must definitely have an inner conviction that it is a type of special vocation that is at stake. Sometimes the urge to exercise this ministry can be irresistible. He is ready to listen to the harassed people of God in search of solutions to their innumerable problems.

Recognition and coordination

These are the key words, Recognition of the priest-healers on the part of the local Ordinaries will help to eliminate adverse criticisms and restore peace and confidence. The people are often discouraged and confused when they discover that the **Man of God** in their midst is at logger heads with his bishop and fellow priests. There is bound to arouse a bad situation, leading to frustrations and sometimes to “schism”.

A well **coordinated** *deliverance ministry* will eliminate **unorthodoxy** and **personality cult**. In a well coordinated Deliverance Ministry, attention is not entirely centered on one man, but the entire Church is involved:

Now you are the body of Christ and individual members of it. And God has appointed in the Church, first Apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers administrators

and speakers in various tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess the gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (I Cor. 12:28)

Surely **Deliverance Ministry** is so wide an area in the Pastoral Ministry of the Church. What is involved is more than **Physical Healing** or **Casting out of Demons**. **Teaching, exhorting, ministering to the needy, converting to Christ, preaching the word, administering the other sacraments** are all involved in the modern **Pastoral Care of the Sick**. It can therefore not be a one man's job in the community of the faithful. If the 'chief organizer or leader of a Centre' is indisposed or is transferred, the centre does not collapse. There will be no need for clients to follow the **Man of God** around when he is transferred to another parish or location in the diocese.

Fighting abuses: critical analysis

It is not only in the NRMs that abuses have crept in. Some can even be found in the **Deliverance Ministry Centres** founded and run by Catholic priests. Some of these abuses can creep in this ministry in the form of pride, intransigence, self-advertisement and of course in certain forms of unorthodox practices. As M.C. Asuzu points out, "We must realize that faith-healing, as for all charismata, are easy prey to adulteration, misuse, evil use and faking".⁵¹

Self-advertisement

Unlike Christ the priest-healer advertises himself, encourages his clients to give superfluous and outlandish 'testimonies' on '*miraculous activities*' which he claims to perform. In **Christ's** own healing mission, his constant injunction was that those He healed should tell no one about the event!

Judging from the fanfare and 'testimonies' that accompany healing ministries in our Church today, it is clear that some of the healers leave little or no place for Christ, the Lord. Even though some of claim that they perform through the power of Christ, their actions and utterances do not depict them as humble and Christ-like ministers.

These testimonies, naturally are invented to boost the healer's prestige and influence. He is wonder-worker to be admired, praised and even worshipped. His fame is made to grow and spread like wide fire as

more clients and larger crowds of people besiege the centre to see things for themselves.

Pride and intransigence

These are no signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit. “But the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22). Pride, arrogance, intransigence and other similar vices are often manifested in the healer’s unwillingness to tolerate criticisms and corrections. In his bid to assert the presence of the *extraordinary powers* in him, he despises others, including his bishop and fellow priests. He curses and uses abusive language on people whom he may equally condemn to hell fire, at the least provocation. He may abandon or neglect his officially assigned pastoral ministry in the diocese in order to concentrate on healing ministry and casting out of devils. The priest may at last quarrel with the Church authorities and then isolates himself in his newly founded ‘*Zion City*’.

Methods adopted in the exercise of the healing ministry

Some of the methods adopted by some priest-healers may not always be compatible with the Catholic faith and practice. Some of these controversial methods which have received severe criticisms from most Catholics include:

- Excessive use of Holy water as panacea for all diseases and ailments;**
- Burying of crucifixes and allied sacramentals;**
- Use of candles of specified colours and shapes;**
- Undue emphasis on the role and place of fasting.**

On personality of the priest-healer

On a more personal note, it is necessary to discern the type of spirit working in the priest-healer. Is the healer out of his senses? Some priest-healers are known to engage in excessive *dry fasting* and they often look feeble, sickly and outwardly poor, poorly dressed and usually unkempt. These healers are known to be adamant in their ways, disobedient, proud, crude and unattractive. Such a healer may have to be healed first! He may be encouraged to seek for medical attention.

On a more serious note, many critics of our modern healers insist that a certain level of *holiness* is required of a healer. He is expected to surpass all others at least in holiness and purity of life. Although this does not mean that the Lord cannot make of even sinners in this special pastoral care of the sick and needy, holiness not be among the necessary virtue which a healer must have. Father Anthony Ojo makes the point:

What we see in the scriptures and even in the life of the Church is that people who have these extraordinary powers are also outstanding in holiness. One should note know that this holiness endures through and permeates all aspect of life. One begins to wonder when one finds disobedient, selfish, money-minded and even promiscuous healers, if something is not wrong somewhere.⁵²

The statement credited to one member of the Aladura sect also fits in well here; “If a man hears spirits’ voices, claims to possess the power of healing and performing miracles and yet proceeds to seduce women and get involved in other promiscuous acts, it is clear that the controlling spirit is not of God”.⁵³

Other ways of facing the challenges of the NRMs

So far we have seen that it is necessary to re-examine the healing ministry as it is exercised in the **Orthodox healing centres** today so as to meet the challenges posed by the NRMs. We have critically examined this phenomenon in the Catholic Church today and in the Nigerian Church in particular.

Many also see the role of the Catholic Charismatic Movement as useful today. Others include the **Catholic Bible Movement and The Biblical Instructors’ Union, The Catholic Christian Doctrine, Schools of Evangelization** and other Catholic sodalities. These movements should therefore be supported, supervised and directed by appointed leaders and pastors of souls. As Father V.A. Nwosu points out, the increase of the **Evangelical Churches** and their aggressive proselytism, especially through the print media, has posed new challenges to the Catholic Church. Some weak Catholics, charmed by their methods, have tended to drift away and join them.

The establishment of **School of Evangelization**, like the Charismatic Movement and Revivalist Movement, is seen also as a development in the right direction. These schools seek to provide systematic training programme for those who are really ready to work in dedicated manner to bring the Good news of Christian message to the door steps of our people.

Like popular **Crusades** organized by the NRMs, there is need to organize at various levels, **Pilgrimages, Festivals, Vigils and Retreats** for the Catholics regularly. Africans Catholics like retreats, vigils, pilgrimages and other **religious-outings**, especially during big feasts and in times of need. Where these are well organized attendance used to be very encouraging. Chorus singing at vigils and religious outings and processions used to be impressive. There is need to build retreat centres for the masses. At the various levels different group can attend retreats at their convenience. Provisions should be made also for conducive atmosphere where people can adore the **Blessed Sacrament and pray** silently in prostration. **Large Blessed Sacrament Chapels** should therefore be provided at various levels in the dioceses. Certainly these measures can help to deepen the spiritual life of our Catholics and check the drift to the New Religious Movements.

CONCLUSION

The prospects and challenges of **The African Church of Today and Tomorrow** may not be adequately assessed without a critical investigation of the impact of the **New Religious Movements (NRMs)** on the Established Christian Churches in Africa. As we have seen so far in this chapter, the **NRMs** have become a force to reckon within the development and survival of Christianity in Africa.

While one may not fail to appreciate the contributions made so far in the development of Christianity in Africa by these **NRMs**, it is equally important to point out some flaws in their activities and practices which leave large dents on the Christian Religious in Africa.

Many superstitious beliefs still abound in African and much more in the NRMs. Whether you like it or not, accept it or refuse it, the prophet healers of the NRMs, as well as their clients and followers believe that the **devil, Satan, the evil one**, is responsible for all calamities and evil in the world. These prophet-healers, including the so-called **orthodox**

healers and exorcists continue to chase this hydra-headed monster around. Thus a recourse is taken to all sorts of measures to combat ‘designs of the evil one’, when a little bit of man’s *prudent action and timely intervention* could have helped to solve a particular problem! Prayer has its place in Christian faith and practice, no doubt, but in Africa, superstition is responsible for many ailments and problems!

Will African Christians, (members of the Established Christians Churches and NRMs) learn to live their faith without undue attachment to “amulets” and Sacramentals. Someone has rightly observed that African Christians are abandoning the *Sacraments in search of Sacraments*. The mixture of the old and the new can lead to absurdities and scandalous contradictions in the practice of the Christian faith. Attachment to *Sacramentals* in the African situation can be infectious and addiction to the use of them can be harmful to the faith. African Christians should learn to live without amulets and sacramentals. They should learn to live without adversities and should appreciate the value of the *Cross*. Healing and deliverance ministers in all their activities should de-emphasize the role and influence of the evil spirits and their diabolical powers in society and in the life of men.

On the ‘*wonders and the miraculous*’ said to be taking place in the healing centres, there is need for caution. The recommendation of one of the contributors at the National Seminar on the *healing ministry*, **should be ignored**. He suggested that “*we must have the eye to see God’s hand (miracles) everywhere!*”. If our friend is actually referring to the types of miracles people like to witness these days in the NRMs and healing centres, then he has to be corrected. If he limits his concept of *miracles* to the attainment of wholeness without the Cross, then the problem we are still faced with is in fact that Christianity has not yet taken root in Africa. We have still a long way to go. At least we can begin again by correcting the false conceptions of the Christian religion. This in effect involves among other things, the evangelization of culture.

CHAPTER TWO

ISLAM AND CHRISTIAN RELIGION IN AFRICA

Preamble

The future of Christianity in Africa namely, its expectations and progressive development in the Black continent will be greatly influenced by 'World of Islam'. Like the proliferation of the new religious movements, the spread of Islam in Africa and world wide has continued unabated. Without doubt, the challenges of the NRMs and other Christian sects, as well as the aggressive Islamic proselytism can really create problems for Christian religion in Africa.

In this chapter, we wish to examine the **World of Islam** and the various factors which contribute to the uncomfortable relationship between Islam and Christian religion in the modern times, and with particular reference to Africa and Nigeria. What are the consequences for the African Church?

Islamic faith can also be attractive, in spite of some factors and especially some activities of some Moslem fundamentalists which seem to dent the good image of Islam. Some Moslems who practice their religion without rancor can be admirable. Such Moslems who cherish good neighbourliness, tolerance and peace are deeply respected by Christian leaders in their communities. In the second part of this same chapter, we will also examine the *Attractive faces of Islam*. There are some Moslem religious practices which non-Moslems, including Christians can even emulate.

As this chapter was being completed, some remarkable events touching on Moslem-Christian relationship were still fresh in mind. In **Sudan**, whose leaders have established full-fledged Islamic government, the regime's popular defense force patterned after Iran's Revolutionary Guards had continued its jihad against non-Moslem population of the South. An estimated 1.2 million Southerners, mostly Christians had died so far in the war. Since 1983, reports indicate that about 2 million people had been displaced. With moderate Moslem voices stifled, Christian

clergymen are virtually alone in opposing the regime's islamization policy. The continued search for peace by the warring parties in Abuja, Nigeria, always ended in a dead-lock. The Christian side had insisted during the peace talk that the heart of the conflict in Sudan was the *islamization programme* of the regime, and particularly the introduction of the *Sharia law*. While the government delegation at the Abuja meeting was ready to compromise on some issues like sharing of power with the so-called 'rebels', the issue of the sharia, for them was a closed matter. Discussing it was a waste of time. Christians could accept the situation if they wished. Sudan remains an **Islamic state**.

In most parts of North Africa and elsewhere in the **Middle East** tension has continued to mount as Islamic fundamentalists, either by the use of force, persuasion or conquest continue to propagate Islam. In some areas of the black continent, resistance to Islam is feeble, as economic hardship lures some poor African states on to accepting and promoting Islam. Most of the Moslem dominated nations, particularly the powerful and the ones very rich in oil resources that sponsor the islamization movements feel satisfied at their victories. It is reminiscent of the days when Saladin defeated the crusaders at the battle of Hittin in 1187 and re-captured Jerusalem.

Strong Islamic movements are present in the following African states – *Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Somalia, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Gambia* – where Moslem population ranges between 40 – 90%. In the Central and Southern African nations, pro-Islamic religious and political movements are rearing their heads. In these countries, Christians-Moslem relationship is at its lowest ebb. In Nigeria, controversies over the nation's membership of the *Organization of Islamic Conference (O.I.C)* as well as the *Sharia* issue have continued to smolder. Ethnic violence which erupts now and again in some parts of the Northern states of Nigeria are known to have religious roots. Moslem-Christian relationship cannot be said to be cordial in any measure. Elsewhere in Africa, where Moslem population is known to be low, Moslems and Christians are not known to love one another. At least this is clear when it comes to politics. Islam has become a success story and as well a force to reckon with in the world of religion and politics. From the capital cities of Europe and America to the remote villages of the Third World nations, mosques tell mixed stories of

civilization, worship, brotherhood, fear and hatred. Should Islam breed misery and ruin in Africa?

Islam a world religion

The revival of Islam has been gathering force for more than three decades now and Islam is acknowledged by believers and non-believers and particularly by the western world as a great success story. And this story began in Arabia, a country which from time immemorial had been inhabited by nomadic tribes. Among its important towns were Medina and Mecca. It was precisely in this city of Mecca that Mohammed, the prophet and messenger of Allah was born in the year 570 A.D. Mecca, as known from history, from the earlier times had been a holy city containing a temple called the **Kaa'ba**, the most important part of which is a black meteoric stone, which was at one time regarded as the Chief of many of the gods which the Arabs worshipped.

Like Christianity which took a new look when it came to the old pagan Rome, Islam came to birth in an idolatrous environment. Where the black stone from heaven is enshrined today, is known to have housed chief deities of the pagan Arabs. It is today one of the principal objects for which Moslems make pilgrimages to Mecca.

Mecca at the time Muhammad was known to be a great caravan centre. It is probable that Mohammed became acquainted with the monotheistic beliefs of the Jews and Christians when he accompanied caravans to Syria and Palestine. It was not until he was 40 years of age that a new religion, Islam was revealed to him in vision. Like many prophets of the Hebrew religion who came before him, Muhammad was not well received by his people and after persecutions and a series of wars, Muhammad was victorious and entered Mecca as its master. The Prophet of Allah, the divinely chosen interpreter of his will, Muhammad's teachings were carefully recorded in the holy Koran.

Like the Christianity's sources of revelation found in the bible and oral tradition, the Moslem sources of divine revelation and theology are found in the Koran and the **Hadith** (the traditionalist) of the holy prophet 'which have come down through the chain of transmitters going back to what the companions heard and witnessed from the prophet himself.¹ So was the beginning of Islam, which is described as 'not merely a religion but a way of life for a Moslem whom it guides from the cradle to the grave'.² Today Islam can be referred to as a World Religion. It is no

more confined to the Middle East or North Africa. Islam is rapidly gaining influence, acceptance and tolerance in the whole world. In most parts of western Europe where Moslems from poorer nations of the world migrate in search of 'greener pastures', host countries make provisions for Moslem education, social life, culture and worship to help Moslems live according to the dictates of their religious faith. In Iran, Pakistan, across Africa, the Middle East and central Asia, Islam is exciting millions. Even in the communist world before the disintegration of the communist block and the Soviet Union, Islam flourished. Russia alone was said to be home to the world's 5th largest Moslem population (after Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). More than half of the estimated 14 million people in China's huge western province of Xingiang are said to be Moslem. Surely the heavy propaganda campaign by the communist government against the 'opium of the people' has failed to prevent the faithful from performing their rituals of prayers. In **Britain, France Germany, Italy**, even as a minority among other Christian and world religions, Islam has continued to flourish. Huge mosques in large European cities stand as symbols of growing Moslem communities. There are over **ten million** Moslems in western Europe and most of them are said to be indigenes. **France** alone has over **four million**. And the whole of Europe may have as well as **30 million** Moslems as Islam claims to be the **second largest religion in Europe**

Germany alone has between **60-100,000** Moslems and most of these are Christian converted to Moslem religion mostly through marriage. The so-called "Gast Arbeiter", that is guest immigrant workers, from Turkey, Middle and Far East countries, who marry Germans, succeed in converting their hosts to Moslem religion. In most state schools in Germany the teaching of Christian religious doctrines is prohibited to Moslem pupils and students. The motive is to avoid creating ill-feelings among the Moslems who would not want their children to be exposed to Christian teachings, and worse, be converted to Christianity. Elsewhere in the west, governments and other religious bodies show great tolerance and give Moslems living and working in foreign lands liberty to practice their Islamic faith.

Christian-Moslem relationship would have been at its best if Moslems in the Moslem dominated areas of the world showed such mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance to other religions and minority religious groups in their midst. But this not to be! The story turns bitter

when examples of religious intolerance and persecution that abound in the Moslem world are unveiled. In **Turkey**, for example, most Christian schools have been closed down and where they still exist, Moslem teachers are deliberately sent to run Christian schools. ‘Restrictions are placed on development of Christian schools and some are normally taken over by the state without any form of compensation. Restrictions are also placed on Christian religious programmes. Of course open proclamation of the gospel is prohibited as well as open display or playing of Christian religious music. It is ‘anathema’ punishable by long term prison sentence to attempt to convert any Moslem to Christianity.

The situation in Turkey is not much different from what is happening in **Nigeria**. Even, in the pre-independent Nigeria, Christian missionaries could only reach ‘strangers’ ‘quarters’, called *Sabon Gari*, and were not allowed into Moslem occupied parts of the towns. And up till today the Islamic hostile resistance to Christianity has continued to grow. This was well brought out by the government’s taking over of Christian schools and institutions at the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970. The exercise was master-minded by Islamic leaders. “All we can conclude is that secularizing school in Nigeria was an all-time reason to deprive Christianity of its veritable tools in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ in our land. It was a way of putting a stop to growing and vibrant conversation effects by opening schools, hospitals and social welfare institutions”.³

Elsewhere in the Moslem world, examples of Moslem resistance to Christianity abound. In some places it is outright display of religious intolerance leading to persecution and conquest. In **Istanbul**, Christian Churches have been converted to museums or mosques. In **Saudi Arabia**, foreign workers who are Christians are not allowed to attend religious services and building of Churches is not a matter for discussion. In **Mauritania, Libya** and other Moslem dominated governments where strong Islamic religious fundamentalism exists, harsh punitive measures await Moslems who abandon their faith to embrace Christianity.

In **Pakistan**, an Islamic state, with a population of about 120 million, the minorities form 5% of the population, 3% of them are Christians. There is a separate electorate system for Moslems and Christians as it was introduced by the late president Zia-ul-Haq in 1977. The system allows Christians to vote only for Christian candidates. As we

are informed the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan has demanded that the general elections must be held on the basis of joint electorate.

The fate of Christians living in Islamic states can even look pitiable. As Joseph Philip a Pakistan Christian journalist informs us, government had decided to register the citizens' religious identity in the passports and identity cards. Marriage laws presently in force do not favour Christians. In this situation certainly, minorities can never get equal rights with their Moslem counterparts. No doubt the long chronology of persecutions against Christians in Pakistan began since independence in 1947. Christians are discriminated against and are not regarded as full citizens of their beloved country. During the 1965 war with India, Christians were called spies. During the Gulf war protests in the early 1991, some Christian localities were attacked. After the issue of the Babari Masjid in India Churches were attacked in Pakistan business city of Karachi.

In spite of the Christian leaders' flexibility, dialogue with Moslems, Moslems often shun such friendly gestures and opt for intensive drive to islamization. "Acknowledgement is readily made as to the rights of Moslems to live their faith and witness to it", affirms a Vatican expert on Islamic affairs and member of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue. "But it must be firmly stated that the Church also has the same rights. Respect for the principle of reciprocity is a necessary condition for any progress in dialogue"⁴. It is the menace of Islam and its unfriendly attitude to Christian religion, its fundamentalist stance, radical and violet approach to expansion and proselytism that provoked the Roman Pontiff, Pope John Paul 11 to lament over the situation.

I cannot remain silent about the disturbing situation experience by Christians living in certain countries where Islam is the majority religion. Expressions of their spiritual distress constantly reach me; often deprived of places of worship, made the object suspicion, prevented from organizing religious education or charitable activities in accordance with their faith, they have the painful feelings of being second-class citizens. I am convinced that the great traditions of Islam, such as welcoming strangers, fidelity in

friendship, patience in the face of adversity, the importance given to faith in God are principles which ought to enable unacceptable sectarian attitudes to be overcome.⁵

But modern society and also Christianity tolerate Islam and promote dialogue and co-existence. Why does Islam create a world of its own where non-members are excluded? Why, unlike any other world religion does Islam instigate feelings of fear and intolerance to non-believers? If Christian nations would welcome Moslems, offer them jobs and respect their institutions and way of life, why can't Moslems reciprocate such gestures. The pope is equally surprised, when he continued:

I express my earnest hope that if Moslem believers nowadays rightly find in countries of the Christian tradition the facilities needed for satisfying the demands of their religion, then Christians will similarly be able to benefit from a comparable treatment in all countries of Islamic tradition. Religious freedom cannot be limited to simple tolerance. It is a civil and social reality matched by specific right enabling believers and their communities to witness without fear to their faith in God and to live out all the demands of that faith.⁶

The pope is not alone in the expressions of the above sentiments. Truly there is a renewed drive for the propagation of the Islam world wide. And Africa seems to feature prominently in such a project whose objectives appear to be the following: *to convert as many Africans as possible to Islam, and to work towards the refashioning of the African society according to Islamic principles-in government, legal system, culture, financial institution etc. These two objectives complement and depend on each other.*⁷ The islamization of the world is surely the foremost of the goals of Moslems and there is the possibility that the dream may come true. As in **Germany**, so also it is in **France** and other western countries where it is fashionable among youths to become Moslems. And "the proportion of native westerners becoming Moslems are alarming", observes Danjuma Byang, like many others. "In most cases", he continues, "these are people who having rejected the claims of Christ were just looking for anything new to fill their empty lives. In view of

these developments and more so the politics of oil and petro-dollars have made the Moslem countries world powers in their own rights, the possibility exists that they can subdue the world for Islam”.⁸

With that ferocity and in having to succeed, reminiscent of its birth and expansion through the centuries, Islam has had a dynamic manifest destiny; in a sense, it is a political faith with a continuous yearning for expansion. Less than a hundred years after the death of Muhammad in A.D. 632, his followers had burst out of the Arabian desert to conquer and create an empire whose glories were to shine for a hundred years. A cavalry of God, they conquered the Persian empire and much of the Byzantine, spreading the faith through the Middle East to the Indus river. From there, devout Arab traders later carry theirs to Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines. Other traders introduced the Koran to black tribes of Africa that lived South of the Sahara desert.⁹

“It is now 1400 years, since the new faith-Islam burst out of the Arabian desert and exploded like forked lightning unto three continent,” recalls James Welsh, writing in the Times Cover story of **June 15, 1992, *The Sword of Islam***.¹⁰ “Under the oasis green banner of the prophet Muhammad, the warriors of Islam converted whole civilizations to their holy book, their way of life and their world view. Today reconstrued idea of Islam is spreading at what often appears to be the same speed over much of the same territories. From the North African coast to the Steepes of central Asia, Muhammad’s precepts, interpreted as a code of earthly behaviour are galvanizing Moslem societies with hope for renewal – and fear of upheaval.”¹¹

Islam in Africa

World wide, the question of Moslem-Christian relations has become a major issue, but as many rightly observe, there is no continent in which Christianity and Islam are more set on a dangerous collision course than in Africa. “*Focus the attention of the Moslem world on the enormous potential of Islam in Africa*”, is said to be one of the declared objective of a permanent body called “**Islam in Africa conference**”, established in 1989, with the participation of the major world Islamic movements.¹² Can the mounting tension be diffused? Many are not optimistic, as Islam remains intransigent and is identified as a difficult partner in dialogue. It is an **important partner** because of its genuine religious values, its large

following and the deep root it has struck among many African peoples. Unfortunately it is a **difficult partner** in dialogue because of lack of a common concept and language for dialogue. It is also widely recognized that generally, that its methods of conversion, do raise problems for dialogue as both Christians and Moslems seek to make converts, therefore, great prudence will be required to avoid a dangerous collision between Moslem drive for islamization and Christian evangelization.

Christian writers and students of religious studies, within and outside Africa have never ceased at pointing accusing fingers on certain Islamic movements, believed to be behind the current universal resurgence of Moslem fundamentalism and its onslaught on Christianity and its institutions. These movements agitate for a return to the practice of primitive Islam as obtained in the 7th – 9th centuries A.D. Among these Islamic movements are the **Wahhabis** movements of **Saudi Arabia**, which preaches literal obedience to the letters of the Koran and the **Sunnah** (*recommend acts of worship*), the **Moslem Brotherhood of Egypt**, whose main aim is said to be the restoration of **Sharia** as the *Instrument of government*, and the establishment of a society which reflects the ideals of primitive Islam. This group is also said to be particularly militant in its mode of operation. The **Jama'ata Islami of Pakistan** advocates the establishment of theocratic states to govern the Moslem **Umma** (*Community*), in which Sharia should be the supreme law of the state.

It is obvious that in order to realize the goals for which these movements were formed various modes of operation are employed some of which come through force, coercion or persuasion. Some influential Islamic leaders have been accused by some sections of African States resisting Islamic onslaught of sponsoring subversive activities in these areas. The building of mosques, the establishment of Moslem centres of studies and schools in predominantly Christian areas of African States are believed to be purely financed by foreign rich Islamic governments for the purposes of Islamic proselytism. The massive drive towards islamization of the whole of the black continent is a source of anxiety to many Africans – the clergy of the Christian religions, bishops and priests, ordinary Christians as well as the adherents of the traditional religions. Even Africans who claim to be free thinkers and don't belong to any religious groups are equally alarmed at the rate at which Islam is

spreading in Africa, leaving a trail of fear and desperation among non-believers and even Moslem moderates.

European nations are not spared of this growing anxiety. There is wide fear and even anti-Islamic campaign as western nations have come to identify the religion founded by prophet Muhammad with **terrorism, intolerance, radicalism, revolution and fundamentalism**, regarded as Moslem revival movement's scourges. "Apart from concern for lives and freedoms that might be in jeopardy, European nations fear that the islamists might destabilize Moslem societies, driving larger armies of emigrants on march for lasher fields.¹³ Western observers and experts on Islamic affairs are quick to point on Iranian Revolution as the single greatest catalytic event that super-charged Islam as mass political jihad or holy war. Although, today Islamic proselytizers vary widely in tone and emphasis, nonetheless, they tend to pay homage to the cause which had inspired Moslems all over the world to strive for a new cultural ascendancy. Prophetic voices rise here and there as these warn against Islamic threat to world peace and particularly to western interest and institutions. It is not only the economic – hard-pressed African nations that are harassed and intimidated. Rich western nations are also in a grip of fear. How to accommodate and maintain the peace among their growing Moslem population, already influenced by the world-wide Moslem revivalism and fundamentalism remains a thorn in the flesh. In **France**, a Cabinet minister was forced to resign his post in 1991 for making statements which were interpreted by Moslems as anti-Islamic and prone to promote violent reaction from Moslems both within and outside France and thus jeopardize western interest in the rich Arab nations.

Sometimes, western nations support Arab course simply to avoid ugly reprisals from Moslem terrorists who nevertheless see westerners as enemies who had for long suppressed the Islamic culture and expansionism. Perhaps today's western sympathetic attitude, tolerance and accommodation could be said to have encouraged the spread of Islam world wide. As Moslem political and religious campaigns and interests intermingle, the western nations are in dilemma. Western support for military, economic and humanitarian reasons could simply be converted to religious purposes and interests – often detrimental to peace and harmony in the world.

Although Moslem ideology remains basically *monolithic* today Islam is known to wear many faces. In many Islamic nations, except for an easy agreement on the establishment of the Sharia - the Islamic legal code as basis of law and general religious war on ‘infidels’, Moslems differ in so many areas. Inter-faction conflicts yield sour fruits of discord as these continue to generate fear and distrust among Moslems themselves.

Islam – house divided

The divisions in the house of Islam affect relationship with other world religions and peoples. Some are for dialogue and peaceful co-existence with neighbours, others can only settle for surrender or ‘death to the enemies’. Like Christianity, in which various brand of religious movements continue to proliferate, Islam to some extent is a ‘house divided’. These are *Liberals* and *Conservatives* in Islam as well as ‘*Born – Again fundamentalists and fanatics*. There are also *Mystics*. Over 90% of all Moslems are said to be **Sunnis** (*from ‘sunna’, the tradition of the prophets*), who consider themselves to possess Islamic orthodoxy. There are also **Shi’ite** Moslems found mostly in **Iran and Iraq**, who differ from the Sunnis in Islamic theology and in their understanding of Mohammed’s successor.

Prophet Muhammad, as it is known, left no generally recognized instructions on how the leadership of Islam would be settled after his death. And as the story went, soon after the prophet’s death in 632 A.D. a group of Shi’ites with sympathy for **Ali, son-in-law of Muhammad and the 4th Caliph of Islam**, broke with the main stream Sunni over succession to Muhammad, though, there was to be no prophet after him, Ali’s supporters were said to have been outraged over the choice of **Abubakar, the first Caliph** as the leader of Islam and subsequently formed the Shi’ite movement. Today there are more than 80 million shi’ite as opposed to more than 700 million orthodox Moslems. The group, with its largest concentration in Iran is identified largely with ‘*Islamic societies to the true path*’. In **Nigeria**, Moslems who belong to Shi’ite movement are portrayed as trouble makers. **Yakubu Yahaya**, the so-called shi’ite spokesman is the leader of a radical Islamic group in **Katsina, Nigeria**. Yahaya, who claimed that his inspiration come from God, was quoted as saying that he would continued to defy all laws as far as they are made by man. In his, words, “No man-made law is binding on

us because we do not recognize any government. The only laws we recognize are those of Allah and prophet Muhammad and we are prepared to die defending them.¹⁴

As also reported in many Nigerian dailies, the itinerant neo-Islamic crusader enjoined Moslems to defy anti-Islamic laws and join the jihad against the infidels. He claimed that his campaigns represented “*the beginning of the long awaited Islamic revolution in Nigeria*”.¹⁵ Observes James Welsh:

Fundamentalist activism is nothing if not youthful, and its young disciplines are mostly urban, unemployed and profoundly unhappy with the politics they have known. They look back to Muhammad’s temporal rule in Arabia in the 17th century, and ‘rightly guided Caliphs’, whose regimes ensured, as the perfect model for state – craft today – even though their societies have been uprooted from the agricultural, nomadic, tribal world of the prophets.¹⁶

Moslems extremists in Africa, Middle East and even in the former Soviet States prefer that same model of society which had existed since the time of prophet Muhammad himself, where everything ought to be the way Allah ordered. And no deviations are to be tolerated! For these crusaders, democracy is apostasy. In a simple language what they advocate is the ‘**Government of God**’.

Islamic messianism

The establishment of God’s kingdom on earth is yet an unfulfilled prophecy. There is renewed faith in Islamic messianism as in Judaism Shi’ite Moslems content that Muhammad’s spiritual authority was passed to his cousin and son-in-law, Ali and certain of his direct descendants who were known as “**Imans**”. Most Iranian Shi’ites believe that Ali’s 12th successor who disappeared mysteriously in 878 is still alive and will return one day as the **Mahdi** (*the divinely appointed guide*), a **Messiah** – like – leader, who will establish God’s kingdom on earth.¹⁷

Whether all shi’ites believe their messianic expectation has found fulfillment in Iran’s revolution and in **Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeine** is an open question.

The implications of the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth are great. It is a frightening event and there is no doubt that governments

with substantial Moslem population will continue to fight tooth and nail to keep strong Islamic movements in check, often with constant harassment and arrests of fundamentalists and radicals. The story is almost the same everywhere – in **Syria, Tunisia, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Nigeria**. It is not only the Christian Churches that should be scared; secular regimes have as much to fear about religious radicals. Steps must be taken to restrain the activities of religious fanatics. In **Syria and Iraq** the secular governments are always ready to crush every manifestation of Islamist zeal. The governments of **Egypt and Jordan** have tried a dual strategy of appeasement and suppression.¹⁸

But there may be a limit to these measures to curb the activities of Moslem fundamentalists. In **Turkey** Islam is a potent force and religious violence between the dominant Sunni Moslems and the **Alevis, a Shi'ite sect** was said to have injected a dangerous new element into the country's chronic political instability, as political opportunists try to capitalize on religious rancour. In the former **Soviet Union**, it is estimated that by the year **2000**, there will be about **100 million** Moslems compared with an estimated **150 million** Russians. Observers see the Moslems of the former **U.S.S.R.** as constituting a demographic time bomb. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the death of communism, it is clear that some fresh air has been let into the hitherto suffocating religious movements. Although not yet in power, it is believed that the Islamic extremists in the former Soviet States are eager to press for the **'Government of God'**.

The establishment of 'Government of God' on earth has grave consequences for political leadership in Moslem dominated regimes, as well as for members of other religious bodies. It may not always be easy to discover God's will here and now, and especially as regards major world events, touching both Moslems and non-Moslems alike.

The implications of Moslem fundamentalism are too grave for Christianity world wide. In the olden days, prophets and messengers of God were few, though some were identified as 'false prophets', there were established criteria for identification of the **Voice of God**. These days, self-proclaimed messengers of God, prophets, visionaries, preachers, apostles and dreamers abound. One may arise from a desert suburb with a strange message from God, ordering that military campaigns be organized to exterminate unwilling followers and overthrow uncompromising governments. There, lies the problem of

identifying the one who has been truly sent and what the message was. In Africa, Christianity has to find an answer to the growing Islamic expansionist campaigns. Whether to fight for its own survival or to strive for **co-existence**, there is need to create awareness among African Christians of the consequences of the Islamic revivalist movements.

Islam instills fear

Many non-Moslems, particularly those living in the predominately Moslem areas of Africa and the Middle East resent their Moslem neighbors as blood thirsty villains, merciless mobs, as hook-nosed treacherous sadists. This is as a result of the amount of violence and destruction, in human and material resources which these non-believers suffer at the hands of their Moslem neighbours at the least provocation. The killings are massive, Churches and religious articles are set ablaze, residential buildings and cars are burnt to ashes. Sometimes religious riots offer opportunities to Moslem fundamentalists and puritans to locate and destroy hotel and liquor shops with the express justification that such buildings and places are unholy to the Moslems. Perhaps that was the reason why the Moslem Student's Society, **MSS**, during one of the religious riots in Nigeria burnt the 100,000 naira – wooden sculpture of the Risen Christ at the University of Ibadan Chapel of the Resurrection.

The woes of non-believers are too many to recount. Christians of Southern Sudan, Northern Nigeria Moslem dominated areas live in fear and talk of **molestations, discriminations, persecutions, ostracism** – in short non-Moslems are despised and regarded as incomplete human beings. Phenomena and events identified with Islamic expansionism instill fear into non-Moslems. These include **jihād, sharia, Moslem brotherhood, organization of Islamic conference and others**. Even institutions bearing Islamic and Arab names equally instill fear into non-Moslems – **Arab bank, Institute of Islamic studies, koranic schools, mosques and hajj**.

Authors, experts on Islamic affairs, journalists and even world leaders are not left out of the groups of non-Moslems who dread Islam and frightening activities of Islamic fundamentalists. Authors and commentators are careful when writing and speaking on Islamic matters for fear of receiving a death-sentence as a result of possible blasphemy against what Islam stand for, against Allah, his prophet and the holy book. The **Rushdie affair** is a pointer and warning to westerners in

particular who might choose to write or speak about the Islamic religion without 'due reverence'. While Christians, in their look-warm attitude to their religion, might feel unconcern about 'blasphemous utterances' against Jesus, the Father or the Holy Spirit (or the Trinity), the mother of Christ and the Saints, it is not so with the Moslems. Moslems on their part will go to any length commit resources – human, material and financial, to avenge any insult or disrespect meted to their religion or religious personalities.

Offence committed against one Moslem nation attracts condemnation and the wrath of Moslem brothers – world wide. Reprisals against the offending nations, perhaps terrorist activities and assassinations can be feared. Collective measures to redress injustices or offenses against an Islamic nation include **oil embargo, high-jacking of aircraft, kidnapping and violent demonstrations**. 'Islam judges, Islam protects, Islam urges resistance when there is injustice', an Egyptian university student was quoted as affirming.¹⁹ Ayatollah Khomeini, the late leader of Iran's revolution summarizes the 'Charter of Islamic universal brotherhood: *"We Moslems are one family even-though we live under different governments and in various rgimes."*²⁰ The same concept is reiterated by Sheik Ahmed Zaki, once the Saudi minister of petroleum; *"The real force of Islam is the feeling that you belong to brotherhood with the obligation to serve that brotherhood and thereby serve God"*.²¹

Images of violence mark almost the entire history of Moslem religion up to the modern era. Islam and the rest of the world seem to be in the state of perpetual conflict. But so far Islam has fought successfully to preserve its ideological integrity in the Mongol invaders, western crusaders and more recently Christian imperialists. The **battle** however continues. It is however not the type of **battle**, one may find its definition and shades of meaning from the dictionary. Explaining what Islam means Rahman Doi has this to say:

The word Islam also means submission – to the commands and will of Allah. And true submission to Allah can be achieved through boundless faith in Allah which becomes the basis of a Moslem action. Islam demands action or practice without which the theoretical belief is meaningless.²²

As Rahman explains further, the life of Moslem in this world is not a mere waste of time. He is a **Muyahid (warrior)** against evil.²³ The key concepts are **faith** and **war**. It may be necessary here for us to consider some of the implications of these key concepts in Islam to help us in our analysis or evaluation of the Moslem – Christian relationship in Africa.

Islamic Exclusivism

The summary of all that a Moslem has to learn about his religion's creed (ideas and thoughts about God) and his relationship to the world, is embodied in the two words **Iman** and **Islam**. **Iman**, which appears many times in the Koran is usually interpreted as '**belief or faith** and embodies belief in God and his attributes, the prophets and their virtues, the angels, the sacred books, the day of the resurrection and **Qadar** or (**predestination**). Whoever believes in these **six parts of the Islamic faith** is called **Mu'min**, i.e. **believer**, and whoever denies these parts or any of them is called **Kafir**, i.e. **Unbeliever**. Islam, means complete dedication and submission to God. There are other teachings which a Moslem has to observe, as well as keep the **creed of his faith**, the elements of which are embodied in **Iman**.

As in the **Yahwist Religion (Hebrew religion or Judaism)** and **Christianity**, followers or adherents accept their religion as divinely revealed through God's messenger. In Yahwist Religion, Moses was considered the founder and propagator of monotheism; Christ was the founder of Christianity. Moslems believe that Muhammad was the last and the greatest of all the prophets. The revealed truths which he propagated were binding on all and sundry. As Muhammad Abdul Rauf expounds in his book '**Islam – Faith and Devotions**', "Muhammad's message is global and universal. It appeals and applies to all mankind, to his contemporaries and to all succeeding generations, regardless of color, place or tongue."²⁴

Reinforcing the above statements, the author insists:

Muhammad's message is therefore eternal. It has replaced all past religions; and Muhammad is the last and the seal of the noble series of the prophets. Moslems are urged to invite others to consider and to accept – if they are persuaded – the

faith of Islam. The desire to spread our faith is because it is the surest measure towards peace, progress and happiness to all mankind.²⁵

From the above assertions, it follows, in the first instance that other religions have no place in the world religious community, including of course, Christian religion, with a population of about 1.4 billion or about a third of world population. Excluded also from Islamic world community are over 583 million Hindus and about 275 million Buddhists, not to mention the adherents of traditional religion and members of other minor religious bodies.

As the contributor to the debate on **Christianity – the Challenge of Islam**, rightly observes the idea of **community** and **brotherhood** as conceived by Islam is alien to Christian concept and peace. “In clear contradiction to the Christian concept of the universal brotherhood of all men, Islam believes, in the brotherhood of believers. These believers are members of a single universal nation with no boundaries, a nation commissioned by Allah, to promote Islam, to promote what is right and suppress what is wrong.”²⁶

A close look at the Islamic world view as elucidated by its theologians may help us understand clearly how Moslems regard non-believers in Islam. Human race is divided into **Three States or Houses**.²⁷

The House of Islam (Dura Islam), which is also the nation of Islam, is one and inseparable, throughout the world and can only be under Moslem leadership. In such a state, it is anathema to have a non-Moslem as a leader. Where a non-Moslem, by any accident, carries out coup d’etat takes over rulership in the state, Moslems are enjoined to pray to Allah for forgiveness.

The House of the Protected (Dar-al-dhimma): In this House are included Christians and Jews (people of the book), the Shabbians and Zoroastrians (mujus). Collectively, the Jews and Christians are referred to as *people of the Book* (Koran 22:17). These can exist, provided they understand, appreciate and accept that when they live in countries with Moslem population – they must live under Moslem

leadership and under some conditions. They may never seek to rule, as this will be high treason. Secondly they must pay certain taxes for their protection; thirdly they must not wage war against Islam or join enemies of Moslem communities. Lastly they should not try to evangelize or convert Moslems to their faith while permitting themselves to be converted to Islam.

The House of war (Dar-al-darb): Under the third and last subdivision of the people of the world of Islam are the traditional religionists, agnostics and all other non-Christians and non-Moslems of the world who do not fall into the hands of the protected. Islam refers to these people as the enemies of Allah. They are with no rights and privileges in the world. They are **infidels**. Islam enjoins Moslems who may have dealings with these people to invite them to accept Islam. Where they refuse to embrace Islam it is *death to the infidel*.

If we consider the second group or House, in which Christians are located, certain truths emerge. As odd these provisions of what looks like a covenant between the vanquished non-Moslems and their Moslem over-Lords may sound, it is a clear evidence of what constitutes the Islamic view point of *peaceful –co –existence*. The covenant prescriptions are really not new as they operate in many nations including African nations where Moslems dominate the political and economic scene of the state. Christians of Nigeria are also people of the Book, and have a common fate prescribed for them by Islam. The renowned **Covenant of Umar** with the conquered Christians of Syria serve as a model and in most cases operate in Nigerian. It is attributed to Othman Dan Fodio, the great Moslem Jihadist who conquered large chunks of Northern Nigeria.²⁸ The covenant contain all shameful restrictions to freedom of religious worship as far as non-Moslems, and certainly Christian minorities are concerned. It portrays what Moslems mean when they talk of *pace and co-existence*.²⁹

The infidels and triumph of Islam

Moslems generally pray for the day “*when Islam will prevail and triumph*”. But how this triumph of Islam will be accomplished is the big

question. Some provisions are made in the Koran. But the tyranny of the religious intolerance, illustrated by experiences of Christians in Moslem – dominated areas of the world is sure proof of the unavoidable tragedy. As far as Moslems are concerned, the enthronement of God's government must be achieved damn the consequences. Islamic proselytism is really pursued by **force** rather than **persuasion**. Often violence and intimidation are the only option to dialogue and negotiations; and this is inherent in the Islamic holy war ideology. The Islamic fundamentalists are ever ready to perpetrate atrocities against those they refer to as **infidels** and these atrocities range from wanton destruction of property, including Churches and residential buildings to massacre of innocent people.

According to Islamic faith any evil perpetrated against infidels carries a big reward in paradise. Thus Ayotalla Khomeini, would directly apply some perverse concept of crime and punishment when he summoned Moslems all over the world to get the head of the author of the controversial book – *The Satanic Verses* – **Salman Rushdie**. For most Moslem jihadists infidels should accept Islam or be eliminated. This hatred and death to-non Moslems, is of course entrenched in the Koran:

Oh you who believe take not the Jews and Christians for friends. They are friends to one another, he among you who taketh them for friends is one of them. Believers, do not make friends with anyone rather than your own people (Moslems). They deserve nothing but ruin. Their hatred is clear from what they say but violence is the hatred which their breast conceal (5.54, 3:118).

'Supremacy' of Islam and the cult of intolerance

As far as Moslems are concerned, the supremacy of the religion founded by prophet Muhammad is to be contested. This concept is embedded in the Islamic teaching that Islam has replaced all past religions and Muhammad is the last seal of the noble series of the prophets. Therefore, neither Judaism, nor Christianity nor any other religion has any place in the world. They all must give way to Islam, which must flourish. But the little mercy that can be shown to non-believers apart from mass destruction is relegation to the status of *Second Class Citizenship*. There can be no equality of status therefore between Islam and Christianity and

there are many Moslems who believe that, even in the nations where Moslems are in the minority, Christians are bound to accept Moslem leadership. For Moslem ideologists, a good Moslem cannot choose a non-Moslem as a leader unless by the use of force.

Seeking to expand and perhaps triumph over other religions, thus maintain uncontested stronghold everywhere, Islam resists the presence of Christianity or its expansion. No one should therefore be surprised at the outbreak of religious riots here and there and the rising tension on the relationship between Christians and Moslems. Surely for many years, Islam had flourished in some parts of Africa, including Nigeria and the presence of Christianity was not felt. Christians were few, marginalized and passive. But with the penetration of Christianity into many parts of Northern Nigeria, including the Moslem dominated areas, naturally there was bound to be trouble. Moslems were to challenge the bold approaches of the Christian mission and try to put a stop to it by all means. Troubles and riots are bound to increase, particularly now that most Christians have been sensitized and are no more passive to the political – religious events in their country. As Christian fundamentalists take up arms to challenge their Moslem counterparts, the struggle for religious supremacy can be bloody. Moslems are not ready to tolerate any other neither religion nor challenge to its sole authority and domination. Some of them express their dissatisfaction and displeasure in the form of religious violence.

Their fear and resentment against the spread of Christianity in the North of Nigeria started as far back as early 1900, and the hostile attitude of Moslem leaders and the emirs was well recorded. They registered strong protests against the establishment of Christianity in the North. It was reported that when Christian mission from Sudan entered **Zaria** and **Kano** (1820 – 1892), a hostile reception greeted their arrival. The emir of Kano sent the following message to the missionaries:

We do not want you, you can go, I give you three days to prepare one hundred donkeys to carry your loads back to Zaria and we never wish to see you here again.³⁰

Christian missionaries had since long been “*personae non gratae*” in Moslem dominated parts of Northern Nigeria. Where ever they succeed in establishing any presence, expansion into the hinterland was slow or

entirely impossible. Violent resistance to Christianity, has however remained the order of the day in Nigeria and many a time police and the army have to be called in to restore peace. But whatever efforts Christians make to propagate their religion and assert their right in a country where freedom of worship is enshrined in the nation's constitution. It is evident that Christianity has been relegated to a second class status in Nigeria and in many other nations of Africa. Their religious intolerance, superiority complex and discrimination against Christians manifest itself in various ways, in discrimination in employment opportunities, education and provision of social amenities, imposition of Islamic culture and language. As it stands, we may arrive at a stage when the indispensable qualification for citizenship in African countries will be 'being a Moslem'.

Islamic supremacy syndrome manifests itself greatly in government appointments and employment opportunities. Most of the important ministerial posts in both federal and state levels in Nigeria are occupied by Moslems – whether in civilian or military regimes.

As for employment, non-Moslem Nigerians living in the North are simply 'strangers' in their own countries. Preference is usually given to Moslems from the Middle East, Pakistan, Turkey India and Sudan. Where, for example, in education, the services of more qualified and competent Christian southerners may be preferred, Moslems from foreign countries get jobs easily. If Southerners are to receive any attention, they are made to sign bonds and are employed on contract basis. They can be dismissed or replaced when suitable Moslem substitutes are available.

Education

Generally in education, there is discrimination against Christian and non-indigenes of Northern states at all levels, both in admissions and services. The troubles in schools in Kaduna state in 1989 were sparked off by the discriminatory attitude of the government of that state while reviewing school fees in Kaduna state. According to government directive, non-indigenes, comprising mostly Christians were to pay higher amount than their Moslem counterparts. Elsewhere in the North, where education is free, non-indigenes, once again Christians are made to pay heavily or their children would not be admitted in school. Medical treatment and the enjoyment of other social amenities follow the same discriminatory trend.

Moslem leaders in Nigeria find reasons to justify their discriminatory attitude in favour of the Moslems. Christian education and Christian missionaries are blamed for Moslem backwardness in education, especially during the pre-independent period. A Moslem scholar and a one time federal minister of education in the Babangida regime heaped the blame on the early missionary methodology in his much quoted book 'History of Education in Nigeria':

Moslem education in Nigeria was retarded not because the Moslems were unprogressive or because their religion was opposed to formal education, but because 'education' in those days tended to mean Bible Knowledge, Christian Ethics, Christian moral instruction, Christian literature, some Arithmetic, language and crafts – all geared to produce Christians who could read the Bible. When the Christian missions started converting animists and a few Moslems, the majority of Moslem parents barred their children attending the 'free Christian schools' for fear of conversion³¹

Since then efforts have been made to build Moslem schools to compete with Christian mission schools in number and quality. But this does not seem to have solved the problems of the worried Moslem educationists. Many strategies were brought into the scene to achieve the desired objectives. One of these was instrumental to the government's take-over of mission and voluntary agency schools at the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970. Long before that action was taken, Moslem educationists had suggested a long term measure for equalizing or leveling up for the educational imbalance between Christian and Moslem schools. Babs Fafunwa had said in his book;

Without labouring the point, the most effective solution would be for all Nigerian school to become secular and citizen oriented for they {the Christian missionaries} have failed in the last one hundred years to produce Nigerians and the sooner all these schools direct their attention to this issue the better. But they cannot successfully do so until all the children are completely free from religious bias.³²

The Moslem programme or strategy has not stopped at ‘equalizing’ or ‘leveling up’ of standards. ‘Education for all Moslems’, has become the slogan. By all means education must be extended to all Moslems wherever they live or work, whether they want it or not. It must be forced down their throats if they are unwilling to cooperate. This is what **Nomadic Education** is all about, a project master-minded by Moslem scholars. By this programme, Moslems wherever they are fishing in the deep waters of Sokoto or Katsina or Kaduna river or wandering about the desert or green pastures with their cattle; these nomads must be pursued with blackboards, slates, books, pencils and chalk and other writing materials and other teaching aids. They must learn reading, writing and the Koran. Millions of Naira have been poured into this project, whether the goal justifies the means or not.

Imposition of Islamic culture

Another area in which Moslems try to demonstrate the ‘supremacy’ of Islam over Christian religion is in culture. In Nigeria, for example, the dominating structures of Islamic art and culture are evident of this reality in Nigeria’s big cities. The ubiquitous Islamic artistic structures greet new comers to the city of Abuja, the Nigerian new capital city. This in particular has provoked protests from many non-Moslems of Nigeria, including the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy and leaders of other Christian denominations. The building of mosques in public squares, airports and in government grounds and office premises, even in the deep Christian areas and hinterland speak for themselves. Many non-Moslems are worried and it sets one thinking about the intentions of our leaders and Moslem brothers. The deep involvement of government in religious affairs in Nigeria is a cause for alarm to all who cherish freedom of worship and secular government.

Arabic and Islamic studies receive wide coverage in school curriculum, from primary to tertiary level of education in our country. Not much is done to promote the rich cultural heritage of other ethnic groups or religious bodies in Nigeria. A worried observer has this to say in this regard:

Thus, by the factor of that language and Islamic religion that Dan Fodio imposed on the Hausas, they accepted situation in Nigeria today is to regard the North, a region of several

ethnic groups, including Kanuris, Fulanis, Hausas, Nupes and others as one ethnic groups.³³

The Shari' a

There is no other Islamic imposition of its way of life, culture and creed on non Moslems that has generated as much controversy everywhere as the Sharia issue. In Nigeria, the introduction of Sharia laws into the country's legal institution as well as the story of Nigeria's membership of the organization of Islamic conference has been fought against with tremendous ferocity by all and sundry – Christians and non-Christians, atheists and as well as agnostics. Moslem leaders press for the extension of sharia laws into Southern Nigeria.

Modern society as well as Christianity tolerates Islam and promotes dialogue and co-existence and up till this point peace reigns. Christianity, however does not tolerate Sharia laws and imposition of Islamic law on Christians and on other religious minorities. This is seen as unwarranted encroachment on fundamental human rights. There comes the parting of ways. Sharia divides. But the basic question is, 'whether a newly assertive Islam can accommodate dissent, as well as approach other cultures with greater self-confidence. This will continue to worry much of the world. Sharia, is define as "*The Way or Road in the religion of Muhammad, which God has established for the guidance of his people both for the worship of God and for the duties of life*".³⁴

The operational word here is the **Way**, and it denotes the part or road someone has to follow. On the context of Islam, it is the part that Allah has ordained to be followed by every Moslem in order to earn his pleasure and to avoid his wrath in this world, as well as in the world after.³⁵ Sharia, many commentators and Islamic scholars insist is wider than its technical or classical definition of law. Sharia, therefore is not only a set of codified laws governing the outward conduct of the Moslem. Beyond that, it is a life principle that gives him a world view, a moral value and a conscience. Sharia is the spirit that gives life to the religion of Islam, the life force that fashions all facets of our life.³⁶

In all its ramifications therefore, sharia should be seen as the only law of Islam. It is changeless for all times, because it is *revealed by Allah*, who is himself changeless. All peoples, cultures, prevailing circumstances and traditions, must adapt themselves to its dictates, since

Islam does not recognize dichotomies such as culture, politics and religion.

Can the Shari's laws-the austere dictates of Islamic law function in a multi democracy? Certainly not. But it can, in full-fledged Islamic regimes, where everything ought to be the way Allah ordered, where no deviations can be tolerated. Presented therefore, as a way of total life for Moslems, without doubt its applications and operations will clearly infringe on the rights of non-Moslems and Christians. Moslem jurists and theologians assert that a society that fails to operate the dictates of sharia, no matter how concentrated the Moslem population in that society is, is considered 'un-Islamic'.

One understands then why Moslem leaders generally do not regard Christian protests and resistance to sharia as justifiable. In most cases these reactions from non-Moslems are ignored as the march toward 'islamization' is pursued with relentless vigour. Devout Moslems are expected to observe the sharia, 'the path to follow', based on the Koran, the deeds and the sayings of Muhammad and the consensus of Islamic scholars and jurists, the sharia is not the compilation of criminal and civil codes of law, but a complex, all-embracing code of ethics, morality and religions duties. It is a sophisticated system of jurisprudence that summarizes 14,000 years of experience and constantly adapts, in subtle ways in new circumstances.³⁷

Because of its importance to Moslems all over the world, including the Nigerian Moslems, the Federal Government of Nigeria had to intervene during the Constituent Assembly debate on the sharia in 1978. Moslems had demanded the incorporation of sharia into the Nigerian constitution. But then when the Constituent Assembly rejected an attempt to accede to this demand by the Moslems, violence erupted even on the floor of the Assembly. At the end, Moslem members of the Assembly staged a walk-out and boycott of the Assembly proceedings, thereby leaving the Christians and traditional religionists and the rest of the non-Moslems members of the Constituent Assembly to finish the task before the body. Truly the sharia controversy has proved intractable and still very much a thorn in the flesh of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. "In the Western eyes", observes an expert in Islamic studies, "sharia all too often is denigrated as a relic of the dark ages. Some of its provisions do seem awe-somely harsh".³⁸ Many examples abound:

- **habitual thieves are punished by having a hand cut-off**
- **adulterers are either scourged or stoned to death;**
- **falsely accusing a woman of adultery calls for 80 lashes;**
- **80 lashes for a Moslem caught drinking alcohol;**
- **80 lashes for those who bear false witness**

There are so many other types of punishment under the harsh provision of sharia law, though some of them have loop-holes arising from strict or liberal interpretations by Islamic courts. Definitely some of these penal codes have their counterparts in the western legal tradition, but beyond that, the threat of the sharia is usually more severe than the reality. The Catholic Church's Code of Canon Law have legal provisions regulating the moral life of Christians and its institutions as well as Catholics' relationship and association with others. But Christianity may not interfere in the 'internal affairs' of Moslems with laws made to guide and regulate moral lives of the 'house of Islam'. But it rejects its provisions and operations when Christians are subjected to provisions of the sharia. Most of the provisions of the sharia laws run counter to the provisions of the New Law of Christ and Christian precepts.

As Danjuma Byand, points out in the sharia controversy in Nigeria:

The real issue here is not whether or not Moslems should have sharia courts to determine their personal matters, but on whether such courts should be established and run with public funds. One thing we have to understand is that sharia courts are religious courts that apply purely religious laws to try personal matters. No non-Moslem has any objection to the Moslems expressing their faith by means of sharia. But the demand based on the existing situation in which our scarce resources are channeled to help propagate the practice of only one religious faith, is both unconstitutional and unjust.³⁹

Section 10 of the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria prohibits any government either at the Federal or the State level, to adopt (or patronize) any religion as state religion to the neglect of other religions. As Danjuma explains further, the intention of this section of the Constitution is not to prevent

government officials from practicing their religion, or to blind-fold them to the significance of the role of religion in nation building. The intention, which is based on the fact of Nigeria's religious plurality, is to ensure that government does not officially patronize one religious group to the detriment of other faiths.⁴⁰ Certainly, the Catholic Church runs its ecclesiastical courts and tribunals for its members and its institutions. Government has no hands in the Church's affairs.

One of the fundamental differences between the Sunni Moslems and the shi'ites arises from the shi'ites interpretation of the sharia. The shi'ites entertain **messianic hope** that someday a messiah – like figure will appear to establish God's kingdom on earth and usher in a new dawn for the Islamic people. In Iran, where radical Islam calls for harsh code of behaviour, it is to be noted that although some of the Islamic favour stirred up by the Ayatollah Khomeini had faded since his death in 1989, but the reformist regime set up after him is still warring against earthly corruption. Government opponents, drug dealers, 'apostates' and criminals are put to death and hundreds are regularly whipped, stoned or have their limbs cut off for various offenses. According to Time's report (January 31, 1994), under pressure from human rights groups. Tehran recently reprieved a Christian pastor who was about to be executed for converting to Christianity 40 years ago. The good news is that **Mehdi Dibaji**, 59, is finally free and no longer faces death penalty. He had been imprisoned for nearly 10 years, charged with **changing religion, insulting Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and 'espionage'**. The bad news is that Dibaji whose Assemblies of God Church is based Springfield, Missouri, is still under investigation. The probable charge according to human rights experts, is still 'espionage', a catchall category that has been used by Iranian authorities to get rid of the people the regime dislikes. Moslems insist that sharia must be introduced into secular legal systems. They believe that it will curb evils associated with modernization which include the breakdown of family structure, the lowering of moral standards, the appeals of easy-going secular life-style. The old political orders that have prevailed in Moslem societies for decades – in many cases, since independence from colonial rule – are incurring severe public dissatisfaction. But moderate Moslems take fright at the spectacle of agitators for political legitimacy founded in the Koran and in religious traditions. It was noted that the main rival Mujahadin factions that battled for power in Afghanistan agreed on little except on

the establishment of shari'a.⁴¹ "Across Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, Islam is exciting millions – and when that translates into political power, the result can be harsh codes of behaviour that so far have been moderated little if at all.⁴² The application of sharia laws in secular institutions where civil law operates will not augur well for non-Moslems. 'Freedom of religion', says Agostino Cassaroli, one time Vatican Secretary of State, while addressing the 45th session of the United Nations' Committee, meeting in Geneva, 30th January to 10th March 1989, 'Is a true civil and social liberty which must be guaranteed by each and every political system.'⁴³ "Life and Freedom of Religion are basic human rights", asserts the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II in his address to the Plenary Assembly of the pontifical Commission for social communications, 24th February 1989.

It is the inability or unwillingness of the Moslems to accept this fundamental human right that constitutes religious intolerance in the domain of faith and beliefs. The implications are disastrous. And as Victor Chukwulozie, an expert in Islamic affairs rightly points out, "the establishment of the shair'a court by the government with State powers and funded by the State means that Islam is indirectly accepted as the 'right religion' of the state of the federation. The Constitutional provisions for the sharia court go against the secular nature of the State and the principles of democracy in a pluralistic society".⁴⁴ For these and other reasons, Chukwulozie recommended that sharia should expunge from the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Some of the following examples serve as danger sign-post if sharia laws were allowed to operate in a multi-party democracy. In **Pakistan**, it was reported that the nation's entire foreign and domestic trading and financial apparatus was threatened by a religious court decision. The Islamic judges, it was reported ruled that a draft of laws that sanctioned the charging of interests on loans were invalid because they contradicted koranic teachings against usury. The embarrassed government only hoped that the secular Supreme Court would overturn the finding of the Islamic court.⁴⁵ But what is a secular court, man-made legal system before the 'divinely established court', whose dictates, systems and operations are revealed by God!

The above incident punctured the argument often brought up by Moslem leaders in favour of sharia laws, namely that sharia is for Moslems alone and will not necessarily affect non-Moslems! Naturally, it

is impossible for sharia not to affect non-Moslems, since Moslems do live in isolation in a special vacuum. It is a common knowledge and experience that members of the same family, village and State, hold different religious convictions. Moslems and non-Moslems engage in business enterprises, buy and sell together. They also inter-marry and may belong to the same social clubs and meetings. And so it is practically unrealistic to talk of sharia not affecting non-Moslems.

The Islamic Penal Code of Justice: Lessons from the Satanic Verses

The publication of the book the ‘Satanic Verses’, by the Indian –born Salman Rushdie, and the ensuing controversies about the book have some relevance in our present discussions. The book is said to be a work of fiction, a production of Rushdie’s fertile imagination and may not be treated as a source material for research into Islamic history and theology. But the controversies which the book generated in both Moslem and non-Moslem world were enough to attract the attention of every agnostics and non-believers. It may not be enough to dismiss the matter as a family squabble between the Islamic revivalists and fundamentalists and the ‘infidel’, Rushdie who was given an award of death sentence without trial. The matter is larger than that and has many implications for other religious bodies, not least for Christianity. It calls for vigilance on the part of those who have Moslems as their next door neighbours. It should evoke vigilance on other part of government and secular and even Islamic, or religious leader world-wide, to check the activities of religious fanatics within their confines.

Penalty for the offence

Let us consider the punishment meted out to Rushdie. In the first place, there didn’t seem to be any option for the punishment which was said to be a blasphemy and apostasy. The death sentence, pronounced by the Iran’s spiritual leader had no option of fine, e.g. there was no possible commutation to life imprisonment. No apologies would be entertained, for the Ayatollah affirmed that even if Rushdie turned today and repented and became the most pious man on earth, he most still die a violent death and sent to hell. Nobody should be surprised that according to sharia blasphemy and apostasy are punishable by death. And also according to

shari'a's penal law, offence against the person, from homicide to assault are punishable by retaliation. No dialogue. No apologies. No need for repentance!

In the *Satanic Verses affair*, not only the author is condemned to death; also to die and be sent to hell were the publishers of the book, sellers, buyers, newspaper editors and journalists, including newscasters, who did not condemn the book or write articles and commentaries in defense of the 'infidel' and his book! Included too, in the long list of 'infidels' condemned to death were heads of Government or their representatives who failed to support Khomeini's death sentence or ban the book from their countries' bookshops. The story could be too long for Rushdie's sin did not stop at blasphemy against Islam and the prophet. All the Islamic Imans and the cleric in this connection are 'sacrosanct', for any careless reference to them by anybody could earn the one a death penalty.

In Nigeria, February 1987, was it not the misinterpretation of certain koranic verses by one Rev. Abubakar Bello in a lecture during the Christian revival week at the College of Education Kafanchan that sparked off one of the worst religious violence in Northern Nigeria that spread with tragic consequences? It was clearly the type of Moslem-Christian conflict that has root in religious intolerance, violence and intimidation. Osagie Jacobs, writing in the Guardian Newspaper of the 15th April 1989 on the 'value of heresy' that exposes the type of Moslem hypocrisy, an attitude devoid of simple fundamental charity; 'do unto others as you would like them do unto you'. Osagie observed that one king Faisal laureate (in the category of the late Abubakar Gumi of Nigeria) – one Ahmed Deetat of Durban, South Africa has once attempted to make nonsense of the Christian doctrine of the **Holy Trinity**. All the insults and blasphemies against Christian teachings were supported and acclaimed by Moslems. The blasphemy was even rewarded for insulting Christians and making mockery of one of the key foundations of their faith. Ahmed Deetat's 3000 copies of his book and lectures in video cassettes were said to be available in almost every bookshop in Kaduna, Nigeria. The book with information that the bible is not the word of God was published and distributed by the Islamic publication bureau whose parent body recommended to the government of Nigeria to ban the 'satanic verse' from circulation in Nigeria.

Judging from the controversies over the ‘satanic verses’, if Ayatollah’s approach was to be entrenched the tendency would be a pattern to emerge which enable every pastor, cleric, shaman or iman, who happens to command a following to thereby appropriate the power to exercise judicial functions in any country of the world, outside his domain. What would happen to the idea of peaceful co-existence even between Moslem states themselves, if every man who can raise a following decided that he could pass a death sentence upon whom so ever the ire of treason falls. That would be a dangerous precedent, for clearly anarchy would reign. At any rate, if the scriptures were to be allowed to overrun the law of any nation, it ought to be based on consent enshrined in the law of the given nation.

Of recent it had been reported from **Pakistan** that the author of a children’s book faces a possible death penalty on the gallows for writing a parable seen as attacking Islamic laws. There may be many other “Rushdies” in hiding – accused of ‘blasphemy’. As ‘blasphemers’, **Christians** too stand condemned in hell fire for Koran prescribes such punishment for them;

They do blaspheme who say, ‘God is Christ’, the ‘Son of Mary!’ But sad Christ, Oh children of Israel. Worship God, my Lord and your God. Whoever joins other gods with God, God will forbid him the garden and the fire will be his abode. (Qur’an Ch. 5, v. 72)

Sharia controversy still looks an open fresh wound in Nigeria. Government’s manipulation of the issue, banning further debates on it, thus making the issues a ‘no-go zone’ shows the seriousness of the matter and at the same time proves and confirms the apprehension of Christians. **“Sudan shelves sharia in step towards peace”**, was a headline news in the Nigerian Guardian Newspaper of April 13th 1989. The report went on “The Constituent Assembly in Khartoum met a principal demand of rebels in the South of the country by voting to suspend debate on the implementation of sharia law throughout Sudan”. The vote, it was said came as set back for the opposition national Islamic front whose fundamentalist Moslem supporters want the sharia fully applied across the country. Although the above report has long been overtaken by events, the Sudanese situation may have to be a reference point for those

African States who are bent on introducing the sharia into the multi-party democracies, or those who have sympathy for Islamic radical movements. Secular regimes have as much to fear from religious radicals. Middle East secular governments, including Algeria, Tunisia, Syria, Iraq and others are apprehensive of further set backs on their attempts to keep Moslem radicals and fundamentalists as bay; for the saying it true to reality: *“Only fools rush in where angels fear to tread”*.

ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE (O.I.C) CONTROVERSIES

Another area of conflict between the Moslems and Christians, in which peaceful co-existence has been threatened is well illustrated by the O.I.C. controversy in Nigeria. Like the sharia, OIC is a house-hold word in Nigeria today. Truly, apart from the sharia issue there is no other debate that has attracted the attention of all and sundry that has generated ill-feelings among Moslems and Christians in Nigeria than the OIC controversies. The implications of the alleged Nigeria joining the organization of Islamic conference have been widely and deeply analyzed by the press, jurists, experts in Islamic studies and international affairs as well as by Christians and other non-Moslems alike. Opponents of the venture were convinced that it was totally wrong to change Nigeria's hitherto observer status to full membership. Each party in the conflict had plausible arguments to present.

For Moslems, there were no sinister motives on the part of government and the Moslem leaders who initiated the venture. As Christians feared, they argued, it was no attempt to assert the supremacy of one religion over the other. It has a harmless venture! Extracts from the address of the president of the Republic of Nigeria and the commander in Chief of Armed Forces, at Abuja, Nigeria's capital on the 3rd February 1986, presented at the inaugural meeting of the committee on the Nigeria's membership of the OIC, elucidated the government/Moslems motives. The committee which was composed of both Moslem and Christian representatives as well as government representatives was set up to examine the implications of Nigeria's membership of that organization as controversies over the issue were ragging. The government/Moslem stand on the issue can be summarized thus:

- i. The central objective of the OIC is the fostering of cooperation and friendship among countries with Moslem population, no matter how small;
- ii. Other important objectives cover cooperation in wide field of activities; economic, cultural, technical and diplomatic cooperation; promotion of international peace, the eradication of racism and colonialism and the promotion of understanding among member states;
- iii. The organization's business is strictly international cooperation and the struggle for economic development and self-reliance in business, which is associated too with those activities of the united nations and other agencies – FAO, UNESCO, WHO, etc.

Apart from the above advantages which members of the OIC may derive, the president of the Nigerian government put up other arguments which should convince Nigerians in general and Christians in particular, that the OIC was a harmless organization with little or no religious bias. We summarize the president's other arguments:

- i. The advantages of the OIC are obvious and many of the Nigeria's OIC sister States and neighbours are members;
- ii. Many of these African countries are secular States with substantial non-Moslem populations;
- iii. Even Christian ministers lead the delegation of several countries during the organization's conferences;
- iv. Member nations of the OIC are distinguished more by their identity as Third World Nations than by religious affinities;
- v. Nigeria did not decide to regularize its membership of the OIC as a result of pressure from Moslem leaders and fundamentalists;

- vi. It is not possible for a country like Nigeria with its multiplicity of religions to have one-state religion.

There were some other minor points which the president raised to re-assure non-Moslem community in Nigeria that the decision for Nigeria's full membership of the OIC was not ill motivated. But it proved a Herculean task to convince the suspicious Christian community of Nigeria that all was well with the OIC affair. What raise the eye-brows of most Christian leaders as well as the press was the atmosphere of **secrecy** which characterized the government's and the Islamic leaders' moves. If all was well, as the Moslems maintained, why were the plans kept secret, only to be made public by the foreign press? The reaction of the Christian leaders and the enlightened public could be summarized:

- i. **The OIC affair is part of the Moslem grand plan to Islamize Nigeria. It is equally a world – wide design rooted in Islamic culture to propagate Islamic faith and interest;**
- ii. **As far as the horrified Christian leaders were concerned, the way in which Nigeria was secretly and hurriedly smuggled into the OIC on January 9, 1986 showed in clear terms that government, already accused of showing open and committed interest in Moslem religion was solidly behind Moslem campaign to Islamize Nigeria.**
- iii. **To Islamize Nigeria, Moslems have demanded that the sharia laws should be incorporated in the constitution of the country. The membership of the OIC is a full-drawn plan to declare Nigeria an Islamic republic;**
- iv. **There had been consistent attempts to accomplish this longstanding Islamic objective – dating back to the Sokoto jihad, led by Islamic reformer and crusader, Shehu Othman Dan Fodio – cutting through the period of Sarduana of Sokoto – down to Shehu Shagari – down to Idiagbon/Buhari regime and lastly, the Babangida administration.**

Apart from the above general and summed up motives of the OIC protagonists in Nigeria, some other arguments, mainly from historical perspectives have been adduced by Christians to buttress their points, namely that the organization was established entirely for religious motives:

- i. **Right from its foundation in 1965 and its first conference, the organization had had the primary motive of uniting the Islamic and Arab theocracies for the purposes of propagating the Islamic faith.**
- ii. **Every other objective of the organization should be seen as ‘an appendage’, fruit of a later reflection, meant to attract and sustain the interest of member nations, while pursuing the Islamic religious interests.**
- iii. **Islamic solidarity among member states is the soul of its charter meant to preserve Islamic spiritual, ethical, social and economic values.**
- iv. **The extension of membership status to nations with small Moslem population is a type of bait meant to convert their leaders to Islam and thus hasten the islamization programme of the countries concerned. This is particularly true of the poor African countries who must have been attracted to the organization primarily on account of economic reasons.**

Thus “from its history, its charter and activities, as manifested in the subsidiary organs and agencies, it is abundantly clear that the OIC is in its conception, foundation, nature and operation undoubtedly Islamic. So we are dealing with ‘an organization of Islamic religion’”.⁴⁶ For most of the Christian leaders in Nigeria that was a fore-gone calculation. The reaction was a sweeping rejection of everything associated with OIC. It is an opportunity to warn the government of Nigeria – military or civilian not to meddle in religious affairs in Nigeria. In their own apprehension, the **Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (C.B.C.N)**, in a communiqué insisted that the government should strive to eschew what looked like

lop-sided involvement in the religious matters which always led to political and religious tension in the land. For the Catholic hierarchy in Nigeria it is basically wrong for government to drag an entire nation into an organization which served only the interest of the Moslems. This reaction was summed up in the press release issued by the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, declaring their stand on the OIC issue, part of which read:

The fact that secrecy and rumour eventually gave way to belated official admission that Nigeria has joined the OIC cannot but disappoint us. With the majority of Nigerians, we have come to expect openness and free debate from this government. The lack of previous debate on such a sensitive matter, either in public or in government is a blow to the trust and the hope that freedom – loving Nigerians have been led to repose in the present administration.

The bishops, however believed that all was not lost if the authorities took immediate and necessary action to repair the damage.

Now that the fact is clear after mature deliberation and having listened to the pleas of he numerous representations from Christians, non-Christians and Moslems, we have come to this inevitable conclusion; we do not and will not agree to Nigerian's membership of the OIC.

The Catholic bishops of Nigeria were not alone in expressing anxieties over the OIC adventures; thus calling for a quick termination of Nigeria's membership of the organization. The Daily Champion newspaper editorial of the 16th April 1986, shared most of the bishops' apprehensions, when it wrote:

Few issues are as controversial as the question of the Nigeria's membership of the OIC. Although such a controversy is only to be expected, given the religious heterogeneity of the country, the OIC issue has become something of an albatross for the regime. Consequently, the regime which professes protection of human rights as its

cardinal principles had become will-nilly, emerged in a climate of unprecedented religious intolerance. Never before had the political ambient become so electrified with tension as has happened following reports that Nigeria had acquired permanent membership of the OIC.

The Nigerian Daily urged president Babangida to consolidate the foundation of secularism in the Nigerian political system by withdrawing all forms of participation in, or support for religious activities. Earlier speculations were rife that the Federal Government of Nigeria at the wake of the disturbing controversies and violence over the OIC issue had taken steps to withdraw Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference. But whatever action the government had taken to reassure the disappointed Nigerians over the issue, many people agree that the controversies and all the dust raised will for long serve as a lesson for all those who like to use religion to cause trouble. It may however take long before the dust settles, as any new religious controversies and disturbances can only help to re-open old wounds.

Fear of Islamic domination will for long continue to haunt the Christians all over Africa. In most African countries there is a wide spread conviction that Islam is being treated in practice as a **State Religion** and Nigeria is under threat of an officially sponsored islamization. Christians strongly feel that the interest of Moslems are generally catered for by the government. Whereas Christian bodies in some states are denied facilities such as land on which to build their Churches, in most cases it is the government that even takes the initiative in sponsoring Moslem projects and builds mosques and koranic schools for Moslems. Such impartial treatment and often aggression against Christians and Christian bodies should be taken to account for the Christians ill-feelings against government in matters of religion and even social, cultural and political matters.

The Moslem-Christian relationship is not faring well in Nigeria's neighbouring State, **CHAD**. The balance sheet of the Christian-Moslem relationship is said to be negative. In spite of living in the same country, Moslems and Christians do not meet and the desire does not even exist. The preferential treatment given to the Moslem religion in Nigeria and in some African States obtain too in Chad, also a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Islam in Chad tends to identify

with the nation and claims privileged links with the political power and State. The unequal condition for Christianity and Islam in Chad, a condition which pervades the whole Moslem influence in Africa was summarized in a document which was the contribution to the **African Synod**. It depicts a situation in which other religions and systems have bowed to and given way to dictates of Islam:

- **The Head of State even when he was a Christian was going to the mosque to celebrate the feast of the end of the Ramadan, but he was never going to the Church.**
- **The political power finances and organizes pilgrimages to Mecca for its most docile servants; it never organizes Christian pilgrimages.**
- **The traditional Moslem law is often imposed when judging a conflict between a Moslem and a non Moslem.**
- **To swear on the Koran is considered the only serious way to swear.**
- **Chad has joined the Organization of Islamic Conference.**
- **The adoption of the Arabic language as the second official language is seen by many as a proof of a privileged link between Islam and political power.⁴⁷**

Whatever may be the actual situation in other African states, it is likely that the interest of Christianity may continue to be jeopardized as the political powers always fall into the hands of the Moslems revisionists hostile to Christian cause. With the issue of sharing and distribution of political power in most African states and religious question largely unresolved, the fear is that the political and religious problems of Africa may degenerate into Christian-Moslem confrontation. There is fear and despair and even the Western countries are not spared of this turmoil. No doubt, to some degree history magnifies this wariness. For centuries, most of the words associated in the western world with Islam have

flashed and clanged like Damascene Sword. But as James Welsh observes:

Devout Moslems are always shocked to hear that the name of their faith, which means submission to God can summon such images of violence. Odd as it may sound though religious beliefs in the strict sense play only a supporting role in the present world drama; for despite all the past vision of Saracens battling crusaders, today's momentous confrontation is not a devotional conflict but a clash between perception of reality.⁴⁸

PART TWO

THE OTHER FACES OF ISLAM

All that one may find in Islamic not always frightening or unattractive. Islam has also some beautiful or attractive faces. The official stand of the Catholic Church on dialogue with Islam has been clearly spelt out in the relevant Conciliar Documents and Papal teachings. The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious dialogue has published guidelines in this area.⁴⁹ It is important to know that Islam is; what Islam is doing and what it is trying to do. It is important to distinguish in-side Islam, different groups and ideas. Certainly not all Moslems are fanatical enemies of Christianity. Christians have a lot to learn from Moslems as they give good example with their life and fidelity to prayer.

While many non-Moslems, particularly Christians may detest Islam and denounce it on account of its **many faces dented by violence, radicalism, fundamentalism and conversion by force and conquest, and other negative characteristics** for which Islam is identified today, the religion founded by prophet Muhammad, the last messenger of Allah has some beautiful faces. Many students of religious studies and sociology admire this influential world religion, alongside its arch rivals-particularly **Christianity and Judaism**. In numerical strength, Islam compares well with **Buddhism, and Hinduism**. Literature on Islamic studies continue to increase as new areas of research open up.

Still coming second to Christianity in influence and population, the impact of Islam on the modern world has remained tremendous. It is estimated that among the 4.2 billion people of the world, about 1.4 billion, a third of the world population are Christians, 723 million Moslems, 583 million Hindus and 274 million Buddhists.⁵⁰ In strength and expansion, Confucianism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism and Traditional religion have nothing comparable to Islam to offer.

The attractive faces of Islam are many and they remain big challenges to other religions, including Christianity. The revival of Islam which has been gathering force for more than two decades, is not a child's play and Islam is not Friday-go-to-mosque kind of religion. It is

code of honour, a system of law and all encompassing way of life. Although religious observance varies somewhat from country to country and from person to person, nonetheless; to the average Moslem his faith is much more in evidence in everyday life than Christianity is to people in most western lands. On Friday, the Moslem Sabbath or Christian Sunday, life comes to a halt in the factories, in market places and in public squares. A Moslem trader will stop sales or counting of money before his numerous customers to pronounce the **Shahadah** (or confessions) and **Salah** – the five daily prayers. Any impatient customer could go away with his money or goods as the **Mallam** or the **Alhaji** will ignore all protests from non-Moslem acquaintances to fulfill that Moslem obligation to render thanks to Allah. While some non-Moslems would criticize such acts of worship by devout Moslems at ‘rush-hour’ in business as share imprudence, many others admire these followers of Muhammad.

Elsewhere men assemble their prayer rugs near an amplifier sound system, if there is no time to go inside a mosque and women frequently pray at home. Others perform the required ablutions and pray wherever they happen to be. A tennis player in white shorts will place his racket alongside the court at the sports club and say his prayers. Sellers of petroleum products at the filling station ignore the long queue of the noisy customers to perform the same act of worship. An airline steward will spread out a towel in the corridor of an aircraft to pray. Workers in the fields will remove their booths and kneel on the pieces of cardboard to pray. Numerous examples abound. Even during football matches, the referee may have to entertain the embarrassment when the players at an unusual type of agreement stop the match for a few minutes while devout Moslems say their prayers.

The Moslems attitude to worship can be captivating and really challenges Christians of all denominations. At public prayers during grand Moslem festivals often televised behold Moslems assemble in prayer from the smallest toddler to the highest government leaders, including, in most cases the Moslem executive president of the country, commissioners, directors-general, judges, businessmen, and traditional rulers. This important factor in the performance of Moslem prayers – the expression of **Common Brotherhood in Islam**, is beautifully painted by Rahman Doi:

The king and his courtier, the master and his servants, the teacher and the taught, the white brother and his black brother and the rich and the poor are all equal and stand shoulder to shoulder with each other while performing the **Salah**, and the phenomenon which is not seen is the ritual practices of other existing religions. The act is a perfect expression of worship in humility and surrender of ‘bad (worshipper) to the Ma’bud (the worshipped one).⁵¹

On their own part, Christians show little or no commitment to their faith. Some hide their identity and stay away from Sunday worship and other Christian celebrations. While it is easy to know a Moslem through his commitment to the ideals of his religion, it is difficult to identify Christians among the political ruling class everywhere. They are not seen generally at public worship and what would eventually serve as the ultimate mark of their Christian identity is more or less abandoned – *Christian Names! The Alhaji* is regarded as a devout Moslem who has at least made pilgrimage to Mecca once. He owns this appellation and is identified a Moslem by it.

Christians, especially those holding government jobs and positions should learn from their Moslem counterparts to show commitment to their Christian faith. There lies the challenge! Often when Christians are persecuted, cheated and denied their rights on account of their faith, instead of fighting back and defending themselves, they run to bishops and the clergy for help. They complain against their religious leaders instead of blaming themselves for their ignorance of Christian faith, commitment and principles. Catholics, in particular are generally ignorant of scripture and Church law. In controversial issues involving Christians and Moslems, Christians compromise easily; as they present shallow and feeble arguments in defense of Christian faith and practice.

Acts of worship: -prayer-life of the Moslem

As in the African **New Religious Movements (NRMs)**, Christians have a lot to borrow from Islam. It is interesting to consider the *prayer-life* of a Moslem. *Salah (Prayer)*, is one of the *Five Pillars* of Islam. Others are *Shahadah – “Confessions”, Zakat – “Alms”, Siyan – “Fasting” and Hajj – “Pilgrimage”*. There can be no doubt that prayer is the heart and centre of Islam as it is the elementary and necessary expression of life. A

Bedouin who lives on the edge of the Sahara was quoted as saying, ‘*If I don’t pray my heart is angry. When I pray my heart is still*’. As Rahman Doi explains Islamic prayer is very simple and does not require any consecrated place where it can be performed.

The whole world is a mosque, a prayer house for Moslems. It comprises various genuflections indicating complete external or bodily submission to God which conforms with the spiritual submission, and these become necessary since a human being is gifted with a body as well as soul which exercise a great influence on each other through their movements.⁵²

As in the Christian concept prayer, in which various acts of worship are involved – praises, glorification, thanksgiving and supplication, prayers and devotions are not merely appreciation but they are something more than that. It is supplication to the Almighty God, bowing down and submitting to the creator.

Every Moslem who has reached puberty is under obligation to perform Salah – prayer – **Five Times Daily – Morning, The Noon, Afternoon, The Sunset and the Night**. Salah, is therefore the expression of religious consciousness in which a Moslem puts himself into relation with God in the simplest and most direct way and surely in the heart and centre of Islam. Through acts of obeisance or worship, man approaches his creator. The term *Worship or Ibadah* literally means **humble propitiation**, in the Islamic legal concept covers all types of **simple and complex acts** whereby a Moslem, man and woman, seeks the pleasure of God.

Ibadah, in its **narrow and wider** meaning, applies to prescribed and well defined acts of worship including the pronouncement of **Shahadah (Confessions of faith) – “I witness that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”**. It includes the **five daily prayers, the obligatory almsgiving, fasting the month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Acts of Worship** in its **widest** sense include many of the **mandatory and recommended acts**; namely:

Visiting the sick, consoling the bereaved, participating in funerals, paying visits to friends, neighbourliness, sympathy

to the poor, taking care of the orphans, greeting those we meet, removing stones and dangerous objects from the way, helping those who need our help, even by a kind word or act, diligence and honesty in our work, devotion to duty, honesty in dealing with others, contributing to worthy causes.

There are also similar acts of worship referred to as Ibadah in Islam for which the Moslems anticipate reward from God, apart from satisfying his own conscience, by performing such ‘civic duty’. Thus, many **good acts of kindness** shown to another, performing acts of benevolence that can strictly speaking be described as purely civic and social, are regarded as acts of divine worship carries heavenly reward. As in Christian practice, such acts of kindness shown to a neighbour have been done to God for “Truly I say to you, as long as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25. 40). There above – acts of worship have parallels in the Christian tradition – what is referred to as **Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy** are: **The seven Corporal Works of Mercy** are:

To feed the hungry; to give drink to the thirsty; to clothe the naked; to harbour the homeless; to visit the sick; to visit the imprisoned; to bury the dead.

The Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy are:

To convert the sinner; to instruct the ignorant; to counsel the doubtful; to bear wrongs patiently; to forgive injuries; to pray for the living and for the dead.

The division into **Corporal and Spiritual** may be artificial, for whether it is the **Body or the Soul** that benefits from the good acts of intention gives support to the meritorious acts. They are all **Acts of Worship**.

In Islam Ibadah extends to what would look like mundane and permissible acts which strictly speaking serve the interest of the individual himself or even lead to some sensual pleasure. These include *eating and drinking* as they are necessary to sustain energy and enable individuals to carry out their duties. In the last analysis they fulfill the divine will, namely the survival and continuity of mankind. Similarly,

sleeping is a type of worship, so also is the *sexual act*, (*accomplished only with lawful partner*), which is regarded by Moslems as one of the noblest acts of worship. It is the way God has chosen as the means of human survival and the measure which provides serenity and harmony within the family.⁵³

Activities that may look superfluous and irrelevant to the ordinary eye are found in Islam as **Acts of Worship:**

- Walking to the mosque
- Waiting for the prayer time in the mosque,
- Contributing to the maintenance of the mosque,
- Fasting on certain days outside the month of Ramadan
- Repeating the pilgrimage to Mecca after performing the first mandatory obligation,

are some of the examples of recommended acts of worship in Islamic religion. There is certainly good understating in Islam that acts of worship as enumerated above and specifically charity extended to others are essential in true religious practices. Good acts must accompany prayers. In Christian religion faith must be nourished by good works:

“ What does it profit my brethren if a man says he has faith but has not worked? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and is in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them ‘go in peace, be warmed and filled’, without giving them the thing needed for the body what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:14 –17).

Frequency of prayer

In the eye of non-Moslems, the five daily prayers, one of the five pillars of Islam and the Friday prayers (Salah al-jum’at) are already too much for non-clerics. But the seriousness with which Moslems of all walks of life observe these acts of worship and prayer daily really intimidate Christians and Christian families who rarely say morning and night prayers, how much more attend Sunday worship. On Fridays, Moslems meet in mosque and open squares and offer the Friday prayer in much large congregation

as compared to the five times daily prayers in difference mosques or private homes. The underlying idea of the Friday prayer, it is said, is the bringing together of the Moslems of a given area in a very large number. Prayer and other acts of worship are cherished worthwhile spiritual activities in the life of the Moslem:

Interrupting the worldly business of the day at short intervals to retire for a brief session of communication with God gives life, some spiritual spice and moral values, rather than becoming merely a dull and dry materialist routine. Also facing the *kaa'ba* at regular times in the company of other Moslems in the congregation, or alone but feeling that millions of others are doing the same fosters a sense of discipline, and strengthens the brotherly ties with fellow Moslems.⁵⁴

Certainly the Moslem prayer-life cannot but be admired. If Christian prayer-life and liturgy can be as captivating, perhaps the established Christian denominations would not be losing membership at the rate at which many young and old abandon the mother Churches to join the so many New Religious Movements spreading all over Africa. Islam's ethical teachings and rituals, including the performance of the *Taharah*, (*removal of pollution*), are a pre-requisite of Salah and other sophisticated legal and moral observances do not present Islam as a cheap religion. There are some critics who often suggest that the success of Islam in the African continent is due to the fact that it makes little demands on converts in terms of dogma and norms of behaviour. As one historian observes:

Islam was a much a simpler religion than the religion of the Christian Church of the Middle Ages; it was easily understood and it contained no doctrines likely to confuse and perplex men's minds. It permitted every man to have four wives provided he was able to support them. It did not provide for the priesthood and was not obscured and overcast by a multitude of ceremonies.⁵⁵

Surely many Moslems will disagree with this assessment. Our historian no doubt was seeing Islam only from a historical perspective. He is not a theologian or an expert in Islamic studies. But as one Nigerian Catholic theologian and biblical scholar observes, the above view of Islam is an over-simplification of reality. “While it is true that there may be nominal Moslems who pick bits and pieces of what suits them in the teaching of Muhammad, (as there are also nominal Christians), the orthodox Moslem would not condone syncretistic attitude”.⁵⁶ The theologian, also expert in Islamic studies was not in doubt that Islam is not a cheap world religion for half-baked followers. He went on:

In fact, today Moslem preachers on the mass media are as intransigent as Christian preachers – if not more so – in their tirades against paganism and idolatry.⁵⁷

He recalled that one popular Moslem crusader in Ibadan – Nigeria was given the significant title of *Ajagbemoke - feri*; meaning he who *harasses pagans*’.

Ironically our historian cited above who tried to portray Islam as simple religion with few ritual and doctrines contradicted himself when he outlined some recommended acts of worship for Moslems:

They have one or more minarets, from which an official called the Muezzi calls the people to pray five times a day, for every true Moslem is expected to pray just before sun-rise, afternoon, before and after sun-set, and when they day had closed. In addition there are four other things which he is expected to do – he must recite daily the simple creed, he must give alms to the poor; he must make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during his life time; he must fast during the month of Ramadan, when he is allowed neither to eat nor drink from sun-rise to sun-set. A Moslem must also be prepared to fight for his faith and for God. If jihad (the holy war) is declared he cannot refuse to fight for Islam.

Definitely these rules, obligations and observances which a Moslem must carry out cannot be described as **simple**. Christian laws, precepts and

observances are by far fewer than these Moslem acts of worship and code of conduct. What is of interest, however is that while a good percentage of Moslems, young and old remain faithful to these observances, few Christians, especially in the western world care about Christian observances and even fewer can tell much about the Christian faith. Perhaps it may be necessary here to expose to the ‘un-initiated’ mind more of the demands Islam makes on its adherents. Most of these are contained in the Moslem *Ethical Teachings*.

Moslem ethical teachings

With regard to Christianity, Christians are already familiar with the Christian Code of Conduct as they are contained in the Commandments of God as handed down from the Scriptures, Church precepts and the Canon law. The New Law of Christ for Christianity is the over-riding principle of Christian ethics. Christ’s teaching on forgiveness, good neighbourliness, unity, love, peace etc place Christianity on a lofty height among the world religions. As Muhammad Abdul Rauf outlined in his book: *Islam – Faith and Devotion*, Islamic theology distinguishes between **ethical and ritual teachings**. We have already referred to the **ritual teachings** which consists of five parts usually called the **Five Pillars of Islam**. We have also discussed **ethical** teachings which includes the Islamic legal system – the *Sharia*. This whole category of ethical teachings aims at guiding human society in the every business and its endeavour to meet the challenges of life. It deals with the conduct of sales, lending, hiring, all types of business dealings, court proceedings, evidence, marriage, inheritance and the mutual rights and obligations that arise from the various types of human relations.

Islamic theologians and jurists explain that the aim of these teachings is to serve as guide that will conduce harmony, promote cooperation, reduce social ills, up-lift man’s mental capabilities and maintain our body and mind in a healthy condition. Their underlying principles, it is said is the observation of such virtues as honesty, trust, justice and avoidance of such vices as hatred, rancor, cheating and encroachment on the rights of others. Islam also enjoins honour to all men. It bids all men to abstain from strong drinks altogether and consuming harmful food and pork. Other crimes which Christianity abhors and which are covered under civil and ecclesiastical code are also

found in Islam – murder, theft, extortion, adultery, fornication, usury, cheating, telling lies and calumny.

Whence friction?

From where arises frictions and conflicts between Moslems and adherents of other religious bodies, including Christianity, if all alike are guided by these moral codes usually found in every culture all over the world, ancient and modern? If Moslems and political leaders are honest why many corrupt practices found in both private and public sectors of our moral fabric? Perhaps the answers to these questions lies in the fact that often the moral and ethical life are separated from religious observances. What the lips pronounce may not relate to the yearning of the heart. Generally religious intolerance has destroyed common objectives which Moslems and Christians could have promoted if religious piety was not limited to mere externalism. The application of sharia law in the multi-religious society is appointed in question. Religious riots have erupted here and there in many parts of Africa, including Nigeria, often as a result of mere ritual observances. What would look like an indifferent act, but given religious interpretations have sparked off violent clashes between Christians and Moslems leading to destruction of lives and property.

In public local markets, for example, Moslems may not allow Christians and non-Moslems to slaughter pigs and enjoy the pork. While pork for example is prohibited to Moslems, Christian could handle pigs and eat pork as they may wish. It is that aspect of religious observance and intolerance which has continued to strain Moslems-Christian relation. One of the worst religious riots in Nigeria in early part of 1991 in Zaria was said to have been sparked off by false reports that a Christian butcher had sold pork to a Moslem lad. Without proper investigations, reports had spread throughout the jam-packed market. It was an ‘abomination of desolation’ to the Moslems. Within a short moment the Moslems had pitched battle with non-Moslem brothers in which machetes, bows and arrows and other dangerous missiles were used. Before the security men arrived the riots had taken toll of many victims- so many killed and maimed.

Apart from the disturbances and religious intolerance which some religious practices attract, generally many Moslem acts of worship provoke admiration from non-Moslems. Although these meritorious acts of worship and religious observations are found in other religions,

including Christianity, but they are not practice with much devotion and intensity as one finds in Islamic religion. In Islam these acts of observances are part and parcel of life and may not be separated from one another.

Fasting – Siyam

The Moslem fasting period during the month of Ramadan, referred to as Ramadan fast is well known throughout Christendom. During his month, Moslems abstain from food and drink and certain sensual pleasures from dawn to sunset. Fasting which is an exercise of self-control, stands out alone as a negative type of worship of temporary deprivation. It gives the worshippers a sense of spiritual **pleasure**, the extent of which he alone appreciates. It is also said that fasting is of some medical value. Moreover when the worshipper suffers the pangs of hunger, he appreciates the hardship suffered by the poor and becomes more sympathetic to their plight.

In Christianity, fasting is an old tradition and is one of the precepts of the Catholic Church – ‘thou shall fast on days prescribed, and as well abstain from meat, namely on good Friday and Ash Wednesday’. In some parts of Christendom, Christians abstain from meat every Friday. They take fish instead. Generally, of course Catholics are obliged to fast during the season of lent and use the money saved for charity. But Christian fasting observances cannot compare favourably well with the Moslem Ramadan fast or *Jewish Yom Kippur*. These days among many Christian sects and New Religious Movements, fasting – also referred to as *Dry Fasting*, is in vogue. Practiced mostly by Christians who are seeking special favours and healing from God, some critics do not regard this as **Act of Worship** meant to attract God’s grace and simply commend cordial relationship with God, mostly after one has strayed from the part of justice and grace. More often Christians who undertake such fasting for private salutary motives expect miraculous favours from God after completing their undertaking.

Alms-giving – Zakat

Another area in which Moslems show commitment to their religious observances as act of worship is in **alms-giving, zakat**. This is one of the pillars of Islam well specified in the Koran, Chapter 2, verse 177, where the Moslem who has the means gives away to others out of love for Allah

to the neighbour, the orphan, the needy and the way-farer or slaves. It is an essential duty for a Moslem to give 2.5% of his cash balance to the poor and the needy in the society. At the end of the Ramadan fast, Moslems pay a charity called **Zakatu**, in order that the poor may share in the festivities marking the end of the fasting.

But we need to know how Moslems, distribute their Zakat and who benefits from such charity? As for Christians, it is clear that alms collected in Churches and elsewhere are for everybody irrespective of creed, tongue and race. Christ resolved this problems leaving nobody in doubt – ‘who my brother is’ in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In Islam however, Zakat (alms) is applied to five categories of people.⁵⁸

- **Those who are concerned with collecting the Zakat, a reward for their services;**
- **To slaves or captives for the purpose of liberating them;**
- **To those who incline to embrace Islam, for the purpose of promoting Islam;**
- **To the community, for the general good;**
- **To those in need – the poor, the needy, those in debt and the wayfarers.**

It is obvious from the above category of recipients of the Zakat that unlike Christian religion, and even in social charitable organizations, Islam restricts its alms-giving to Moslems in general:

- Those who are concerned with the collection of Zakat are surely appointed Moslems;
- Slaves or captives to be liberated are Moslems or Kafir (unbelievers) who should embrace Islam immediately they are liberated;
- Those who incline to embrace Islam receive Zakat in the form of grants-in-aid. The economic aid becomes a bait which attracts the needy individuals or nations to Islam. In this case the sole purpose of such – ‘charity’ is for the promotion of Islamic religion. The Arab or Islamic Banks promote such financial aids in the case of needy nations and groups. The Organization of Islamic Conference

(OIC) operates its economic package primarily for the promotion of Islamic interests.

Another group or category of beneficiaries of Moslem Zakat is the community - for the general good. The 'community' here definitely refers to the "House of Islam", which is also the Nation of Islam – is one and inseparable throughout the world under Moslem leadership.

Another, and the last group that benefits from Zakat should be those in need, the poor, those in debts, and these are of course, too those who belong to the community.

One is not mistaken to think that those who benefit from the Moslem Zakat are primarily Moslems and those who in one way or the other are closely or remotely associated with Islam and Islamic interests. While Christian 'charity' is meant for all 'brothers' in the widest sense of the word – the Universal Brotherhood, Moslems are 'their brothers' keepers' in the narrowest sense of the word. But whatever the case may be, the obligation to help the less privileged of society – victims of natural and man-made disasters, for whatever motives, is in itself a noble and commendable gesture, even in the eyes of men. As an act of worship it is certainly more meritorious.

Pilgrimage (AL – HAJJ)

"Al-hajj" is to make a religious journey to Mecca, and precisely to the **Ka'aba**, the very house of worship for Moslem on earth. Although an act of worship and one of the five pillars of Islam, it is a duty for those Moslems who afford it in a life time. Al-hajj a yearly popular religious event in the life of devout Moslems, is becoming controversial these days as critics question the usefulness of the event, considering the amount of money involved in the face of deteriorating economic situation, especially in the poorer nations of the Islamic world. More often governments, out of sympathy and pressure, subsidize expenses for the privileged pilgrims and are often directly involved in the actual arrangements and operations – a gesture non-Moslems criticize as government's undue involvement in religious affairs in multi-party democracy. Incidents in government's involvements in hajj operations, in cash and kind are reported all over Africa. Moslem governors and ministers of states often have no qualms about their sponsorship of political allies and cabinets ministers in which

large sums of state money are committed to hajj. For some of them, it is one of those duties a devout and capable Moslem owes to the less privileged ones. The matter becomes so serious when a very poor nation or State, unable to pay its workers' salaries or provide some basic amenities for the people spends a good percentage of its annual budget on hajj! Worse still when large sums of embezzled money are used to perform hajj; ordinary citizens are not impressed and therefore question the good intentions of such pilgrims. The issue becomes most serious still when pilgrims are involved in international crimes and scandalous activities during hajj.

But whatever reservations non-Moslems may have about the usefulness of the yearly hajj, there is little doubt that for Moslems the event is a serious act of worship and not an international tourist venture. Ka'aba was not created for tourist attraction and financial gains. Traveling to Mecca is a serious religious event no matter the cost and the amount of inconveniences and risks that are involved.

These days million of **Visitors** throng major and minor world cities of ancient religious significance and repute. But very insignificant numbers visit these places and sites with religious motives. In fact most of these globe trotters are simply 'laymen' and **tourists** who spend time and money simply visiting places to satisfy curiosities. Among the millions of visitors who besiege St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the largest Church in Christendom, not many gather there to pray or to participate in Christian religious devotions. Many are not even Christians, so are **not** most of the ubiquitous Japanese, Germans and Americans seen around the big Churches of Rome, Jerusalem, Fatima and Lourdes. Most of them are tourists, gypsies, wayfarers and hippies who tour the world for amusement. In the way they dress, take pictures with their cameras and video gadgets and move around, it is clear to passers-by that there is nothing 'religious' about their visits and they are no pilgrims. However, better organized pilgrimages to Rome, Lourdes, and Jerusalem are undertaken by few Christians and these are mainly Catholics who can pay for such journeys and visits. Even in such a case some of them look more like 'tourists' than pilgrims who are moving out for serious religious function. Generally protestant churches and other Church denominations have not had any meaningful tradition of organizing pilgrimages to the Holy Land or religious sites. Perhaps motivated by the spirit of

competition, some protestant denominations, including the New Religious Movements or Independent Churches in Africa are undertaking pilgrimages to their religious places of interest. But however genuine their motives are, the organizations are generally poor and are nothing to compare with the Moslem hajj.

The Moslem hajj is a holy ‘outing’ in the strictest sense of the world, an act of worship with many rituals and obligations. These rituals are accomplished, especially when the pilgrim has assumed the ‘status’ of a pilgrim – **IHRAM**. Some mundane practices and activities are forbidden, including sexual relations. The purpose is to make the life of the pilgrim simple and devoted to worship and contemplation. A western expert in Islamic affairs observes that “perhaps the most reliable barometer of islam’s revival is observance of the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca that devout Moslems are expected to make at least once in their life time”.⁵⁹

Generally participation or undertaking has been on the increase, even in periods of economic depression. Governments of even circular states all over Africa are normally involved in hajj operations both materially and financially. Often transport planes are provided free or at subsidized rates for the lifting of pilgrims to Mecca. Wide coverage is given to hajj operations from the initial stage to the end of the event. Stranded pilgrims – and they used to be many – are often rescued through government intervention. This is true where inadequate or poor arrangements are made for the lifting of pilgrims to and from Mecca.

Every year, millions of Moslems of almost every race and language converge at the arid plains of Mount Arafat, near Mecca to live in tents and perform arduous five to seven day rituals that have remained unchanged for many centuries. These rituals include activities that must be accomplished before departure, on the way to Mecca and when one is actually in Mecca. In Mecca, one of the most solemn moments is the visit to the AI-MASJID AL-HARAM, the sacred mosque in the middle of which is the ka’aba. Special pilgrimage garb must be put on. There are some taboos or forbidden acts. Moslems also perform the ‘lesser-pilgrimage – alumrah. While hajj has a specific season, lesser hajj can be performed at any time within the year.

It may be interesting to examine the real benefits of hajj as Moslem theologians explain, the supreme purpose of the hajj is as a means of coordinating the intentions and efforts of the Moslems towards the

realization of certain objectives which include the central theme of the good of the family of Islam as a whole, the **fruit** of which is the **spiritual good** and welfare of the Moslems. The hajj, therefore, is not merely the paying of visits to places of importance or the performance of prayers. It is a meeting of hearts and an occasion for the **unification** of purpose and the **consolidation** of efforts towards the common good of the Moslems.⁶⁰

Burial of the dead

On our evaluation of the impact of Islam and challenges it poses on other world religions, particularly on Christian religion, we consider the **burial rites in Islamic religion** in the last segment of our work. In every religion and culture, the last duty to be done to the dead is to bury him. In some places the details of ceremonies and rites carried out by the living on behalf of the dead are points of controversy and disorder. It is so important to many that governments and secular institutions often intervene to restore peace among warring cultural and religious communities that pitch battle against one another, solely to ‘protect the interest of the dead’.

In the modern times expensive burial ceremonies, especially in Africa are the order of the day and attempts by certain Church denominations to put a stop to lavish funeral ceremonies or at least to control the extravagances involved have yielded little positive results. With the establishment of mortuaries and modern facilities and materials for the preservation of the dead until burial, corpses remain unburied these days for months until arrangements are completed for the burial of the dead fellow. A dead traditional ruler in Nigeria, was reported to have remained in the mortuary for **two years** before ‘adequate arrangements’ were completed for what the relatives described as **befitting burial ceremonies**. There are often a lot of extravaganza involved, even leading to the most ridiculous. Some important rich personalities have mausoleum built to preserve their remains for centuries!

Obituaries, funeral arrangements and photographs of the dead published and ‘advertised’ in the National Dailies in Nigeria can take pages and cost large sums of money. Television and radio announcements of obsequies take a good chunk of listeners and viewers attention and can be very disgusting to westerners.

The Moslem burial tradition on the other hand, is widely recognized for its simplicity. Unlike Christian and other burial

announcements and arrangements, information used to be scanty and usually is followed by the sentence **“He/She has since been buried according to Moslem burial rites”**. Apart from the prayers which come before, during and after burial ceremonies, practical burial details are simple. The dead Moslem is preferably laid to rest **directly on the ground** not in a box or coffin. It is also recommended to place something like a brick under his head to rest on it not a pillow. The grave is covered and filled with earth. In some local Moslem communities, where mats are used to bring the dead to the grave yard, after putting the corpse into the grave the mat may be taken back and reserved for another burial. This is in contradistinction to the Christian and other religions’ attachment to the purchasing of expensive materials for the burial of their dead – coffins, clothing materials and expensive decoration of graves and burial sites.

As for the length of time that should be allowed before burial Moslems are simpler and more decent, for as soon as it becomes certain that the person is dead, normally delays are not tolerated. Indeed as far as Moslems are concerned, a gesture of respect to the dead is to hasten the steps of his burial.⁶¹ While more extra time may be taken to wash and cover an ordinary Moslem before burial, the matter is even simpler for a ‘martyr’. The recommendation is down to earth:

The martyr, who is killed in battle with the enemy of the faith, is to be buried with the blood of his wounds and in the clothes he had on when he was killed. If some parts of his body are not covered by those clothes, the exposed parts must be covered.⁶²

Without doubt, some of the elements of Moslem burial rites are worthy of emulation, especially in their simplicity. Some Christian Churches scandalized by the existing Christian burial arrangements and rites have decided to enact laws meant to guide Christian burial. These laws are principally introduced to reduce costs and unnecessary ceremonies and are also meant to bring out the true Christian meaning of caring for the dead. In one Catholic Diocese of Nigeria, some directives have been introduced to make Christian burial simple, inexpensive and meaningful.⁶³ They are all geared to making burial of Christians simpler. They also serve as ‘protest notes’ against the extravagant and unedifying burial tradition now in vogue in many parts of African communities.

Moslem have little or no problems since Islam has for long settled the matter by laying down directives which are meticulously followed and observed by all Moslems.

CONCLUSION

Islam, the religion founded by Muhammad, the prophet of Allah has continued to grow and expand and its impact is felt in every part of the modern world, including to hitherto strong Christian nation of the world. The rate of its expansion, particularly in Africa is alarming and can only be compared to the rate of proliferation of independent African Churches and New Religious Movements. The aggressive proselytism, propagation by force and conquest with which Islam has been associated since its beginning to the days of the Saracens and Crusaders has not changed. And its revival which took a new turn with the Iranian revolution has definitely added new traits and colour to the religion. Today, Islam, especially in the western circle is identified with fundamentalism and violence.

But whatever these negative influence have been made to bear on Islam, there are not a few experts in Islamic studies who interpret the new wave of fundamentalism and radicalism, sweeping through the Moslem world and beyond as a positive religious phenomenon.

Across the Eastern hemisphere, but primarily in that strategic crescent that straddles the crossroads of three continents, Moslems are rediscovering their spiritual roots and reasserting the political power of the Islamic way of life. Repelled by the bitter fruits of modernization and fired by a zealous pride in its ancient heritage, the UMMA (World Community) of Islam is stirring with revival.⁶⁴

This Islamic ‘revolution or revivalism is a great challenge to Christians most of whom are merely nominal members of the Christian religions. At this modern age when Christian youths seem to be in moral disarray and are only attracted to the pleasures of the modern civilization and interests – discotheques and insatiable hunger for sex and sexy films, Moslem youths shun western and enviable style of life and opt for upright moral living. Evidently the renewed interest in Islam is most pronounced among its youths. A prominent judge in Algiers was reported to have been

overwhelmed with joy when he discovered that five times a day his 14 year old son joined a group of friends at a mosque in prayer. In the west, it is no more fashionable to find young people in Churches on Sundays. Adults are seen in Churches once a while except for a few old people who still attend Sunday Services and religious devotions.

It is not only in Algiers that unexpected Moslem youths frequent the mosque. In Nigeria, most of the Moslem university students and youths are pious and active followers of the prophet. They fill the mosques on Fridays and prayer-meeting squares during Moslem festivities, while their Christian counterparts spend more time in discotheques and cinemas than in Churches. Moslem youths know much of the Koran by heart and are conversant with Moslem devotions and rituals while their Christian counterparts know little of the bible or the Church's precepts and traditions. While western Christian youths and adults discuss divorce, abortion, homosexuality, condoms, pills, and contraceptives, it was reported in Turkey, for example that students belonging to Moslem Brotherhood waged war on **Sin** and **Evil** by painting over sexually suggestive cinema billboards and chalking quotation from the Koran on city walls. At Cairo university reports said that hundreds of Egyptian students have taken up the veil and demanded classes separate from male students.

All over the world, in the former Soviet Union said now to be home to world's fifth largest Moslem population, China and other communist regimes, reports indicate that there has been among youths an upsurge in attendance at mosques and a renewed interest in Islam. Not only that Islam has become a success story it is a great challenge to Christian religion. History has it is that Christianity before the advent of Islam was a flourishing religion in North Africa, what happened to the Christian Church in that part of Africa is part of the history of Christian religion today. The Church in Africa is still young and has many problems, one of which is the threat posed by Islam. Will the kite which killed the mother chick allow its young ones to survive?

CHAPTER THREE

THE CLERGY AND AFRICAN CHURCH

Introduction

The prospects of a brighter future for the African Church will be largely determined by the number as well as the quality of the native clergy. In many Dioceses there is sufficient number of minor and major seminarians and that raises hope for a bright future. Increase in priestly vocation is reported in most parts of Africa and both the local and the universal Church authorities express satisfaction at the progress made so far but do not fail to emphasize the need for **quality** in the priestly formation, too. In some African countries, however foreign missionaries will still be needed to supplement the number of native clergy.

Whatever the case may be, there is need to examine the problems that will continue to confront the African Church of Today and Tomorrow with regard to the clergy that will continue to minister to the people of God in the Black continent and perhaps equally elsewhere in the Christian world.

Although Africa cannot claim to have got sufficient number of Priests to replace the foreign missionaries, surprisingly enough African missionaries, both diocesan and religious congregations are working and missionizing in various parts of Europe and America. While some African Catholics do not see the need for sending out African Priests and religious to work overseas, while many Parishes and institutions at home remain empty and are thus starved of personnel, there are not a few others who see this as a healthy development. These do not see anything wrong in the children taking their rightful turn to feed and take care of the old parents. This traditional obligation, which is never neglected in the African traditional society help the African Church to strive more towards achieving self-sufficiency in the management of its own affairs. By tapping its own local resources and thus making them available for both the local and universal needs, the African Church is in fact demonstrating its maturity and commitment to discipleship and mission. The onus of

providing for the ‘rainy day’, the present and future, the local and the universal Church, rests on the seminaries and houses of formation in Africa.

In order to build a solid and prosperous African Church, most African Bishops and religious superiors have turned their attention to the tapping of the present resources seen in the growing number of young boys and girls who embrace priestly and religious vocation with enthusiasm in Africa. While some houses of formation in the West have closed down for lack of vocation, most African seminaries and convents have to be expanded to accommodate the teeming number of seminarians and aspirants. This is a development that should gladden the heart and should be encouraged by the universal Church. Many African Catholics and Church authorities strongly feel that Africa and the entire Church of Christ must be grateful to God that young Africans embrace priestly and religious vocation. The growth in number or what is often referred to as “Vocation Boom” should be seen, first and foremost as a **blessing**, no matter some deficiencies and anomalies that may go with it. The Gospel maxim “many are called but few are chosen”, is as old as Christianity and applies to many circumstances and situations, not least to the “Vocation Boom” in some parts of Africa. This is truly not the phenomenon in all African Dioceses. In fact, some African countries are not so blessed like others. Some even may continue to depend on foreign missionaries or support from sisters Black African neighbors for long still. But let us emphasize that the African Bishops and other Church authorities are not oblivious of the consequences are of large numbers of priestly candidates. While encouraging growth, efforts are made not to compromise **quality**. But to take care of quality of candidates, there is need to have good number from which to select.

There are abundant materials today on *the prospects and challenges of the Catholic Priesthood in the modern times*. On the international level, the identity and values of the Catholic Priest are being re-examined. Its **past** performances, **Today’s** and **Tomorrow’s** challenges are being evaluated. The issue occupied a prominent position in the Synod of Bishops’ Special Assembly for Africa, and the working paper for the Assembly, {Instrumentum Laboris} raises many issues centering on Priests – **The Agents of the Proclamation of the Good News of Salvation**. The Eight Ordinary Synod of Bishops, 1990, held in

Rome had the theme **The Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the present day.**

On the national and local levels, discussions are regularly held which seek to re-examine the image of the clergy, and assess the role of the “Man of God” – in the modern times. “*The Clergy in Nigeria Today*”, was the theme of the third SIST (Spiritual International School of Theology) Missiological Symposium held at Attakwu, Enugu, November 1992. Some of the papers delivered at the symposium included:

- The Clergy in Nigeria Today, a Layman’s perspective
- The Priest in Nigeria, a Laywoman’s perspective
- The image of the Priest in contemporary Africa; the Nigerian connection
- The Priest and the African Synod
- The Priesthood in African Traditional Religion
- The Biblical image of the priesthood
- The Catholic priesthood in Africa and the need for the sincere inculturation.

The Enugu symposium, which covered a wide spectrum of old and recent theological enquiry on the priesthood was very interesting. Its conclusions can never be limited to the Nigerian situation. They have far-reaching consequences for the African and the universal Church. New situations have arisen together with new questions about the Church and the Catholic priesthood. As Dr. Luke Mbefo, C.S.Sp, the rector of SIST put it in his welcome address introducing the topic of the symposium:

The new situation has raised a number of questions among the faithful. Those brought up in the Church of the missionaries, have nostalgia for their accustomed uniformity, the fixity of doctrine and of their customary immutability and the sacredness of ritual. The Catechism answers seemed to have exhausted all their theological problems: the generation that arose after Vatican II however is not satisfied with the question and answer formula. It is a generation schooled in asking further questions, and educated in thinking for itself.¹

Even on relatively local levels, the faithful engage in discussions surrounding the changing image of the Priest. In the past during the missionary era of the “White Fathers” (Ndi Fada Ocha, Ndi Bekee), not much was known about the identity of the “Man of God”. There were many strange ideas and mixed feelings about him. He was a god or at least God’s messenger and not a real human being. With the *Africanization of Christianity*, like the post – Independence Africa, a government of the Church has passed over to the Black man. He, Bishop or Priest – ‘Father’ speaks the language of the people and the people know his home and family.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the black Father finds himself in the midst of both the old and new generation of African Christians, the rural and the modern urban dwellers, who would like to know more about the identity of the “Man of God”. Most of the Priests now working among these people are in fact as young as the new generation of the African Christians. They have little or nothing to tell about the old missionary days or even about the White Fathers. The people to whom they are ministering in fact know more than the old ministers of the word. Perhaps both have one thing in common, namely, the spirit of inquiry.

This generation is not satisfied with answers accepted on the authority of another. It is more critical, more articulate, more exposed to diversity; it wants to find out the truth for itself and to formulate a style of life based on personal convictions. Today’s people is not the “Yes Sir Fada” generation we are used to. It is a generation anointed with modernity and democratic processes.²

The above observations are really very important notes for any meaningful discussion on the Clergy Today, whether in Africa or Europe. The older generation of “Fada Bindel, Fada Walsh or Fada Smith” in Nigeria, for example may not be tolerant to the young Priests’ ‘strange behaviour’, as the younger generation that never witnessed the activities of those renowned pioneer missionaries who laboured to establish Catholic missions and schools in the East of the great river Niger. For the Fada Bindel generation; certain Priests of today should not only be suspended from exercising the ministry, but should be excommunicated. The ‘sins’ of such Priests include:

- Talking to women, visiting them or even allowing them into Fathers' houses. Any type of intimate association of course is not to be mentioned even giving any woman a lift in the car cannot be tolerated.
- Appearance of a Priest in any other clothes, outside the immaculate white soutane;
- Any good house found in a Priest family must have been built with mission money.
- The Priest is not expected to enjoy any type of comfort etc.

While for the older generation of African Catholics these might represent the Capital Sins of the modern Priest, the younger generation may not see anything wrong in a Priest having a girl friend, riding a nice car or living in a decent house. There is a clash of views about the Priest and the clash creates an uncomfortable situation.

Modern society has also influenced both the Priest and the people. The exposition of rather hidden realities about the priesthood has also helped to create problems. Some have wished that such 'secret matters' should have been left untouched to avoid curiosities and unnecessary craving to know more about those 'divine realities'. For the modern man 'there is nothing to hide'. So, hot debates rage today on the hitherto sensitive issues that were never publicly debated before. They include the question of **celibacy** and **ordination of women in the priesthood**. A Nigerian Priest, Emmanuel Obuna even wrote his doctorate dissertation on the problem of **celibacy**, "**African Priests and Celibacy**" – **in a culture where a man without children is a waste**. Many Priests and laymen, black and white, who felt embarrassed by the young Priest's controversial topic, felt that he had imprudently delved into 'a no-go-area', about the secret lives of Priests. Father Obuna was not unaware of the dangers surrounding his work and so he pleaded:

The reader is expected to quarrel with much that is said in this book... I am saying this from the very start so as to disarm anybody who might be preparing to do battle with me after reading the cover of this book. The thing about celibacy is that whether you argue for or against it, you will always find people ready to attack you from either side. Those in

support of it just wait for you to say anything different from the orthodox position of the Church so that they can bang you over the head with the Vatican II document or some similar missile; while its opposers either shout you down and call you conservative or do not even bother to listen any more.³

The attitude of Father Obuna, clearly illustrates the attitude of most younger African Catholics, Priests and the laity. For these, there should be nothing to hide. The African Priest should remain open to his culture while keeping to the rules of the game, as dictated by the Roman Church. There may not be much to change in the Church's canon law in favour of Africa. What Africans need are not concessions like the **abrogation of the law of celibacy**, or special type of Catholic priesthood for the African clergy or aspirants. Such universal questions touching the entire Church of Christ everywhere, should be given global solutions, arrived at by the representatives of the various local Churches and the Roman Pontiff. What Africa requires on the part of the Priest and the lay people is a proper understanding of the issues at stake. Then, there is need for adaptation or inculturation.

Our exposition so far is meant to show that Africans – young and old are also aware of the current debates on the future of Christianity in Africa and elsewhere. If there are problems confronting the Church and other institutions, African is also affected. Africa is well represented in the discussions about the Catholic Priesthood. There are 'conservatives', who do not advocate any change in the Church's laws concerning the priestly vocation. There are 'moderates' and 'radicals' who are always ready to forgive the Priest for these failures, who rarely criticize him, who sympathize with him. From these, one often hears "Is a Priest not a human being?" By insisting that a Priest is a 'human being', these moderate Catholics do not mean to belittle the 'divine realities of the priestly vocation'. But they try to appreciate his difficulties. The often hard conditions in which the Priest works. He, the Priest, is really 'alter Christus' (other Christ) in spite of his deficiencies. In many aspects, he is in fact 'not like the rest of men'. Nevertheless, the Catholic priesthood, whether in Nigeria, Africa or the West faces many challenges and the Church hierarchy is quite aware of the present problems. The concern of the 1990 Synod of Bishops and its discussions focused on the formation of candidates for the priesthood and at the same time searched for forms

of ‘on-going formation’ to provide realistic and effective means of support for Priests in their spiritual life and ministry.⁴ The need for such concern is really obvious as John Paul the II points out in his Post Synodal Apostolic exhortation “**Pastores Dabo Vobis**”.

The new generation of those called to the ministerial priesthood display different characteristics in comparison to those of their immediate predecessors. In addition, they live in a world which in many respects is new and undergoing rapid and continual evolution. All of these cannot be ignored when it comes to programming and carrying out the various phases of formation for those approaching the ministerial priesthood.⁵ As Chibuikwe Ukeh rightly points out, the challenges facing the Catholic priesthood today should be seen in a wider perspective:

Today, there is this general challenge on every profession to come down from its colonialist pinnacles. The demands are on each individual to prove his or her own mettle. No one talks now of general excellence or inadequacy but of the individual. Now, it is no more an issue of ‘lawyers are learned men’, but unlike X, barrister Y is very brilliant. And true to it, society as a whole is already adapting.⁶

The Catholic priesthood in Africa is no exception, its own challenges are diverse but are not insurmountable.

THE IMAGE OF THE PRIEST

A good image of the priest in the African Church will no doubt contribute immensely to the growth of the Church of Christ in Africa, while a distorted or dented image of the priesthood will mean disaster. This mental picture, idea or concept of the priesthood, whether correct or merely frivolous or sentimental is not always easy to erase from the minds of the people all over the world. They may be Christians or non-Christians who hold strongly to the view that the Catholic priest is this type of personality or the other. They might have had contacts with the earliest missionaries who influenced their thoughts or mental picture about the “Man of God”. The successors of the white missionaries may not have behaved, preached or worked like the missionaries and may thus have created a different image of the same Man of God. There are bound

to be misconceptions and even crisis of confidence in the institution if the image is not set right or the authentic, and well established and accepted concept reviewed.

There are not a few individuals world wide who feel that the good image of the Catholic priesthood has dwindled and that its reputation has tarnished in the modern times. There is fear among Church authorities and the laity and there are signs of desperation everywhere. There is crisis in the Church and solutions are being sought before more damage is done. In his own 'Intervention' at the end of the eight Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1990, Pope John Paul II did not fail to show his apprehension:

So it is that the very life of the Church pointed the way for us to overcome the crisis of priestly identity. This crisis has its roots in the time immediately after the Second Vatican Council. It was expressed in a wrong, sometimes deliberately harmful interpretation of the teaching of the council's Magisterium. These interpretations, undoubtedly represent one of the main causes for large number of defections from the Church; defections which so seriously affected her pastoral ministry and reduced the number of priestly vocations, especially missionary vocations.⁷

There was no doubt that the news of massive defections of priests must have shocked ordinary Catholics all over the world. As for Africans it was scandal to hear that some of the old missionary priests, sisters and brothers who once ministered to them had left their ministries and had taken to lay state. If black priests had followed suit their own number must be too low to compare with the **10,000** western priests, including one bishop who left the priesthood between 1965 – 1975, immediately after Vatican II: **26,000** sisters were said to have also pulled off their religious habits during the same period. Such phenomenon alone was enough to dent the image of the priesthood in the universal Church. Those priests and religious who persevered in their vocation may no more be 'adored' by the Africans who are usually less sympathetic than their Christian counterparts in the western world. The massive defection of priests, not only helped to erode the good image of the priesthood, but also led to the shortage of priests, which the pope described as "a tragedy

for each and every Church”. And as the supreme pontiff asked, is it not also a call to examination of conscience? The question has to be asked: Are we not making the Holy Spirit of God sad (cf. Eph. 4:30).⁸ The call by some priests themselves to the abrogation of the Church’s commitment to priestly celibacy was seen by most lay Catholics as a breach of a solemn promise made at priestly ordination. It was also a breach of faith and confidence reposed on the clergy of the Roman rite.

But as far as the Church is concerned all hope is not lost. Christ has not abandoned his Church as a result of the present set backs. Consequently attention has been turned to questions which concerned the formation suitable either for those candidates preparing for the priesthood, or for priests who have already begun their work (on-going formation). There was need for an integral formation that neglects nothing; a human, doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral formation which takes into account the often difficult circumstances in which the ministry has to be carried out. This attention has shifted from the question of the priest’s identity to that connected with the process of formation for the priesthood and the quality of the priestly life.⁹ The Church has however not ignored the call by so many of her concerned members to return to the theme of the priesthood, treating it from a relatively new point of view, one that was more adapted to present ecclesial and cultural circumstances.

The image of the priest – past and present

The changing image of the priest also worries the authorities of African Church and to build an enviable African Church there is need to re-examine the image of the African priest – **past and present**, in order to improve the performance of priests in the African Church of tomorrow.

“What do people say the son of man is?” That was a crucial question which Christ put to his disciples. Today that same question has led to the discovery of more and relevant Christological titles in the African Church and culture. Who do the simple Africans say the Catholic priest is? The awareness of the type of image the people hold about their priest may help the priesthood to recover its lost image.

The way he was in the past

John Forgarty, an American Carmelite priest, quoting the once famous Dominican preacher, Lacordaire, once at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris summarized the **Idealistic** view of priests that was current, not only

during Lacordaire time, but well into the present century. Such views are still current among African Catholics who can be described as the first generation converts to Christianity:

To live in the midst of the world without wishing its pleasures; to be a member of each family, yet belonging to none; to share all sufferings; to penetrate all secrets; to heal all wounds, to go from men to God and offer Him their prayers; to return from God to men to bring pardon and hope; to have a heart of bronze for chastity; to teach and to pardon, to console and bless always. My God what a life! And it is yours, O priest of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

As Forgarty points out Lacordaire's paean on priesthood was often utilized by newly ordained priests on the cards commemorating their ordination. Quite frequently the priest who was invited to preach on the occasion of the "First Mass" would make use of Lacordaire's words in order to end his sermon on a highly emotional note.¹¹ As he was elsewhere, in the **past**, the priest was placed in an exalted mystical position and was conceived as metaphysically equal to, or even higher than angelic beings. He lost his roots in the community and in the wider diverse Church. Among men, he occupied a special status within the community, was invested with awesome powers, and exercised tremendous spiritual authority over the community. The Priest was not an expert only in the sphere of religious matters, he was also consulted in moral, economic, social, cultural and even political problems. As for Bishop Joseph Abangetie Gasi of Tombura – Yambio, Sudan; in all AMECEA countries (Association of Member Episcopal Conference in Eastern Africa), the image of the priest is highly upheld and respected. It was the missionaries who brought the word of God to Africa and Sudan that really gave a **good image of a priest** to the people and the local clergy have imitated a good image given by the early missionaries:

The priest is seen as a messenger of God, sent to preach the word. He is given a local nick-name of **Basnagbaamabori** – 'carrier of God's word'. The priest is still seen as the 'fac totum': He teaches the faith as well as secular sciences, builds houses, is a carpenter, dispenses medicines, besides

administering the sacraments. The priest is seen as a man of God. He is expected to spend part of his time in union with God, talking and listening to him. He is seen as an honest and a just man who deals equitably with everybody. He commands the respect of the people who trust him with their confidence.¹²

“What the priest means to the people of Angola”, according to Cardinal Alexander Do Nascimento, Archbishop of Luanda, **Angola** and **Sao Tome** is best rendered by the local expression in one of the national languages – **NGAGA-A-NZAMBI**.

In the minds of the simple people of my country, Catholic priests are thought of as closely linked to sacred things, to the things of God. In one of our national languages, a word used to convey the concept of Catholic priest is linked with two things: the power to heal and the goodness of God. The priest then, is the one who restores lost health and who does this in the name of God, in the service of God ... as a rule the priest remains at the centre of the community of the baptized, the guarantor of the presence of the savior’s body and blood, but also of reconciliation so needed in our civic society.¹³

The image of the priest and **role expectation** however can be a subject of diverse implications in the African Christian communities. As Archbishop Antonio Jose of Tangiers, **Morocco** pointed out in his own ‘intervention’ at the 1990 synod, “like Jesus, the priest must be a person of dialogue, both within and outside of the Catholic community.”¹⁴ For Bishop Dieu Donne of Kenga, **Zaire** “in terms of faith and the Gospel the priest is called to be a convert to Christ Jesus and in terms of our people, a genuine representative of our cultural values, synthesizing these in life is not achieved instantly. It is a result of ongoing conversion and education. It goes without saying, of course, that such a programme of inculturated life holds good for all minister of the gospel”¹⁵

In **Nigeria**, the Church is blessed with numerous vocations in most dioceses. As for Bishop Albert Obiefuna of Awka, Nigeria, many factors are responsible for the huge numbers. The most obvious factor is the

peoples' great religious sense. Everywhere people are looking for priests. Huge numbers come for Masses, for Confessions and for Holy Communion. Priests are called for all kinds of celebrations. Everything must be blessed by the priest or by the bishop if not, people will consider the occasion unholy and incomplete.¹⁶ As for the image of the priest in Nigeria, the bishop has the following to add:

Priests are respected as sacred and holy even where they do not live up to their expectations. Vocations to the priesthood cannot but flourish in such a religious atmosphere. Vocations fall where ministry of priests means nothing to the people, where the priest is made to look like, behave like and dress like a layman in the name of being with the people. This does not work in my country.¹⁷

Factors responsible for the building of the image of the priest

The above samples of opinions on the image of the Catholic priest from different parts of Africa summarize what African Catholics and others think about the priest and what they expect and feel should be his role in the community in which he discharges his key ministry. Among most Nigerian Catholics, one can add without any fear of exaggeration or contradiction, that the priest is expected to be playing all the above outlined roles and in fact more. He is a super-human being and is believed to possess all spiritual and temporal gifts and virtues in abundance. He holds the key to all moral, intellectual, spiritual, social, cultural and political problems, and it is believed that he is in the position to solve them no matter his age and experience. People approach him for solutions to their economic problems. He is expected to give financial support to both the poor and the rich, even to the rich who are engaging in multi-million dollar ventures. If he is not in the position to practically finance the business project, at least he can recommend the business man to higher officials in government or in the business circle who can help. On account of his position in Church and society, it is presumed that he commands a lot of influence and therefore could talk to all big people in the area. His 'vow' of poverty does not shield him from committing himself financially to the development of his village and family to the training of his brothers and sisters in school. He is in fact expected to extend his generosity to the extended families and neighbours. The

Nigerian-superman in the priestly garb is therefore capable of everything and his ability to supply answers to people's problems knows no bounds. Sometimes intensive pressures from kit and kin, friends and acquaintances can lead him to excesses. Where he decides to ignore such pressures, he may earn the wrath of the 'tempters' who join his other numerous foes to destroy him. Such a misguided picture of the priest who has a panacea for all problems can be frustrating and never encouraging. In such cases the priesthood can become a burdensome vocation for those who cannot tolerate or meet such role expectations. The priests' faults, in such situations are easily exaggerated and he may suffer untold hardship.

What factors have contributed to the 'extra-ordinary high expectations' of the priest on the part of the people? What boosted the image of the priest in the past, which many suspect or claim is at present dwindling or sagging? Rev. Dr. Anthony Ekwunife C.S.Sp., a Nigerian theologian has given a brilliant expose' of "**The image of the priest in contemporary Africa**", in a paper presented on the occasion of the 3rd SIST Missiological symposium on the **Clergy in Nigeria today**. He traces the build-up and the growth of this image (false or real) to early Catholic Missionary period.

The Image of 'unlimited power'

According to Ekwunife many factors contributed to the Missionaries' great success in many fields. One of these was the consciousness of unlimited power 'plenitudo', which can be defined as the ensemble of forces – physical, moral, social, political, religious and economic – which are said to reside in the will of the Almighty God and the socio-political cum economic, humanitarian aspirations of western powers of which the missionaries and their allies are mandated to implement.¹⁸ This 'unlimited power', influence and control which the missionaries wielded was primarily as a result of the role expectation which they filled, among the Africans whom they ministered to. Their black African successors naturally inherited this power image which can be attributed largely to the following:

- Their spiritual out-look and dedication to duty which won admiration from both young and old and encouraged vocation boom;

- The control and management of schools naturally helped to increase the power and unquestionable authority of the missionaries.
- The works of charity which they carried out among the wretched and benighted Africans of course showed that they came to give and bestow the riches of the west on the Africans. The one that plays the piper naturally calls the tune.

As Mrs. Gladys Ujomo pointed out in her own contribution to the present debate (the priest in Nigeria today – a lay-woman’s perspective), the present Nigerian priest inherited unlimited authority and control of finances from the missionaries:

The laity did not seem to know how the priest administered the finances of the parish/diocese. It was purely a priestly affair. The priest was the sole director of the Church business and hence it was ‘Father’s Church’, ‘Uka fada’ in Igbo; Church fadi’ in Yoruba, and ‘Aduwan fada’, in Hausa. Most of his projects were carried out with foreign aids and he was not accountable to the laity who were objects of pastoral care.¹⁹

The laity against the above background was at the receiving end of the priests’ charity and good works. He literally cut and chewed and spat into their mouths whatever he wanted them to swallow.²⁰ There were not a few Christians as well as non-Christians in Nigeria who saw a priest really as one vested with divine and human authority. He was rarely challenged even when he went wrong. Stories are still told of one Rev. Father Michael Forley who ministered at St. Michael’s Urualla in the diocese of Orlu. He dismissed five of his primary school teachers who complained of late payment of their salaries. He also disbanded the Church committee because some of the members enquired about the proceeds from the years’ bazaar and harvest sales. As far as the pioneer missionary priest was concerned that was ‘anathema’. The people had no right to know about the financial stand of the parish. He was accountable to no one.

That was the time when the priest was the alpha and omega in the Church in Nigeria, the priest enjoyed the absolute power and the layman obeyed him as if the priests were gods. The layman was to be seen and not heard. He was not regarded as member of the Church but an object of pastoral care who has no business in the administration of the Church.²¹

The divine judgment which he administered added further aura of the divine to his person. The priest, and he alone could sit at the confessional, while poor sinners, the children of Adam went and knelt before him asking for forgiveness of their sins: “Father, forgive me for I have sinned...” No matter how he scolds the repentant sinner, no matter the amount of severe punishment meted on the sinner, the priest receives a favourable reaction from the penitent: “Yes father, thank you father”. The story told of a Rev. Father who was angry with a layman and slapped him, was one out of so many of similar incidents. As the story went the people who were around when the white missionary slapped the man feared that the layman would revenge, but instead, he went and knelt down, thanking God that a holy man had slapped him!

By reason of the power to forgive sins that had been conferred on him at ordination, he alone could bind and loose, he alone could serve as judge and jury. His main task was to make certain that the penitent confessed his sins according to genus, species and number, provided that the penitent was truly sorry for his sins and had a firm purpose of amendment, the priest could then pronounce the words of absolution in the name of Jesus; ‘Ego te absolvo ab omnibus peccatis tuis, in nomine patris et filii et spiritu sancti, Amen’.²²

In the African rural areas it was unusual to see a priest pay casual visits to families, expect on sick calls. In fact if he approaches any home on foot or in his car, neighbours usually enquired whether someone was sick and of utmost significance, the priests’ commitment of celibacy really contributed to his self-understanding as someone ‘set apart’. “The majority of the human race married and had families. He, however, had been called to ‘a higher state of life’. Well aware, at least intellectually of

the sacrificial dimension involved, he embraced a celibate life style in order to demonstrate his regard for a Church law that would enable him to be free 'to be all things to all men'.²³ This singular 'heroic act and commitment' to a strange type of unmarried state of life (at least as Africans see it) has in fact contributed to enhance the authority, power and prestige which the Catholic priest enjoyed. He could 'fail' in some other 'vows' and self-imposed sacrifices, but not in his commitment to celibate life and chastity. The people would be ready to forgive and forget his many idiosyncrasies, but not breaking this crucial law of celibacy. It will later become a yard stick for measuring his image and values.

Tracing the sources of his power and influence, we have seen some of the factors that have contributed to the growth of the good image of the priest in the past. Although his domineering authority seems to be dwindling in the present times, there is no sufficient reason to believe that the priest will cease to enjoy those privileges, respect and honour with which the Catholic priesthood has been identified for long now. At least in Nigeria we are sure that his good image has not vanished, he is respected and greeted obsequiously everywhere both by Catholics and non-Catholics. In spite of his often exaggerated failures, he is still seen 'a man of the people's alter Christus, a just judge, a prophet and a priest – who intercedes for men before the Almighty Father. He is still 'fada' – priest, 'fada' – 'nna' (the head of the family). Both the young and the old respect and honour him.

The image of the priest: present times

Has the image of the priest, as some of his critics claim, really dwindled? Has he failed woefully to play his role expectations among the people? What has contributed to the bad situation? Or are his critics not judging rashly? Are they not prejudiced or is the priest, perhaps not misunderstood by his critics? Whatever the case may be, there is nothing wrong if we made investigations to establish the truth or falsehood contained in the criticisms directed against the present image of the Catholic priesthood. The results of such investigations will help us see the 'way forward'.

The Catholic priest may not find himself alone in the present predicament, where the authority of the leaders of the people is facing challenges and stiff opposition. As the Jews questioned the authority with which Christ was acting, so also the present generation of enlightened

people is no more content with one man's dictatorship. Certain decisions affecting the lives of so many in a community cannot be left with the whims and caprices of one man. Collective decision or leadership, if not democratic ruling is preferred. Therefore, the authority of the traditional leadership, the political leadership and even that of heads of families has come to be challenged.

The Church's leadership at the highest level has also been questioned: "Is the pope really infallible or not?" If the authority of the supreme Roman pontiff, the visible head of the Church of Christ on earth can be challenged, even by his closest allies in the hierarchy of the Church, what of the poor parish priest in the poor remote African village? "To expand on some of the basic changes that have occurred in our society", insists John Fogarty, "would be to belabour the obvious". The general knowledge explosion in all fields of human endeavour has had a marked effect on the people's view of themselves and the world in which we live. It has also had an influence on the way in which we perceive God, Jesus Christ, the Church and her fairly visible local representatives – the priests.

Among the many factors that contributed to this different understanding of spiritual realities were a sense of openness, the development of an appreciation for history and historical consciousness, the decline of common meaning and the practical implementation of certain principles that have been enunciated by the Second Vatican Council.²⁴

Various developments in theological investigations brought about by the Vatican II have created a new vision of reality and the Church. Thus the dimension of history had finally come to the fore within the Church. Language, meaning, values and cultures were seen as subject to change. This history of human race was not the static record it was once thought to be. The concept of **pluralism** in both religious and secular world have paved way for divergence of opinions. No one man can now possess a monopoly of knowledge. "No longer do many Catholics look outside of themselves for authoritative sources. Better education, surrounded by information available to them on all sides, feeling comfortable about looking to their own life experience as a primary source in decision – making, they rely on their own conscience as their ultimate criterion. No

longer do they rely on the clergy to make their decisions for them. Now, they are ready and willing to assume full responsibility here and in the here-after for the decisions they make”.²⁵

The changes brought about by the explosion of knowledge and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council had also unlimited consequences on the African Church and its clergy. But it was clear that the Vatican II’s “signs of the times” was meant to prepare both the clergy and the people for the ‘new era in the history of the Church’. There was no need in fact for one to feel that the Church was going astray or that massive defection of priests from the priestly ministry was to be the end of the Church. Perhaps ‘the opening of the windows of the Church’ which Pope John XXIII did to let in fresh air should be seen as a venture in the right direction, the action of the Holy Spirit meant to strengthen the Church. It was an opportunity for members of the clergy who were being suffocated by the demands of Priestly celibacy to get some relief. The event should not be seen as a curse in the history of the Catholic Church.

Naturally as a result of Vatican II’s ‘reformations’, most Catholics have come to see that their priests are human as they themselves are human; that priests are like them in all things, including sin.

One of the factors that has contributed greatly to the improved relationship between priests and people is the increased involvement of the laity in matters ecclesial, their roles in the liturgy as ministers of the word and Eucharist, their membership in parish councils, their work as catechists, their involvement in parish finances have brought them into closer contact with the clergy. They have come to recognize that though priests have different roles or functions within the Church, the clergy still share with them the same human nature.²⁶

There was of course also the confusion brought about by the ‘new teaching’ about the Ministerial Priesthood and the Priesthood of all the Baptized. Such concepts were not easy to translate or be made meaningful to the Africans. No doubt, such teaching including infidelity to celibacy or worse still that a Catholic priest could revert to a secular status helped to tarnish the image of the Catholic priesthood.

Expectations and catalogue of sins

On the African, and in the Nigerian scene, there are not a few Catholics, including priests themselves who feel that the priest no longer commands that awe which made people formerly dread him. They feel that the priest has to prove his mettle, first before acceptance, even at that, he is no longer regarded as the sole possessor of power. That image is gone and seems to have gone forever! But as far as we know, the Nigerian critics of priesthood are only exaggerating and are blowing up the issue of an unreasonable **size**. They are either ignorant, misguided, prejudiced or simply mean to attack one or two priests – x-raying their pit-falls in order to lump together all Nigerian priests, and in fact the entire priests of the Catholic Church into one discredited group – adulterers, power-seekers and wealthy hypocrites in priestly garb. These critics and enemies of priests who are even worst accomplices in crimes are always ready to produce a catalogue of atrocities which they claim must be committed by priests, and Nigerian priests in particular. We give such a summary of the priest's sins here. Such sins of priests are often circulated to priests during annual retreats in unsigned documents often titled: **What laymen expect of priests; What women expect of priests; Layman's view and expectations of a priest etc.** Any deviation from these expectations is a disaster:

- The layman regards the priest as a super human being.
- The priest is a holy man, a man so close to God that he is considered next to God and is therefore expected to be perfect.
- He is a man committed to the vow of celibacy and chastity, who has nothing to do with women.
- A man who would not misappropriate the Church or other funds entrusted to his care.
- The layman expects this holy man to keep strictly to his ordination vows of obedience, poverty, celibacy and to be dedicated and committed to his calling in life.
- The layman expects him to administer the sacraments, wear his cassocks (Cn. 284) most of the time.
- The priest is expected to be a good preacher and to live by what he preaches and to preside over the Eucharistic celebration with dedication, commitment, conviction and utmost reverence.

- A layman expects a priest to be a humble man, who renders real selfless service.
 - He must be a man who does not like money and other worldly things to the detriment of his vocation
 - He should not take part in partisan politics (Cn. 287.2).
 - He must be a man of sound knowledge of the teachings of the Church and of canon law.
 - He must be a man of prayer.
 - A man who would not be found in hotels.
 - He should not extort money from the people before performing his expected priestly duties.
 - He must take the people into confidence in the administration of his parish.
- (Extracted from a symposium paper on ‘The priest in Nigeria, A layman’s perspective).

After an extensive treatment of what the Nigerian priest should do and not do, the author went further to highlight other priests’ offences concerning sex. According to him:

There are two things that people are most critical and sensitive of in Church administration ... no matter how well a priest celebrates the mass, preaches or how hardworking he is, if he does things that make the lay people to regard him as a person who is always ‘running’ after women and who cannot also be trusted with money, then he is finished and nothing can redeem these two poor images.

And according to another layman who also presented a paper in the symposium, still on the above issue of **sex and money**, there were the following remarks:

The most sensational problem that rocks the foundation of any organization, for example, the Church is the issue of sexual misdemeanor. An ordained priest of God should like Caesar’s wife be above suspicion. In fact he does not only have to be free, he must convince others and be seen as free from sex scandal ... Many other shortcomings of a priest are

not as destructive as this one and my advice is that a priest must pass this acid test by all means. It is not negotiable.

On **money**, the presenter advises, “excess love for money is the root of all evils. Priests must show a high degree of accountability”.

In another write-up, circulated among priests during one annual retreat titled “What women expect of priests”, by a Catholic lay woman, the two issues of sex and money featured prominently. The pious lady gave detailed advice to Nigerian priests on how to avoid temptations coming from women- middle aged and old women, women between 25 and 39, girls in their teens and non-Catholic women. She cautioned that Priest should not allow girls in the mission premises or in fathers’ houses, whether they are priests’ relatives, sisters or distant relations. The lay woman counselor of priests claimed that she had observed other serious anomalies in the life-style of present-day Nigerian priests. According to her the post Nigerian civil war **materialism** of the society was catching up with the priest. Some of the younger ones have completely abandoned the sacred habit, the soutane, with all the respect it commands and have opted to go in plain clothes. Some of these younger Priests not only go in plain clothes but dress up in such fashions that are not befitting of priests. A number of them, she claimed, have acquired all sorts of material possessions, a few have been known to have entered certain types of financial deals that make one wonder whether really the labourer has need of his wages, and whether they are regretting their entry into priesthood.

Generally there are other areas of priestly life which some Nigerian critics of priests maintained have contributed to the ‘sagging image’ of the priesthood. These include, primarily what is referred to as ‘**Secular Model**’. Since one of the avenues for positions of powers in Nigeria today, is paper qualifications in secular degrees, it is claimed that most Nigerian priests rush for **degrees** to boost their image, doctorate degrees that are marketable for lucrative jobs in the universities or elsewhere. In the excessive mania for doctorate degrees many refuse to accept appointments as parish priests in rural and poor areas.

In this **Secular Model**, one finds priests, too who like ordinary rich Nigerians indulge in superfluous and extravagant spending on birthday and ordination and anniversary celebrations: these priests therefore seem to prefer the image of worldly lords charged with the duty of displaying

worldly excellence and wealth. The result is that the majority of Nigerians put them in the category of the Nigerian bourgeois class and treats them as such. Some critics of Nigerian Priests claim that the wave of **anti-clericalism** and armed robbery unleashed against priests in Nigeria today is a pointer to the society's assessment of the priest's image in our times.

Redeeming the “badly damaged” image of the priest

In the first place, we have to ask ourselves the question, whether the image of the priests in general, including the African and Nigerian priests has been really ‘bad damaged’. If so, can it be restored or has it been damaged beyond repair that one should no more bother oneself with a search for reparation. How far are the critics of the priests correct in their assessment of the role expectations of the catholic priest?

These questions are being asked by both sympathizers and Church authorities and answers to the questions are crucial for any future role of the priest in the society and Church anywhere and Africa in particular. The Nigerian perspective will be used to respond to these questions. We will first tackle the problem of **materialism and money**.

Priests and money

The first observation we are making which every reader of our write-up must take seriously is that the African priest, the Nigerian priest has Herculean problems facing him as he ministers among his very people. The white missionaries may have committed those ‘atrocities’ which Nigerians claim their counterparts are committing today. But the people did not care much to know about the activities of the missionaries, or rather they had not access to their premises or could not even communicate with them as result of language barrier. He spoke Greek to them, if the Catechist or an interpreter was not around.

Most of their accusations of materialism, money and lavish life styles are not based on the facts but on prejudices. There is a natural prejudice against the black priest who knows the black man well, speaks his language and understands his way of life. The priest knows when his fellow African is deceiving and when he is sincere. The African and the Nigerian Catholics are not the best when it comes to honest behavior, and have their crooked ways of life. They could easily cheat and deceive the white man but not their fellow black man, who also knows and could

confront them and tell them their faults to their face. It will not surprise anybody in Nigeria to find out that the rich benefactor and life-wire of so many priests and bishops in one diocese where the benefactor is residing may be a dare-devil at home, in his community and home parish and diocese. Because the bishop or the priests of the diocese which he patronizes do not know him and his wicked ways at home, they are ready to canonize him in a living saint. They sing his praises everywhere as he is always ready to share his wealth and money with the Church 'abroad'. At home, neither his people, nor the parish community will be ready to vouch for his good character nor accept any gifts from him.

This type of man 'Oka mma na mba' (only a good man outside his home) always speaks ill of those priests and bishops who know his ways. Those who are ready to accept his 'Greek Gifts' or sing his unmerited praises are his declared enemies, among whom are priests who have sought to help him change his ways. At home he might be an oppressor of the poor, a bad egg in the community.

Nigerians who accuse priests of excessive craving for material well-being, who chase after money, positions of honour, flamboyant life-style are only deceiving themselves and should not be taken seriously. In Africa and in Nigeria in particular, **poverty** is never a virtue and any person, priest or lay person who assumes or exhibits any style of lowly and poor life is grossly despised. **Humility** is equally not a virtue and any person, priest or lay person who wishes to be humble is regarded a fool. Woe betide any traditional Chief or community leader who is said to be **poor** and **humble**. In a country where the rich personalities, high society figures, noisy and flamboyant over-lords are adored, it is unlikely that the priest, who naturally belongs to a 'high class group' will be respected and obeyed if he decides to take the lowly stand of a humble servant.

With a few examples, we may be in a position to convince our readers and doubting Thomas's that we are not cracking any joke when we insist that a poor and humble priest in an African society may be an embarrassment to his parish or community. The people most often do not cherish such a figure and will insist that he ascends the social ladder to discover the class which he belongs. The poor man is not a 'man of the people'.

Father John studied Canon Law at the Lateran University in Rome and while in Rome he was impressed by the life-style of the clergy in Rome. Bishops and even some cardinals working with the Roman Curia

in the Vatican were known to live simple life-style befitting men of God and servants of the people. Some of them were known to struggle in the public buses for space with a common people, especially during the rush hours in the busy city centre. Those who were offered luxurious cars even refused such gifts and preferred to travel in public buses, rubbing shoulders with common citizens. When Father John completed his studies and returned to Nigeria, his bishop assigned him to a parish in a very poor remote community. The parishioners were poor rural peasants and could not provide a car for the parish priest. With the little money John was given by some benefactors he was able to purchase a second-hand Volkswagen car. The parish priests working in the neighboring parishes had 504 Peugeot cars. The parishioners of Fr. John's parish met and decided to sell some of their belongings to purchase a brand new Peugeot car for their parish priest. The people were angry with their parish priest whom they complained was insulting them by ridding a Volkswagen car. They would like to be like others. When Fr. John refused their offer the people petitioned the bishop requesting him to remove their parish priest for his 'unbecoming behavior'. The **poor** and **humble** Fr. John was disappointed at what he also thought was a strange attitude of a people he was sent to serve, in the Spirit of Christ, the poor and humble servant. This incident took place in one of the Nigerian dioceses, East of the Niger in 1982.

Another incident which further illustrates our point, namely, that Africans generally do not admire a poor humble priest, took place in Germany in 1985. A young Nigerian priest had finished his studies in one of the German universities, and visited his family friends in Munich who offered him a small Renault car which they had fairly used for a period of three years. With that the young priest could begin work back home in Nigeria. The young priest was so happy and broke the happy news to a fellow Nigerian friend, and layman studying in a German university. Hearing that the gift was a **small Renault second-hand car**, the young man warned the Nigerian priest never to mention even the name of the car to the hearing of anybody. As far as he was concerned it was a disgrace to the Nigerian community at home where the priest may be posted to work when he eventually returns home. How can a priest who had studied overseas and even earned a doctorate degree not be in the position to return home with a brand new Mercedes car or a BMW car or

at least a new Peugeot car?, the young man reasoned. Who should talk of a poor humble priest? It is a contradiction in terms, at least in Nigeria!

Nigerian families and communities expect their sons and brothers who are priests to be rich and be in the position even to take up some family and community financial responsibilities. He may be regarded as a failure where, like Fr. John he decides to take the posture of a poor humble priest. If he does not ride a good car he may not be respected. If he decides to spend money prudently, he may lose friends and the company of his relations.

In the eyes of a western visitor certain celebrations and festivities, like priestly ordinations or anniversaries can really look extravagant and scandalous. Shorter makes one of the observations: "Priestly ordination is celebrated in Africa on a scale and with a lavishness probably unknown elsewhere in the world."²⁷ Shorter does not feel that this is bad in itself, but he has his fears still. The young man who is the focus of all the festivity and congratulations can easily persuade himself that he is now beyond criticism and accountability. Such tragic self-deception, Shorter thinks can only be forestalled by learning to undertake menial tasks with generosity. Although priests rightly offer paid employment to a number of people, the white missionary who has worked for many years in Africa (but unfortunately does not know all about Africa and Africans), suggests that seminarians (and priests too) should get their hands dirty. They should do a fair amount of cleaning, laundry, dish-washing and gardening and not remain content to be waited on hand and foot by others.

Good sermon by Shorter! Who does not agree that African bishops, priests and seminarians should do some manual work and even dish-washing? But the point is not whether these God's ministers are ready to undertake menial tasks or not. They are ready of course. But will the people like and admire their priest who uses his hands. He may be misunderstood. Perhaps he is a miser and would not like to spend or let others benefit from such services as gardening or laundry. But by the way, if a black African priest were to undertake such menial jobs what will the numerous house boys who flock the fathers' house do? They are readily at hand to render such services and thereby attend school and eat. If a humble bishop ventures doing some menial task like gardening, will the people not be scandalized and even petition the pope(!) to warn the bishop to stop disgracing the Church and belittling his high office? Can the people even understand it if their bishop appears in public in civil

dress and not in his bishopric cassock? That may be the scandal of the moment!

Truly one finds now and again, here and there what looks like extravaganza in ceremonies, feasting and spending during priestly ordinations and jubilee anniversaries. But in most cases the reason behind such levels of spending is that the people want them that way. In short that is part and parcel of 'African way of life' and it should be seen as that. At the priestly ordinations in one Nigerian diocese in 1993, one of the new priests did not receive a car gift from his parishioners. It did not worry him any way and he was ever ready to take a taxi to the places he wanted until their locations were out. Perhaps he might be lucky to be sent to a parish that had two cars. But the people, and especially the Lagos branch of the town union would not allow their son to go on a taxi. As the story went, it was a protestant chairman of the town union who sponsored a motion during an emergency meeting called to discuss the new priest's 'predication' that the Lagos branch of the town union should provide a car for the new priest. About two weeks after his ordination the young priest got his car and smiled like others! As for the chairman of the parish council who led the delegation to Lagos to inform the branch union about the sorry situation, a calamity had struck the parish and community and something must be done and urgently. Moreover the new priest was the first the young poor parish had got.

From all the above observations, it can be seen that the picture of **a wealthy, materialistic and extravagant** priest being painted by disgruntled critics in Africa may in fact not be entirely of his own making. The image of a priest that completely shuns intellectual excellence, social and cultural appreciation of African way of life, may at last not be truly African. There is celebration at every occasion and it is even difficult to distinguish when some Africans are mourning or rejoicing. It is not true that African priests have abandoned their vocation in pursuit of wealth and worldly power. There is nothing really wrong in keeping to the limits of what makes decent life. In Africa and Nigeria, there should be no cause for alarm.

Is the Nigerian priest also corrupt?

Let us at this stage try to disabuse the minds of honest and good Nigerians of the silly prejudices and propaganda which some wicked enemies of priests spread against the priests of God in Nigeria. Foreigners

living within and outside our country should also take note of what we are saying. If there is any human being in the Nigerian society today who can be entrusted with money, **it is the priest**. In a country where bribery and corruption, fraudulent practices carried out to cheat and accumulate wealth have been enthroned as a way of life, **it is only the priest** still who condemns these evil practices which have dented the image of our country everywhere. The priest remains the sole defender of the poor and the oppressed and challenges the rich to consider the plight of the poor and the down –trodden. For instance, **an open letter to Dives (the rich) and Lazarus, (the Poor)** is a new book written by a young Orlu diocesan priest, Fr. Bernard Ukwuegbu.

But alas, in his crusader against bribery and corruption, his attacks on the rich minority who amass wealth for themselves at the detriment of the poor majority, his attacks on those who defraud governments and even the poor Church of Christ, it is belaboring the obvious to point out that the man of God, the proclaimed of the word of God will normally step on sore toes. Most of these corrupt Nigerians are Christians, and Catholics who sit at the front pews in the Church on Sundays to listen to the priest's sermons. Most of them may not like his sermons and attacks on the rich over-lords. On their own side, they would counter-attack the poor priest and accuse him of all sorts of financial malpractices. Now, if a brother of a priest is doing well, it is the priest who is sponsoring the business; if a brother of a priest is riding a good car, it is the priest who has bought it for him; if a nice house is erected in a priest's family, it is the priest who has done it; if a brother or sister of a priest is studying in the university or overseas, it is the priest who is sponsoring him or her. The priest is presumed to be the bread winner of the family and his brothers. Sister and parents are good for nothing. They cannot struggle along with other Nigerians to accumulate wealth! Only a few people question the basis for these accusations which are often leveled against priests in Nigeria. From where does the parish priest get all the money for all these commitments and numerous projects he is thought to be executing? Some of the priests have not even been in the ministry for more than a year and are already believed to have contributed immensely to the financial growth of their families. Most of the priests are lecturers in the universities and only receive financial support to maintain their cars which are most often in bad shape, and perhaps feed from the Sunday collections and mass stipends. Those who work in the poorer

parishes receive financial support from their families, brothers and sisters. Some go to their families even to collect food items from their parents in order to survive. Some brothers and relations of priests are known to have bought cars for their brothers at ordination, especially where the parish fails to carry out this obligation. Priest's brothers and relations are known to have denied themselves certain comforts in order to help their brother in the priesthood 'look like his mates'. And naturally in the African mentality and culture they show that they are their 'brother's keeper' in times of emergency. Many bishops of course send regular financial support to some of their priests living in difficult and poor parishes.

Perhaps the priest's sin is seen in his visit to the poor parents. What is wrong with his attitude if he sends the sick and aged mother or father to the hospital and perhaps pay the hospital bill, if he can really afford it. Should he neglect his sick parent which is of course un-African? Should he avoid visiting his home so that he should not be accused of sending bundles of money to his family? Why can't priest's brothers and relations be among the rich Nigerians?

We may discover some of the reasons why priests are accused of financial impropriety. In fact he remains the only voice in the desert that condemns financial abuses and fraudulent practices in our country today. He remains the only stumbling block to the many Church and parish committees which may plan to embezzle Church funds. Most members of the Church's committees do not like priests to meddle in financial matters of the Church. They keep him at arms length so that he would not discover their fraudulent practices. They refuse to adhere to the Church's or diocesan regulations on finance and accountability. They often do not accept the priest's authority and may prefer to hand over large sums of bazaar or harvest money to their own appointed treasurer instead of banking it! Often members of the Church committees do not allow the parish priest to be one of the signatories to the parish bank accounts. All these can bring a lot of ill-feelings and create a situation of war between the priest and his people.

If the people do not trust their priest with money, if they do not hand their money to him for security, to whom will they go? The truth is that it is the priest that can keep the people's money and the owners collect their money when they want. And no matter the level to which the people have lost their consciences and confidence in fellow human

beings, by and large **the Catholic priest still remains trustworthy, credit worthy and reliable** in matters of money more than most other people. Some Nigerians may see him as ‘one of them’ –corrupt and dishonest, because they believe that in our society today, where evil is even thought to be a virtue, no man can be perfect. But there are many in Nigeria today who in matters of money strongly hold that the catholic priest is ‘not like the rest of men’.

Is the Nigerian priest worldly?

As we have argued elsewhere, if the Nigerian priest looks worldly in comportment and attire, our society has made him so. There are of course many Nigerian priests who are ‘**very spiritual**’. They are men of prayer per excellence. They practice the virtues and their spiritual lives are sources of inspiration to the faithful. People rush to them on account of their rare spiritual gifts and they live even like monks and excel in works of charity, in humility and poverty. Those priests who do not live up to the standard expected of them in spiritual matters should therefore wake up and do what Christ and His Church have prescribed. But to lump all Nigerian priests together as ‘worldly’ is just unfair.

The cassock and modern fashion:

Most Nigerians are not well informed. They may need to be told that throughout the universal Church, it is the African and the Nigerian priests who still revere their clerical habit, the cassock or soutane. Nigerian bishops put on their cassocks from dawn to dusk and few people, and even priests can claim that they have seen their bishops in civil dress within or outside their houses or offices. Most Nigerian priests likewise put on their cassocks most of the time, at the liturgical celebrations and festivities and mostly while traveling outside their houses on official and private engagements. The insinuation by some enemies of priests in Nigeria that armed robbers attack priests who do not put on their clerical dress is of course based on mere prejudices against priests. Armed robbers attack priests as well as other simple Nigerians because these armed robbers feel that priests or simple citizens do not keep fire arms and may not resist armed attacks. Priests are doves, not aggressive, obedient to orders and are forgiving. They pray to God to forgive their enemies and those who attack and injure them. But armed robbers who have severely been dealt with by priests in various ways have learnt their

lessons. These days the wearing of cassocks may not make much difference in the way people treat the priest. They know them; they identify their priests whether these are in their clerical habit or not.

But whatever the case may be, Nigerian priests are widely known to be closely attached to the clerical dress and are often referred to as 'conservative monks', perpetually attached to their white cassock under rain or sun, and of course in the heat of the long liturgical celebrations. Nigerian Priests dress 'heavily' during long liturgical celebrations from 'head to toe'. While most priests in the west are content with their soutane and even lay dress at liturgical celebrations, Nigerians, from the bishops to the last ordained priests put on their *albs, cincture, amice and chasuble* on top of their lay dress and white cassock. The seminarians, right from the first year of their senior seminary formation are obliged to put on their soutanes during prayers, classes, at table and even seminary authorities expect them to be on their soutanes during manual labour.

How then can people accuse Nigerian priests of abandoning their clerical garb in order to 'hide among the crowd?' This is quite unfair. And since many enlightened people all over the world accept today that 'it is not the habit that makes the monk' why then this hypocritical lamentation by 'pious' Nigerian Catholics that their priests have abandoned their cassocks in order to commit atrocities undetected. Even while making long travels within or outside the country, most Nigerian priests at the least put on the internationally recognized clerical habit called 'the clergyman'. The story was told of a meeting of national and provincial representatives of priests of one international religious congregation which took place in Rome early January 1993. At that meeting it was reported that it was only the members of the Nigerian delegation that were on the clerical dress. The others ridiculed the Nigerian priests as 'moving behind the times!'

There are other frivolous and ridiculous remarks which Nigerians make about their priests which still point to the accusation that Nigerian priests are 'going worldly'. During an 'open forum' at the Enugu symposium on 'The priest in Nigeria today', one chief judge of a high court of Nigeria, a pious catholic stood up to complain about how priests 'imitate the men of this world'. He was particularly angry with priests who put on what he called all sorts of **perfume** and **make-ups** to look decent like other men. As far as the honorable judge was concerned, Priests should not use perfumed soaps or creams, body or hair lotions. In

fact, according to him, priests should not look attractive or clean. There were also complaints about priests who go to the barber's saloon or who put on 'baggy or bogus trousers', who crack jokes or laugh loudly at public places and gathering. As far as these pious Nigerian Catholics are concern, priests should not 'move with the times'. They should behave, speak, dress, eat and generally comport themselves like the ideal white missionaries of Bishop Shanahan era. They are simply to be 'in this world but not be part of it'. Where they are unable to keep to this status-quo, they had better put off their cassocks and join others in the other businesses and activities of this life. We can see therefore that most of the criticisms leveled against priests are based mainly on sentiments and ignorance of some facts concerning this vocation. The people should in fact readjust their views and impressions and remain open to the 'signs of the times'.

PRIESTHOOD AND CELIBACY

As we have seen already, the second important factor which many people all over the world including Africans and Nigerians claim had contributed to the 'dented image' of the Catholic priesthood is the problem of celibacy. Outside the problem of **money**, any breach of this clerical vow of celibacy and chastity means the destruction of what remains of the image of the priest. The issue is **not** negotiable according to most lay people.

Once again, our stand in this matter is that most of the accusation that all priest break this vow are based on false prejudices and on false generalizations as well as on ignorance. As far as many pious Nigerians are concerned, if the Church decides to abolish this law and allow Catholic priests to take wives, Nigerian priests should be excluded from such 'concession'. Some Nigerians mean that their Church in Africa will go to blazes, people will abandon the Church and revert to the traditional religion; there would be an erosion of trust and confidence formerly reposed on the priest. Furthermore no one will confess his sins to the priest again, since the married priest may reveal confessional secrets to his wife and children. There are may other frivolous arguments and views based on simple sentiments which Nigerians bring up to oppose any idea of lifting the ban on the marriage of priest: "Who will maintain his children? We will be taxed for the up-keep of his wife and children". But

these Catholics forget that the Anglican pastors in the same community has a wife and children and most leaders of the Pentecostal Churches and the innumerable Independent Churches and religious Movements are married and have children. Some even operate more flourishing Churches than Catholics. No disaster or calamity has struck their Churches.

But the truth of this matter concerning the celibate life, if we still use the Nigerian situation to illustrate, is that, it is widely acclaimed even by critics that Nigerian bishops and their priests excel their counterparts elsewhere in the observance of their commitment to the priestly vow of celibacy and chastity. There are many Nigerian bishops and priests and religious who are known to be **living saints** in the issue of pure and chaste life. They have passed the acid taste, if this issue is the only one necessary for the canonization of saints. They preach it and they live what they preach.

But again a few cases of failure on the part of a few individuals is not enough to provoke sweeping statements and reactions from the faithful. If priestly **holiness** is important and is closely linked with chastity, most Nigerian priests and their families are quite aware of the fact. Like the **wife** in the African society who does not 'belong' to the **husband** alone, in the sense that other members of the family contribute to her welfare and protection, so also the priest is not ordained for himself alone. The member of his family and extended relations share in his worries and successes. They help to protect his image and would not like him to bring shame to their family. In fact, in most families before a son or a brother or a sister takes to priestly or to religious life, the members of the family gather in a closed-door meeting to question the young aspirant if he or she is aware of the commitments and obligations and demands of their divine calling. When later they get any bad news about the bad behavior of their brother or sister in the ministry, they call him or her to order. They will not accept any 'double-standard stance'. The choice is there, 'if you cannot make it, if you cannot live up to expectation, you had better decide before it is late'. In Africa, a calamity has befallen a family whose son or daughter has left the priesthood or religious life!

But one may like to ask, whether it is fear of such failures and consequences for the families of priest that persuade priests and sisters to remain in the priesthood or religious life, no matter the odds. Or perhaps can such a proposition be framed like this: "I would have liked to leave, but I fear that my family will be disappointed. Even I fear the that I might

not adjust easily to life outside the priesthood". Such reasons can of course make priests anywhere to continue the struggle, suffer even where frustrations have set in and the priest finds no more conviction reasons to continue.

In Europe, and elsewhere in the Catholic world, people are more understanding and sympathetic and do not see priests who leave the priesthood as other Judases who had betrayed their masters. They bear no ill will towards those who have left the active ministry. But this is not always the case in Africa. Africans are unforgiving and uncompromising. In one community, South of the Niger in the Nigerian Church, in fact a certain Catholic community had completed plans to ostracize the father of a girl who married a 'fallen priest'. It was at the intervention of the village chief and the bishop of the diocese that they agreed to forgive the man. In another community, the people had vowed never to allow an ex-priest from their town who married and ex-sister to return home. The ex-priest and his wife are meanwhile living in London. Who knows whether the sons and daughters will get Nigerian wives or husbands when they grow up and eventually return home. In another incident an ex-senior seminarian, now married suffered an untold humiliation and shocking embarrassment when he attended a dancing party with his new wife. At a stage in one of the dancing sessions, one of the ex-seminarian's parishioners who identified him, boldly went to him in the hall and shouted, "Yes we know now why you abandoned your priestly vocation to come here and mess up with us!" The young men there organized some 'area boys' or a gang of trouble makers in the hall and threw the man and the wife out of the hall. Those who enquired what was happening and were told never cared to intervene; they supported the action of the boys.

These incidents will bring home, especially to non-Africans how Africans take the issue of any breach of the vow of celibacy. While Europeans may have a few huddles to jump in the struggle to keep to the vow of celibacy, the African priests have to begin from home, from their very families. Such awareness, no doubt help them more instead of frightening or discouraging them.

African Church and celibacy

But no matter the situation, Africans are not demanding that the Church should shelve the law of celibacy for their priests. As a universal problem, it must be given a universal or global solution. This will not

prevent us from discussing the issue here, even though the Church in 1990 at the synod of bishops had declared through Archbishop Giberto Agostino, secretary of the congregation for the clergy that *celibacy was not open for discussion*.²⁹

Over the past few years the subject of celibacy in terms of the formation of priests, has been raised. As the Archbishop addressed the issue he noted that without doubt sexuality has enormous importance in human life and society simply because it is innate. Consequently from this point of view if education towards perfect chastity proves difficult, this a problem shared by any one who wants to live an honest life. “Therefore when particular problems arise concerning perfect chastity we have to deal with these in terms of someone who ‘has ears to hear’ the call which Jesus addresses to him, and not on a purely anthropological level”.³⁰

The problem which the African Church encounters with celibacy is summarized by Father Kalenga Matembele, a Zairean priest from the parish of Somboshi in Sheba province in thoughts expressed by some African priests in a magazine ‘Spiritus’.³¹ According to Kalenga Africans and their priests are in no way denying the value and witness of remaining unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. But he wondered why and how this free offer, this invitation can be made into an obligation for all who wish to serve the Church as priests. And this is in a place like Africa, where **marriage and family** occupy such a central position in life. According to the Zairean priest: “Before the synod of bishops in 1971 81% of the 595 African priests in Zaire spoke out in favour making celibacy optional, but the Synod went against this large majority. Our views were asked, but they were not listened to, thus a split arose between priests and bishops, between the African and European Church”.³²

African problems centering on celibacy may not be understood or appreciated by Europeans and non-Africans. It is not a question of sexual satisfaction. It has to do with raising a family ‘sons who will weep for him when he dies, sons who would maintain the family tree or lineage, so that it does not disappear from history’. Celibacy has a wider concept in African context. First and foremost are the issues of children, land and inheritance. In the western concept, celibacy may be limited in the concept of living with a woman and the enjoyment of sex. Issues or

children may not be among the important elements of marriage in the west.

The African phenomenon was what the Nigerian priest, Emmanuel Obuna was treating in his controversial book “ *African Priests and Celibacy – in a culture where a man without children is a waste*”. We have already cited the book in the introductory part of our book. Father Obuna claimed that he was forced to investigate the problem of celibacy, particularly as it concerned the Africans and the Nigerians in particular as a result of the ever current debated on this issue. Perhaps that was part of his own contributions when he put his ambiguous rhetorical questions: “Since Africans, and Nigerians in particular place a great deal of emphasis on marriage and children, the most important question was, is celibacy really possible in an African culture where a man without children is often considered a ‘waste’ — for failing to fulfill his duty to the tribe?”.

Definitely Father Obuna had no intention of telling the world in his thesis on celibacy that African priests cannot be chaste or that in order to arrive at a self-fulfillment as Africans, they must at the same time take wives. That would make nonsense of the Catholic priesthood, as Christ and His Church had no intention of making a separate law of celibacy for the Africans. It is unlikely that such a ‘concession’, to be based on ‘the hardness of their hearts’, can be possible today.

Once on a holiday in Germany in 1990, I was in a group of German priests and laymen. So many usual questions about Africa — hunger, wars, disease, including aids had been directed to me. The topic had now shifted to the Church in Africa, its priests, the liturgy and the possibilities that in the near future the African priests will be expected to missionize or re-evangelize Europe. In fact, the area of the discussion and arguments that kept me thinking for a long time was that concerning the **African Priests and celibacy**. “I have heard it said in several church quarters”, began one of the priests who claimed he had worked as a Franciscan missionary for some years in one East African country, “that in Africa celibacy is a problem for African priests”. “Only in Africa?” I retorted. “No”, he answered, but continued “It is a problem everywhere, including Europe and Africa, but we heard that in Africa the problem is too big (sheer gross!)”. I grew tense but tried to avoid any confrontation that would turn the friendly discussion sour.

Without wasting time, I cited many well known stories, big scandals, some even reported in international magazines and in leading world news media, where many western priests and bishops have left the priesthood because they were no more able to keep the Church's law of celibacy. These must have broken this law many times before making up their minds to abandon the priestly vocation. He agreed with me. But as the discussion continued I discovered that the German missionary priest was making a strange cultural reference to the status of an unmarried man in Africa and the 'unnaturalness' of a situation where a healthy normal African male could remain single for his entire life. He insisted that he had read most of his stories from the writings of some European theologians who had worked and taught in Africa. Immediately one Adrian Hastings who was said to have spent a substantial part of his life in African between 1950 and the 1980s but now an ex-priest and professor of theology in the University of Leeds, Great Britain, came to my mind. About the African priesthood, Adrian Hastings has this to say in his *African Catholicism*:

The African priesthood remains not just too few in number, by and large too shaped according to a pattern of clerical existence not organically related to the reality of the African Church. Its self-confidence is embarrassed by contradiction. While tied by the law of celibacy and expected actually to expatiate upon the value of that law, it is common knowledge in some dioceses that hardly a priest is without the children of his own.³³

In spite of the tense atmosphere created by the German priest's stories and those I had heard and read myself, I tried to deliver some meaningful 'lecture' to the group. I tried to disassociate the priesthood in Africa and Nigeria from the stories being told about it, especially in relation to celibacy. I was not aware of any particular problem associated with priestly celibacy which should require separate treatment or solution for the African; or any problem related to the same issue which should require a special delegation of African bishops and priests to the Holy See. Africans are free like their counterparts everywhere to express their views concerning current issues on morals and doctrines. There is no biological, sociological or cultural proof so far adduced showing that

Africans, their priests or layman are *more sexy or immoral* than any other race under the sun. I am sure that ‘the children of their own’ which Hastings believe are the real children of priests born by them within or outside wedlock, must be the fathers’ House Boys! There are many of them found in the fathers’ houses, some are near or distant relations of the priest or come from near-by villages. They are the laundry men, sweepers, dish-washers and the fathers’ cooks and **not** priests’ carnal children!

There is no proof that celibacy constitutes a stumbling block to the growth of priestly vocation in Africa. If there is any cultural stigma, it is unlikely that some African dioceses would be enjoying any vocation boom. The hitherto exaggerated reference to the poor recognition accorded to an unmarried man in an African society does not hold much today. Those who used to bring such arguments point to its implications for celibate life. Likewise it has been argued that an African worthy of honour and any prestige must have many children. These are simply outmoded theories. Today in Africa it is clear that the prestige, honour and respect which one enjoys in society may not derive entirely from the number of wives one possesses. There are today many places in Africa where unmarried people of prestige and honour occupy leadership positions in society and no one questions their integrity and worth. These unmarried ladies and gentlemen are not denied any due rights, titles or other social recognition. On a strictly ecclesiastical domain, the old tradition or theory that the first or only son of an African family cannot opt for the priesthood can no more be sustained. There are many priests and bishops in Africa today, who are either first or even the only son of their parents. Many are found among seminarians.

Do Africans generally find celibacy burdensome or a stumbling block to the realization of their priestly ideals? Yes – No. Like their counterparts elsewhere, in Europe, Africa, Asia etc, like any other difficult undertaking in life, African clergy are bound to respond to the above question with mixed feelings as they also look at their counterparts in the Protestant denominations, others of the non-Latin rites, who have been able to combine married life and their priestly commitments. The leaders of the New religious movements are married and their members have not abandoned their Churches. If the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church decide sometime to lift the ‘burden’ or ban of celibacy,

why can't those African priests who wish, join their counterparts elsewhere to readjust to a new situation?

Unfortunately enough, the thin Scriptural support for the priestly celibacy (as in the case of polygamy) has not been able to give enough **fire or power** for an 'unprecedented commitment' to its observance. Questions will continue to be asked on 'why this law?' There is need therefore to find more convincing answer especially for those who are new to it or most importantly for those who are aspiring to the priestly life in Africa and elsewhere in the modern world.

But for most Africans, celibacy is not a new phenomenon in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. The decision has been taken to keep the law and there is no going back. But where the going gets tough, it is always better to stop, think and take a decision as the Igbo proverb puts it – *Ebe oku nyuru awusa nkpewa (Where the light goes off, the straw should be abandoned)*. Since the Roman Catholic hierarchy has spoken lastly through the secretary of the congregation for the clergy that ***Celibacy is not open to discussion***,³⁴ that is enough reason for priests to accept the challenge whole heartedly, if they had not done so. There is no need crying over split milk as the Archbishop Agostino rather pointed out, ***Education for celibacy*** should now be the slogan. "Education for celibacy must be part of the complete and integral plan for the formation of future priests, but not as the most important element which is the attainment of perfect chastity".³⁵ The Roman spokesman of course admitted that the modern world poses certain problems. These should not be exaggerated. "When Jesus proposed chastity to his followers, he inspired in them a sense of faithfulness, and he was able to make them understand the value of what he was recommending – not just the difficulties as many educators do".³⁶

In the same vein the Roman congregation for the evangelization of peoples, in the **Pastoral guide for diocesan priests in Churches dependent on the congregation for the evangelization of people**, urges priests to be faithful to their obligations to 'chastity in celibacy for the kingdom'.³⁷

In today's often permissive society priests are called upon to reconfirm their vocation to perfect continence in celibacy through which they are consecrated to God in a new and distinguished way... Chastity should not be

considered a law that inhibits personal growth; rather its positive effects should be stressed.³⁸

The Sacred congregation however observes that at times celibacy contrasts with family or tribal structures. “Even in these cases they (priests) should be faithful to their undertaking explaining to their people, by word, but especially by their lives the true meaning of their choice.”³⁹

It is unlikely therefore that the Church of **today and tomorrow** in Africa will be marred by the problem of celibacy. Since it does not seem that all the controversies surrounding this institution for long now will be resolved so soon by the catholic hierarchy. It is certain that Africans, as well as their counterparts everywhere will continue to abide by the Church’s regulations on the issue and avoid anything that might go to tarnish the image of the Church. When a more comfortable and universally accepted solution to the problem is found, it will surely apply to all and sundry, to priests of every race and colour who find themselves under the rulership of the Roman Catholic Church.

VOCATION AND PRIESTLY FORMATION

Increase in the number of young Africans aspiring to the priesthood and an adequate formation of the candidates will continue to be most important factors in the growth and development of the Church in Africa. “The formation of priests in circumstances of the present day”, is so important that in 1990, the Eight Ordinary Synod of bishops was called to examine the issue. The results of discussions held are also seen in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* of Pope John Paul II.

The congregation for the propagation of faith, founded in 1622, right from its very beginning had urged missionaries not to suppress the native culture and to regard the formation of native clergy as their principal task. Early attempt at the formation of the native clergy were said to have yielded little or no fruits. In Kisubi, Uganda, in the years from 1892 – 1900, we were told that out of about 400 boys who began their studies for the priesthood only four of them were ordained priests. Although some parts of Africa are blessed with numerous vocations, in most dioceses, the situation of the shortage of priests in Africa and other parts of the world has not drastically changed. In Nigeria, for example, of

the seven diocesan major seminaries in the country, three have between 450 and 500 candidates each. The others have between 200 and 250 candidates. In the minor seminaries the number of admissions is high – up to 600 – 800 (Classes 1 – 6). But compared to the number admitted initially, the number of candidates who reach the priesthood is relatively low. In the most buoyant dioceses, East of the Niger, yearly ordinations range from 20 – 30 candidates. Many candidates fall on the way for various reasons – poor academic performance, unsuitability for seminary formation etc. Some students leave the seminary or are expelled on account of financial problems and inability of parents to pay their school fees. Minor seminaries as Buhlmann, rightly points out formerly the source of all vocations in the Third Church are now the subject of discussion. “Episcopal conferences do not know whether to keep them or close them down, particularly now that Rome has cut **subsidies** or even discontinued them”.⁴⁰ With financial support largely channeled to the Church and people of the East European countries by the sponsor nations of the west, subsidies to seminaries and Church institutions in Africa and Asia are bound to dwindle if not disappear.

Seminary Formation in the African Church

Truly emphasis has shifted today from the question of the priest’s identity to that connected with the process of formation for the priesthood and the quality of the priestly life. There is increasing consensus regarding the need for adequate preparation at all levels of seminary formation right from the minor seminary. There is need to determine too the **content** of the seminary education. The period and the content of such formation should take into account the human, Christian, intellectual and spiritual preparations for the candidates.

“These candidates should, however, have certain qualities: a right intention, a sufficient degree of human maturity, a sufficiently broad knowledge of the doctrine of the faith, some introduction into the methods of prayer and behavior in conformity with the Christian tradition. They should also have attitudes proper to their regions through which they can express their efforts to find God and the faith”.⁴¹ As for the selection of candidates for priestly formation, neither Roman or African bishops would be ready to introduce or entertain any less demanding process or idea. It is believed that such a process or programme would only lead to the production of second – class clergy

who would always be inferior to the white missionaries. This was something always to be avoided if the African Church is ever to stand on its own. Such excessive precautionary measures to avoid lowering of standards have unfortunately ever led to a situation, where in some African Seminaries; a lot emphasis is placed on obtaining academic degrees and diplomas. In the major seminary curriculum a lot of time is devoted to the study of foreign languages like *German, French, Italian, Spanish* at the detriment of *English* for instance in the English speaking areas of Africa. In some cases major seminarians spend a lot of time learning *Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic* and even *Syriac* and other oriental languages at the detriment of the African and other local languages which the future priests will use for the dissemination of the gospel message. In some extreme cases some major seminary authorities have even introduced 'strange' and unnecessary courses into the philosophy and theology faculties. These include: ***Political and Analytical Philosophy, Critique of contemporary value, German Theology and Theology of hope etc.*** One of the unfortunate consequences of these measures introduced to boost academic standard in our major seminaries is that the

Most important aspects of seminary formation in the African situation are neglected or forgotten. Most often some of these seminarians who imbibe foreign languages and high sounding academic courses have no chance or opportunity of stepping out of their parishes to overseas after their ordination. The new languages are often forgotten entirely after leaving the seminary precincts. But there are many African bishops and lecturers who see any move which would lead to 'lowering of standard' of academic discipline as a catastrophe that must be avoided at all costs if the African Church would ever stand on its own feet. These African Church and seminary authorities seem to have accept entirely the old stand of the church expressed by Pope Benedict XV in his encyclical *Maximum Illud* of 1919. It was this that put the final seal on this line of approach. After recommending the missionary bishops to train native clergy, the pope went on:

It is however, necessary to give native priests a good formation. This formation must be complete and rounded off in all its aspects like the formation given to our priests. The native priests must be trained not only to the extent that they can relieve the foreign missions of certain tasks but so that

they will be equal to all the tasks of a priest and be able, at sometimes in the future, to take over completely as leaders of their people.⁴²

There is no doubt that most African bishops and agents of seminary formation have applied these directions to the letters today. Most of them are so strict in their screening of candidates at various stages of seminary training that only a few pass the tests. Most bishops do not believe in large numbers of seminarians, namely **quantity** at the detriment of **quality**. Consequently many seminarians, minor and major and even deacons are dismissed or delayed at the least sign of laxity in moral behavior. Those who are not academically bright have even no chances of entering the major seminaries until they had passed all the required examinations and secured comfortable grades and standards as found in the other secular universities and other higher institutions of learning.

Rome and other seminary sponsors or benefactors of African seminaries should therefore not be surprised at what looks like a discrepancy between the number of seminarians in – training submitted to their offices for records and the actual number which ends up as priests. The screening and criteria as well as requirements for qualification are just too many and tough. Only a few candidates survive. Perhaps that is one of the big reasons why priestly ordinations in Africa are celebrated with unprecedented pomp and lavishness! The far-reaching directives of the Church are therefore observed in Africa and the result is that today we have an African clergy who in no way fall behind the missionaries and who can move among the educated African elites without feeling inferior. Happily enough most of the African priests have been able to take over and continue from where the missionaries stopped.

Minor Seminary Formation

Whatever the western Church had discovered as substitutes or alternatives to the minor seminary institution, it is unlikely that the African Church would do away with the minor seminary as a *Preliminary Preparatory High School* for the future African priests. The value of the institution cannot be underestimated. Formerly the source of all vocations in the west and in the Third World has been the minor seminaries. But with the decline in Priestly vocation, there is ample evidence that minor seminaries in the western Church are no more in existence. Although the

‘vocation boom’ is not found in all African Dioceses, Episcopal conferences and individual bishops still find the minor seminaries indispensable for the early formation of seminarians. ‘Pastores Dabo Vobis’ seems to approve the decision of those bishops who have kept the seminaries as preliminary institutions for priestly formation, distinct from the state-run high schools. As long experience shows, priestly vocation tends to show itself in the pre-adolescent years or in the earliest years of youth. Even in people who decide to enter the seminary later on, it is not infrequent to find that God’s call had been perceived much earlier.⁴³

The Church looks after these seeds of vocations sown in the hearts of children, providing a careful, though preliminary discernment and accomplishment. In a number of parts of the world, these seminaries continue to carry out a valuable educational work, the aim of which is to protect and develop the seeds of priestly vocation, so that the students may more easily recognize it and be in a better position to respond to it.⁴⁴

In Nigeria almost all the dioceses have minor seminaries. Those which are unable to run theirs alone, combine with other dioceses. Naturally both the young seminarians and adults appreciate the importance of the minor seminaries which are flourishing centres of preliminary priestly formation. The course of studies run in the Nigerian minor seminaries does not differ much from that of government or state school system. But the seminaries also teach what used to be regarded as *core seminary subjects* as well as spiritual exercises and extra-curriculum activities which help in the moral, intellectual, and asocial development of the young aspirants. These ‘core-subjects’ include *Latin, French, Literature in English, History, Religion and Liturgy*. The broad are of formation is followed in keeping with the Vatican II’s directives on the minor seminaries and course of studies, as expressed in its documents on priestly formation [*Optatam Totius, nr. 3*]:

To the extent that they apply to the goal and programme of minor seminaries, the following decrees on major seminaries should be adopted in minor ones. In any case, the course of studies ought to be so arranged that students can continue

them elsewhere without disadvantage if they choose another state of life.

In minor seminaries in Nigeria, students who decide to discontinue their seminary formation or those who are expelled or are advised in their own interest to change school, do not suffer any disadvantages when they join the state school system. Rather they enjoy many advantages over their counterparts, as a result of the better moral, spiritual as well as intellectual formation they had acquired even with in the short period of their stay in the seminary.

With the state take-over of schools in Nigeria after the civil war, there has been mad rush by parents to send their children to the minor seminaries for better and **qualitative education**. In such a case, it is never easy for minor seminary authorities to separate the wheat from the cockle. But in spite of that a good number qualifies, after more than six to eight years of junior/senior secondary education in the minor seminaries. In most public examinations organized by the state, minor seminaries in Nigeria excel the state schools in academic performance. In the area of academic, the main (big) problem which the seminaries encounter is that of qualified teaching staff. With the proliferation of Secondary School subjects, following the government policy on secondary and technical educations, it is almost impossible to get qualified teachers who can teach these new subjects. The problem of qualified staff is compounded by that of the poor financial stand of most minor seminaries. Where teachers are available, it is not easy to pay them and give them allowances and other benefits which they enjoy in state schools. Nevertheless, most bishops and seminary authorities endeavour to solve these problems by training and deploying priests to teach in the minor seminaries. These can supplement the work of the lay members of the staff. These priests who serve as full-time or part-time teachers in the seminary also help much in the spiritual and moral formation of the young students. Some of them are the confessors and spiritual directors and also help out in the other areas of minor seminary formation.

Promoting Vocations

It is not in all the dioceses of Nigeria and Africa at large that vocations thrive or 'boom'. In the Moslem-dominated parts of Nigeria, there are no seminaries and where they exist they are not as flourishing as one may

find in the Southern parts of the country. The situations in the Moslem-dominated parts of Nigeria and Africa resemble those of **Cuba** or other ‘communist-dominated’ countries. In his own Intervention at the 1990 synod on the formation of priests, Bishop Fernando Prego Casal of Cienfuegos – Santa Clara, Cuba lamented:

I come from a country where the vocation of pastors demands an extraordinary dedication of time and energy. We have no nurseries for vocations because there are no Catholic schools, nor colleges. All education, from pre-school through to the university level, is by law the exclusive responsibility of the state. All we are left with are the youth groups in our parishes and Churches, which thank God not only continue but are on the increase.⁴⁵

Outside the seminary system, vocation can still flourish, even in the most difficult situations and circumstances. Even in places where increase in vocations has been encouraging Church authorities still organize ‘vocation drives’ into secular institutions of learning. Diocesan vocation directors usually organize yearly retreats for secondary school students and others wishing to embrace seminary vocation at the end of their secondary school and tertiary education. Such students who join the seminary from secular institutions are many in Nigeria today. Over 30% of seminarians in some major seminaries in Nigeria come from secular institutions and not from minor seminaries. Reports about their overall performance compared with their counterparts who undergo minor seminary formation are quite encouraging.

Nigerian bishops, seminary authorities and vocation directors happily enough have tried to comply with the directives of the Vatican II Council Fathers:

Equal care should be expended in fostering the seeds of vocation among adolescents and young men attending institutes which under the circumstances also serve the purpose of a minor seminary. The same applies to those who are being trained in different schools or by the other means of education. Let active concern be shown for schools and

other projects designed for men who pursue a vocation at a later time of life.⁴⁶

According to Bishop Medardo Joseph Mazombwe of **Chipata, Zambia**, promotion of vocations in the Zambian Church is undertaken by various categories of people which include the diocesan bishops, priests, Christian families and Christian youth movements.⁴⁷ As the bishop highlighted; priests by their lives promote vocations. Besides there is the vocations promotions team, consisting of priests and religious men and women. In each diocese, there is a director of a promoter of vocations coordinating the work of the vocations team. Elsewhere in Africa priests are obliged not only to promote vocations among youths in general, but are also urged to help the seminary authorities and families in the formation of seminarians. In most of the Nigerian minor and major seminaries, students are expected to spend part of their holidays with their parish priests and in the home parishes. At the end of each holiday period, parish priests submit confidential reports about their seminarians. The reports are sent to the rectors. Major seminarians spend about 6 – 8 weeks of their long vacation working in parishes and stations assigned to them under the supervision of the parish priests.

Vocation Interest Promoters Association (V.I.P. Asso.)

In the diocese of Orlu, Nigerian, Vocation Interest Promoters Association is a sodality – a devotional and charitable association of the Catholic laity established by the bishop to promote vocations to the sacred priesthood. Members are active and practicing Catholics interested in fostering vocations through the activities of the association, also for their own spiritual benefit and growth of the Church. Aims and objectives of the association include:

- Praying for increase in genuine vocations;
- Encouraging such vocations through voluntary contributions and association's other activities towards the priestly upbringing of seminarians;
- Supporting the priest in his human weakness by helping to neutralize some of the calumny on the priest;

- Stimulating full involvement of the laity in the tapping of human and material resources in the diocese for the deepening of faith and growth of the Church.

Membership of the association is open to all people of good will who are interested in fostering vocations in the Catholic Church. Local directorates are formed to facilitate coordination and help the diocesan vocations director reach people easily. All the zonal leaders, branch leaders and about ten other leaders constitute a working committee. The Vocation Interest Promoters Association is flourishing in the diocese of Orlu. And some other dioceses and other religious congregations have formed such associations too. Two other popular ones around are *The Holy Ghost Vocation Movement and the SS Peter and Paul Missionary Vocation Movement*. These have made a lot of impact on both the ordinary Catholics and the youths. There is now great awareness created in the local Church that sponsorship of seminarians and the general promotion of vocations can be undertaken *locally* by African Catholics. This is a very encouraging development for the Church of Christ in Africa.

The major seminary

The Vatican II's document, *Optatum Totius* is very clear on the importance and need for major seminaries for priestly formation: "In them the whole training of students ought to provide for the development of true shepherds of souls after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was teacher, priest and shepherd".⁴⁸ There is enough evidence to show that in Africa major seminary formation is a serious matter as far as African bishops and the agents of seminary formation are concerned. As we have already pointed out most African bishops are ready to suspend or dismiss priestly candidates even a few hours to the ordination if reports of suitability for the priestly office are not in favour of the candidates. Before deaconate ordinations intensive grass-root investigations are carried out concerning each candidate. Sometimes one or two candidates may be suspended from ordination. Friends, families and relations of the affected candidates often send delegations to the bishops to plead on behalf of the candidates. It is a useless venture as the bishops and the seminary authorities are always reluctant to reconsider candidates who have dents on their character. Bishops rule out sentiments in the matters

of promotion of candidates to major order. They are most often best qualified to assess candidates. Senior seminarians are usually aware of the dangers facing their vocation and therefore struggle to live up to expectation. Those who realize their handicaps in time leave the seminary before they are expelled. The moral and spiritual uprightness of the major seminarians is uppermost in the assessment for the major orders.

Intellectual formation is by no means relegated to the background. This is primarily reflected in the selection of seminary lecturers who have the highest academic qualifications among their counterparts working in the other areas of the priestly ministry. Seminary lecturers and professors are also presumed to excel other priests in moral and spiritual uprightness. Where major seminaries in Africa lack professors, most bishops are often ready to send their available best Priests to teach or act as spiritual directors in the seminaries. With the best qualified priests as agents of priestly formation in the seminaries, the future leaders of the Church are assured of the best training in human development. Once again the formators adhere strictly to the directives of the Council Fathers:

The norms of Christian education are to be religiously maintained, and should be properly complemented by the latest findings in sound psychology and pedagogy. By wisely planned training there should also be developed in seminaries a due degree of human maturity, attested to chiefly by a certain emotional stability, by an ability to make considered decisions, and by a right manner of passing judgment on events and people.⁴⁹

There is no doubt that the positive and pastoral tone of the council reoccurs in these directives on education. Surely, *the priest must be a man – mature with human and social virtues – not a clerical caricature.*

If we can draw our examples from Nigeria, it can be said that the training in the major seminaries is of high standard. However, as Shorter rightly points out, it is often difficult to hold a balance between academic and pastoral training in the major seminaries. In some African seminaries considerable emphasis is placed on obtaining academic degrees and diploma. In others, academic standards may be low.⁵⁰ There is however need to avoid the temptation of over-emphasizing one aspect of major

seminary formation at the expense of others. But whatever the case may be it may sound odd if in all the efforts to give him the best training. The role of the candidate is forgotten. As the Pope points out in the Post Synodal Apostolic exhortation – ‘Pastores Dabo Vobis’:

We must not forget that the candidate himself is a necessary and irreplaceable agent in his own formation; all formation, priestly formation included is ultimately a self-formation. No one can replace us in the responsible freedom that we have as individual persons.⁵¹

One can therefore draw a useful and a far-reaching conclusion that the ultimate and most reliable and convincing guarantee that a priest really knows what the ‘business of the priesthood’ is all about is based on ‘**self-formation**’. He alone can judge himself – his suitability for the high office, moral and spiritual uprightness. In the world and in the modern times where people look at one another with distrust, where deep suspicion of fraudulent practices surrounds man’s activities, it is necessary that priests and seminarians prove to the world and particularly those around them that no matter the odds, there are still people who can be trusted, especially when they give testimonies of their private lives. Deep-rooted commitments to the obligations and demands of the priestly life and ministry will be enhanced by the individual candidate’s correct assessment of himself and indisputable qualification to embrace the high office. It is no credit to the office of the catholic priesthood that some candidates and members of this order should be living on the glories of the past workers in this Lord’s vineyard, the missionaries or some of the successors who had performed excellently well to the credit of the priesthood. Let everyone then prove by himself and to those catholic and non-Catholics as well, who are ever suspicious of priests’ character and commitment to his priestly obligations that the priest’s image to some degree has remained in tact and has not depreciated to an irreparable level.

PRIESTHOOD IN THE AFRICAN CHURCH:

Challenges and Prospects

Two main challenges face the African Church of today and tomorrow, namely, how to cope with the pastoral problems of its teeming population here in Africa, in the remote rural areas and in the urban centres. There is also a growing number of African youths that is found here and there in Europe and America and elsewhere in various parts of the world in search of ‘greener pastures’. The African Church, even in its infancy is already getting involved in Missionary work, within and outside the Black continent, ‘going therefore and making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Mt. 28:19)

Challenges of urban apostolate and Africans in ‘Diaspora’

“Brain drain” and “search for greener pastures”, are the well known expressions in Nigeria and Africa, to day associated with the migration of people to urban centres and also to overseas countries in search of better paid jobs. On one side, it is ‘loss’ to the country and the rural communities, since it may not be possible to find suitable replacements for these technicians, medical doctors, engineers, teachers and other professionals. On the other side, it is a ‘gain’. The extra savings accumulated are sent home to cater for the needs of those loved ones at home. In the cities where these African job seekers are found – in Lagos, Nairobi, Accra, Lusaka, Rome, Tokyo, Paris, London, Frankfurt, New York, it has been easier to secure a better paid job, no matter how ‘menial’ a job. It does not matter to the job seekers if it meant changing one’s rightful occupation, from a medical doctor to a taxi driver, fashion-designer to dish-washer, an engineer to a petrol attendant, a professor of social sciences to a hotel attendant or even street sweeper. The satisfaction one gets from a well-paid job cannot be compared to any type of joy or social entertainment.

It is very likely that this trend will continue since the economic situation in most African countries does not offer hope for any brighter future. Consequently Africa will continue to lose its best brains as the surge for the greener pastures continue unabated. In this part of our work we will examine the consequences of urban migration in Africa and see the challenges it poses for the African Church of today and tomorrow, on both national and international levels.

Challenges in the urban cities

Both young and old Africans abandon the rural areas and villages and migrate in ever – increasing numbers to the cities. The attractions of the cities are obvious. They offer better prospects, more opportunities for improving the family income. People move in order to secure higher rewards for their labour. And for young people, the search for casual employment is the chief attraction in the African city. Although city life offers the migrant a promise of liberty and multiplicity of choice in addition to personal enrichment, the consequences of these attractions are grave. Only a visit to Lagos or Ibadan in Nigeria will convince any doubting Thomas – rush-hour traffic jams, overburdened transport services and communication networks, parking problems, violent crimes, prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, drug – trafficking and of course deplorable environmental pollution and poor sanitary living conditions. These images of the city are bound to affect the migrants and particularly the youths who are often the main victims of harsh conditions of urban life.

Africans in ‘Diaspora’

Search for greener pastures is not limited to the best brains in Africa. Younger people with little or no reasonable work experience, qualifications or talents, have since been on the move, to the other parts of the world, including Europe and America, in search of the means of survival. They are found in almost every nook and cranny of the western world, as well as Asia and the Far East. Often harassed by racist and neo-nazist groups as well as by the police and immigration authorities in these countries, and often refused residence permits and working permits, these young Africans, toughened by suffering and hardship, seem to have taken the irrevocable decision to face the public brutality and damn the consequences. Often thrown into prison for one ‘illegal activity’ or the other, when at last they regain their freedom, they are not depressed or disillusioned as they re-adjust to new-life situation and the struggle for survival continues. There are many young Nigerians in these groups. Most of them are not criminals but honest and hardworking youths who had been forced out of their countries by harsh economic, social and even political conditions. They are not lazy youths. They simply want to be useful to themselves and their families.

Good news often reach the families of these young people from abroad. They send part of their hard-earned money to their families to

help their friends suffering relations. Such ‘good news’ has often encouraged their friends still at home to try their lot too. These, too, are not deterred by the numerous difficulties they encounter in their way to the ‘earthly paradise’ – harsh weather conditions in Europe, problems of accommodation, food and of course language. These do not upset the young Africans bent on setting their feet on white man’s land.

It is not only Nigerians, Ghanaians or Africans who migrate to other countries in search of jobs. Although difficulties which immigrants face in foreign lands are in most cases the same. These foreigners, like the Jews of the old and the new era have learnt to come together and take care of themselves and their families. In Germany, for example, you find immigrant workers from various parts of the world – Turkey, Italy, Spain, India, Bangladesh, people from the East European countries – Poland, former Yugoslavia etc. These have for long formed recognized communities in most bigger cities like Frankfurt, Berlin, Hamburg and Munich. Where sizeable communities exist, special religious services, social and cultural festivities are organized by these communities in Diaspora. Often both Christian and Moslem religious priests and leaders are appointed to look after the spiritual needs of their people. This is important, so that the people, especially their youths are not lost in the ‘foreign crowd and culture’. Though in a foreign land, born and educated there, parents do not wish their children to be lost in the crowd. They may imbibe the European culture, but should not forget the way of life of their own people.

Urban apostolate

As people migrate to other places and urban cities in ever-increasing numbers, it has been recognized that urban apostolate represents an enormous ‘missionary task of the Church’, comparable to the Primary Evangelization of the rural areas in the days of the white missionaries. New strategies have to be devised for coping with the problems of migrants. As people continue pouring into towns and urban cities, far and wide, priests, Catechists and Church social workers are obliged to follow them. Urban chaplaincies for special categories of peoples have to be created and new fields for specialized urban apostolate must be discerned.

‘Urban Apostolate’ in Africa should also be extended to take care of Africans in Diaspora. It seems that Africa was late in the ‘*Scramble for Europe and America*’. African History shows that there was a time

when European countries ‘scrambled for Africa’ – right now, there are many Africans who believe it is the turn of the African countries also to ‘scramble for Europe’. But whatever the case may be it is not late for African government and African missionaries to take a look at problems facing Africans and their children who are living and earning their living in Europe and America.

It is not fair to refer to African immigrant workers in the western countries as ‘criminals’ who should be thrown into jail or deported back to their own countries. A few individuals who break the laws of their host countries can be punished like other offenders. It is clear that African immigrants have no criminal motives to destroy and plunder what the white men had built. To look at Africans in search of jobs overseas as criminals whose movements should be checked is just unfortunate. Hardworking and honest Africans have right to earn their living like other non-Africans in Europe and America. It is criminal on the part of the west to castigate and persecute Africans living in their countries who are making an honest living and thereby contributing to the development of the host countries. Here the Church of Christ in these host countries must live up to the expectation and commit herself and her pastors to the defense of the poor and the oppressed and the marginalized. There is no doubt that the Church’s preferential option for the poor’ demands the Christian involvement in the struggle for the liberation of the people of the self-help city,: “Evangelization necessarily has a social dimension, since one of its aims is to gather people into a community, that is the body of Christ. In particular the urban poor experiences Christ who cares for them in their bodily, as well as their spiritual needs”.⁵² There is urgent need to extend assistance – material and spiritual to the poor Africans in the Diaspora. The social gospel which the Church preaches must be put into operation in the African situation in the Diaspora:

The Gospel is proclaimed to and lived by people who are embodied spirits, and there is no way in which the Church can indulge in evangelism without subscribing to social gospel. Spiritual values cannot be preached without practical involvement in the material everyday life of Church members.⁵³

Black African Church and missionary enterprise

As we pointed out at the beginning of this chapter of this book, Africa cannot yet claim to have sufficient number of priests to cater for its teeming number of Christians, especially in those parts where Moslem religion has not succeeded in wiping Christianity out of existence, yet the need for African priests and religious in the ‘missions’ has continued to grow. Any African diocesan priests and religious of various congregations are already working in many African countries, Europe and America. Some are **Missionaries** in the West African countries of **Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Ghana**. In the East, Central and South African countries of **Gabon, Central African Republic, Congo, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, Lesotho, Burundi**. Many African priests, including Nigerians are ministering in European countries like **Germany, Italy, France, England**. There are many working in various parishes in **America**. Outside diocesan priests the following congregations of male religious are involved in missionary work within and outside Africa – *The Holy Ghost fathers (The Spiritans), The Claretians, The Vincentians, The Society for African Missions*. The Missionary Society of St. Paul, established by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria has continued to send out missionaries to the various parts of the world. They engage in pastoral as well as in teaching Apostolate. The congregations of female religious engaged in mission work within and outside Africa are too many to count. It is a happy development and encouraging reports about their missionary activities are many.

“Nun gehet hin, meine lieben Bruder und bringen den heidnisher Europaern das Christentum.” (“Now, go, my dear brothers and bring back Christianity to the pagan Europe”).

The above piece of address in German appeared in a Church magazine, under a cartoon addressed to Black African Missionaries. An article which appeared in the same magazine lamented the deteriorating situation of the shortage of priests in the *First World Church*, and examined the possibilities of the African pastors coming to Europe to **Re-evangelize** Europe. The writer of the article and the cartoonists were indeed not cracking jokes for what they were expecting was already happening. *The*

Third Church, in spite of its poverty and other deficiencies is already engaged in missionary work in the Christian world.

Having been ministered unto for many years, having been the scene of both the colonial and the missionary activities, the tide seems to be changing or has actually changed, in so far as the *Third World Church* is being invited to send missionaries to its formerly mother Churches in the west. The universal call to 'go and make disciples of all nations' continues in the history of the Church, depending on need and circumstances. The need takes its natural course, whether it is the mother who feeds her children or the children who take their turn to feed their mother at her old age or during sickness.

There is thus a general acceptance of the new concept of **Mission** in the modern times. **Mission** exists everywhere and the Church is in **mission** wherever human misery, population growth and tension prevails, wherever new forces are on the move, wherever decisions are made on priorities and on the use of force, wherever the gospel is not established, especially in centres of power, in revolutionary movements, in universities, in cities, in the relations between industrialized nations, developed and in developing countries.⁵⁴ There are not a few western and African Christians as well as Church authorities who stress the urgent need for missionaries in Europe who would fill many vacant posts left by priests who had abandoned the vocation. There is need to re-open most parishes that had remained closed for long as a result of shortage of priests. Many insist that there is natural need to save a crumbling wall and structures than to begin constructing new ones. African Church has not got enough priests, but that does not mean that she cannot help out in a **rescue operation** to save what remains of the old mother Churches in the west. All the old European countries who sent missionaries to Africa during the era of colonialism and pioneer missionary enterprise could not have claimed absolute self sufficiency in Church personnel before sending out some to evangelize **Africa, Latin, America and other Third world nations.**

It is therefore an urgent task to draft African missionaries, especially those of the various religious congregations in which African priests form a comfortable majority to minister to those traditional Catholic areas that have now run short of priests. Many ordinary Catholics as well as Church authorities in these places will naturally

prefer African missionaries to lay ministers or married deacons taking charge of their parishes.

The older persuasion that missions were for Africa and other such places and not for Europe is increasingly questioned by anyone who has lived through a feast day or a Sunday or (even a weekday) in a Third World Christian community and contrasts it with the situation in certain countries of ancient Christian tradition. The fact that some territories are under the Congregation for evangelization and others are not is more of an administrative and technical distinction based on historical factors than on ecclesiological one.⁵⁵

It follows therefore that any territory in the Church anywhere which is in difficulty and suffers structural defects **needs outside** missionary aid to overcome its present disadvantages.

Missionary activities constitute one of the urgent challenges facing *The African Church of Today and Tomorrow*. Thanks to this awareness and the wisdom of the Nigerian bishops, for example, in founding the *Missionary Seminary of Saint Paul* at Abuja, the headquarters of the seat of government in Nigeria. Since its inception in 1976, the missionary seminary of St. Paul has sent out over 120 missionary priests who minister in various parts of Africa, including the United States of America. Other religious congregations also send out missionaries to some parts of Africa and Europe.

CONCLUSION

At long last many have seen the need to encourage African missionary enterprise. African missionaries are the best substitutes in those areas where conflict between African freedom fighters and colonialist regimes had led to the expulsion of foreign white missionaries. Vocation to the priesthood should be encouraged so that more resources can be tapped now that the African initiative and enthusiasm have been sustained. This may be the *African's finest hour*. This early precaution will help to avoid the European and Latin American experience of empty palatial seminaries constructed to take the teeming number of priestly candidates

during the ‘vocation boom days’ which could not be sustained when the tide changed.

Prospects for a brighter future for the African church are there. At the home front the people’s love and admiration can be seen in their respect for priests, in spite of all calumny by detractors. In Nigeria, we are sure that the image of the priest has not sagged in spite of the wave of **Anti-clericalism** which one may notice here and there. This is not new. It has been there since the missionary days. Out of love and goodwill gesture, most Nigerian Catholics, even the poorest ones contribute freely for the support of their priests. As far as they are concerned, the priest has still very important roles to play in society outside his priestly ministry around the altar.

On the part of the priest himself, he is aware of the high expectations of his office. He knows that any failure will affect not only his reputation and that of the Church, but also that of his family and the entire community. Although most of his faults have been exaggerated, he knows of course that he must make serious efforts and sacrifices in order to keep his head high as one rich in human and spiritual virtues, and truly as a result of his divine calling, that he is not like the rest of men.

There are many other challenges facing the African Church of Today and Tomorrow. We have only highlighted the chief ones. But we may not ignore the challenges posed by the proliferation of certain sects and African Independent Churches. We have discussed this particular issue in the **First Chapter** of this book. Pope John Paul II in his closing address in the 1990 Synod of bishops mentioned the **growth of sects** as really problematic in the modern times.

Of course, there are other problems some of them serious ones, which come up whenever the question of the tragic shortage of priests is raised, those to do with the disturbing phenomenon of the growth of certain sects.⁵⁶

The African Church therefore must do something about the proliferation of New Religious Movements in Africa.

On the issue of celibacy, it is clear that the Roman Catholic Church of the Latin Rite has no intention of ‘lifting the ban’ on the marriage of catholic priests. This ban is also extended to the African priests. African priests who think or hope that Rome would even in the near future and

under any pretext, based on culture or tradition permit African clergy to take wives or abandon their commitment to the perfect chastity, will do better to pull off their cassocks in time and join others in the lay state to marry and live normal family life. There will be no double-dealing, and candidates under priestly formation will do equally well to forget and abandon the ambition to ascend the office of the Catholic priesthood. The Church has made its stand clear on the question of celibacy. It is not only that *Celibacy is not open to question*, the pope has confirmed that in spite of the shortage of priests, married priestly candidates will not be ordained priests. This he insists is not the alternative solution to the problem of celibacy.

Some have questioned whether in such circumstances it might not be appropriate to consider the possibility of ordaining **Viri Probati**. However, this is not a solution that should be entertained, and other ways of dealing with the problem must be found.⁵⁷

The Church has therefore confirmed; quite unambiguously, the choice of male celibates for the priesthood as is proper to the Roman rite. The pope leaves no one in doubt about the position of the Church in this over-flogged issue:

By affirming unambiguously its commitments to priestly celibacy and by explaining its reasons, the synod in the name of the Church has made a great act of faith in the grace of the Holy Spirit who guides the church..⁵⁸

On the *Challenges of Seminary formation*, especially where large numbers of candidates are involved as in some dioceses of Nigeria, bishop Albert Obiefuna of Awka diocese informed the world bishops and the Roman Church that the African Church and its bishops have not their hands folded. They are aware of problems as well as possible solutions:

We have spiritual year centres and minor seminaries where deep spiritual formation is imparted before entry into major seminaries. Students go on Apostolic work every year for two months under parish priests and parish communities.

Spiritual directors are in the seminaries. We have a long period of training, four years of Philosophy and four years in Theology and a year's Apostolic work in between.⁵⁹

Such measures may not bring about miracles, but certainly they go a long way into proving that the young African Church is growing in maturity and in no distant a future will be in the position to manage its own affairs independent of foreign supervision or interference. To some extent, the African Church can also participate in the world-wide programme of human development, as well as in Missionary enterprise.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CATECHIST AND THE AFRICAN CHURCH

The future of Christianity in Africa will greatly be determined by this Catholic missionary institution – the Ministry of the Catechist. There is need to examine in this chapter the role and impact of this Church’s minister in the African Church of **Today and Tomorrow**. Though the Church in Africa may be blessed with encouraging number of priests and religious being turned out yearly to serve the teeming Christian population in many areas of development, it is likely that the role of the “Village Catechist” will ever remain vital in the service of the Church in Africa. No doubt the institution in its peculiar form has developed in a thoroughly local form, something simply non-existent in the Church from which the missionaries came, it has since been recognized by the universal Church. The Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the International Secretariat for Pontifical Work of St. Peter the Apostle accord special recognition to the catechist in their disbursement of financial aids to the ‘native clergy in the young Churches’ in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In most African Churches bishops and priests still rely heavily on the catechist. A theologian once described him – the catechist as the **Trojan of the African Church**. Although criticized, maligned, poorly trained and still poorly paid, if at all, but in fact the catechist has for century in Africa remained the abiding ministerial reality of the village Church.¹

He is the father of the Church, of priests, sisters and bishops and he remains when they depart for the town, the seminary, for Europe, for Rome etc. He remains in civil war, famine and in the long break-down of rural communications brought about by the shortage of petrol and of spare parts for car and motor cycle. He remains teaching, baptizing, preaching and re-preaching eloquently enough the sermons he heard years

ago from some historic missionary returned to retirement in Dublin, Verona or Mill Hill.²

Whatever his failures and successes have been, the African Catechist remains an important pillar and corner stone in the establishment of the African Church. Theoretically being phased out of existence in some areas as a result of modernization in Church ministries, the role of the catechist in the African Church remains vital even today. He is always at hand for consultation, both by the out-going and in-coming parish priest. He is the link between the old and the new, between the pioneer missionaries and the almost totally indigenized local clergy. In some cases he remains the station or parish “archive”, and can relate all problems the parish or station has had right from the early missionary days to the present. His ‘mission house’ or private home is the ‘rest house’ for visitors to the station or parish, for seminarians on apostolic work, before perhaps a more convenient or permanent place can be found. The care-taker of all **Mission Property-** buildings, farmlands, cash-crops or other endowments of the Church, he stood for the Church in the drafting and signing of agreements between the Church and local authorities and communities.

Some of the younger Christian’s fathers and mothers were prepared for baptism and marriage by this all-time Church minister, the catechist. Even the young parish priest castigating, mocking and threatening to dismiss or remove him from office may have been baptized when the catechist was serving under one Irish Missionary – Rev. Fr. Walsh, Fr. Connolly, Fr. McManus or Holly, some 30-40 years ago!

Reminiscences of the glorious past

Most of the older catechists who have survived the turbulent times of modernization recall with nostalgia, *the glorious past of their ministry with the pioneer missionaries*. With the traveling missionary, one of the first ideas of Bishop Shanahan in Southern Nigeria, the ‘guardian’ and ‘mouth piece’ of the itinerant ‘Man of God’ also helped to found and build up new stations and Church communities. The catechist and the missionary were the co-founder of new ‘Missions, leaving representatives (Station Teachers) behind to consolidate and continue the work of nurturing the seed. The new station catechist or station teachers usually

took over the responsibility of building up the Church, winning converts and preparing them for the Sacraments.

The catechist in most cases was also a mission teacher, which was creation of the Church. The opening of schools by the missionaries helped in the conversion of the people. The catechist was also involved in this assignment and took the lead. The mission teacher depended completely on the mission for his appointment, his training and salary. He was much more than a teacher. He conducted morning and evening services on Sundays. He instructed the adults in the afternoons and prepared candidates for Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion. He sent back sick calls to Father, published banns of marriage and kept track of those who lapsed. And without knowing it, he was exercising the *Priesthood of the Laity* in its highest form!

When the era of the station-teacher (a quasi help-mate of the traditional catechist) was over, some of the catechists continued their ministry, whereas others tried to combine both functions. In Nigeria, this era of 'station teacher' was virtually over with the state take-over of mission schools, and this came to a completion at the end of the Nigerian civil war. Hitherto the mission school teacher regarded himself as part of the mission. He served the Mission at his centre as the missionary's indispensable co-worker. In the course of time the state grant-aided the Mission schools and with financial assistance control of the schools passed over to the Ministry of Education. The teacher was no longer a 'mission teacher', paid by the mission and bound by its conditions, but a civil servant paid by the state, little subject to mission control.

Matters got worse for the Church still when at the wake of government take-over of schools, teacher unions were formed to protect the rights and interests of teachers, the majority of whom had been under the mission management. Most of the union leaders who has hitherto nursed ill feelings against Mission management or who had not been well treated on account of their religious laxity saw an opportunity to unleash attacks on the Church, hence the slogan *teachers need their reward here on earth, not in heaven!* Lax Catholics and formerly mission teachers, including the state sponsored ones withdrew their services. The standard of religious instruction in both primary and secondary schools became low. And few teachers taught catechism outside school. But whatever adverse changes the loss of the mission schools and the teachers brought to the missionary work, the catechist was still around to supply in some

measure much of the manpower needed to keep Church activities on in the mission.

The changing apostolate

The old missionary structure in which Catholic schools and mission teachers supplied the needed manpower for evangelization was no longer bearing fruit. It would be unfair to put the blame on the teacher. He was no longer bound by the old contract. The fact was that times had changed and the Church was bound to change with them. The traveling missionary geared his apostolate to the mission school. The missionary had become a parish priest and the school has lost its mission character. Adaptation therefore had to be made in the apostolate.

The bishops of the Church thus faced at the Second Vatican Council the problems of the modern apostolate. One problem of this apostolate was the world shortage of priests; the second, the untapped resources of the **Lay Apostolate**. The decree on the Lay Apostolate opened up the Church's mission to the laity. Therefore the structural modernization of the Church (Cf. Vatican II's Signs of the Times'), the new role of the laity, the new role of the married deacons, the growth of pious and lay associations, and above all, the new era of evangelization phenomenon – all have come to 'adjust' the traditional role of the catechist. It is not that the idea of the catechist or the old station teacher has become old-fashioned and should therefore be discarded. The welcome implication is that the burden of the catechist is being shared with other groups and sodalities, for example **Catholic Biblical Movement, The Charismatic Movement, The Catholic Christian Doctrine group, The Catholic Fathers' Association, The Catholic Mothers' Association, The Catholic Youths Organization, Young Catholic Students Association, The Knights of the Catholic Church.**

There are also a host of pious associations which had long been associated with the teaching of catechism and charity work in the local environment of the Church. They include, the **Legion of Mary, Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary, The Block Rosary Crusade, St. Jude's Society, St. Anthony's Guild, The sacred heart Guild, St. Theresa's society, The Blue Army Crusade** and many other religious associations springing up here and there. They are all associated with the spreading of the good news at grass-root levels.

Instead of seeing it as hindrance interference in the old catechist's ministry, the phenomenon should be seen as a healthy development in the African Church. Rather, as the role of the catechist faces new challenges in the modern times, it has become imperative to take a fresh look at these challenges. There is a recognition of the urgency of reevaluating the ministry of the catechist and of adapting it to the existing needs. This evaluation and adaptation must be done in order to help Christian communities by re-enforcing the structures. The Second Vatican Council has taken a fresh look at the role of the catechist in the missionary activity of the Church. Number 17 of the Decree **Ad Gentes**, has appropriate and eloquent words on the matter, while the Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops **Christus Dominus**, in Number 14 echoes in the same strength the importance of renewing and adapting catechesis.

Powerful Co-workers of the Priestly Order

These are the very terms which the Vatican II used in describing and evaluating the perennial role and vocation of catechists. Among the laity therefore who become evangelizers, catechists have a place of honour. The Decree on the missionary activity of the Church speaks of them as *that army of catechists, both men and women worthy of praise, to whom missionary work among the nations owes so much. Imbued with the apostolic spirit, they make a singular and absolutely necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church by their strenuous efforts.*³ The important role of the catechist can be even be more appreciated in the modern times. The Council fathers took note of that when they observed:

In our time when there are few clerics to preach the gospel to such great number and to exercise the pastoral ministry, the role of catechists is of maximum importance. Therefore their training must be so thorough and so well adapted to the cultural advances that, as powerful co-workers of the priestly order, they can perform their task as superbly as can be, even though it is weighed down with new and expanding burdens.⁴

Catechesis Tradendae, echoes the same note on the invaluable contributions catechists have made in the growth of the Church in the mission lands.

It is with good reason that the older and established Churches, committed to a new evangelization, have increased the numbers of their catechists and intensified catechetical activities. But the “term catechist belongs above all to the catechists in the mission lands..... Churches that are flourishing today would not have been built up without them.⁵ Even with the extension of services rendered by lay people, both within and outside the Church there is always need for the ministry of the catechist, a ministry with its own characteristics. Most missionaries to Africa have never failed to acknowledge the unique figure of the catechist in the development of the African Church. For them the catechist remains specialists, direct witnesses and irreplaceable evangelizers who represent the basic strength of Christian communities in the young Churches. The new code of canon law acknowledges the tasks and qualifications of the catechists:

Catechists are to be given a role in missionary work. They are lay members of Christ’s faithful who have received proper formation and are outstanding in their living of the Christian life. Under the direction of the missionaries, they are to represent the gospel teaching and engage in the liturgical worship and in works of charity (no. 785, 1).

Canon 785, 2, directs that “Catechists are to receive their formation in schools founded for this purpose. If there are no such schools, they are to be formed under the direction of the missionaries”. The catechist will continue to play unique role in the African Church. He works among his people and lives with them at the same level of society, his knowledge of the customs and tradition of the people, their mentality and way of speaking makes him better understood by the people. Instead of diminishing his role as ‘co-workers of the priestly order’, certain factors have rather come to perpetuate his dominant role in the development of the young African Church, one of which is lack of missionary and priestly vocation.

Shortage of the clergy

The world wide shortage of the clergy is becoming more acute every year. Some of the important reasons for this anomaly include:

- Increased prosperity which is not a breeding ground for vocations among modern youths. Most of the western seminaries and religious houses which were once flourishing centres for missionary vocations have closed down for lack of vocations. Some have been sold out to business entrepreneurs.
- The general indifference to religion among adults and youths affects vocations to the priesthood and religious life.
- The observance of celibacy is not attractive to the modern man which sees it equally as out of fashion. The shortage of the clergy, particularly in the developing countries of Africa also stems from another source, namely, the faith, which is relatively not yet deep in Africa and in the other developing countries.

Although in some areas of Africa, remarkable increase in indigenous vocations has been recorded; in others the situation has rapidly grown worse. In some cases it has been impossible to get enough indigenous clergy to fill the posts left by the missionaries. Neither can salvation come from the older Christian world. Crisis which has enveloped the Church and its priesthood in Europe and America makes the expectations for a brighter future look like a dream. Instead of coming to the rescue of the younger Churches as in the days of missionary enterprise, the older Churches are looking for help from Africa and other developing Christian world. It follows therefore that shortage of missionaries and the native clergy has re-enforced the call for lay persons' participation in mission activities. The role of the catechist becomes even most indispensable than ever.

Catechist's ministry in the modern church

During the pioneer missionary days, catechists were among the leading citizens in both Church and local communities. Local chiefs and community leaders desirous of the white man's system of government and education applied to the missionaries for catechists and station-teachers, who were then among the only few that could read and write. That was the first stage towards development and civilization. These catechists and station-teachers were usually sent from the coastal regions

of Nigeria and metropolitan stations where the missionaries first established some bridge-head. They maintained the link between the various communities and the white man. The impact of the catechist and station-teacher was greatly felt throughout the hinterland where they operated, opened up more schools and station Churches. At inauguration of new parishes and dedication of Churches these days, in most of the Nigerian dioceses, Church communities do not fail to recount the important roles which the pioneer catechists played in the establishment and development of the Church in this part of Africa. In Onitsha ecclesiastical province of Nigeria, most of these pioneer catechists who exercised a lot of influence on the people usually came from Onitsha, Ozubulu, Nteje, Oguta, Adazi, Ihiala, Ahoada and other areas of the then Eastern Nigeria. They were powerful Church leaders and teachers who helped the missionaries as co-workers in the Lord's vineyard.

Today, however, new social classes have come up which include civil servants, teachers, university students, social workers and political leaders. When the missions developed their school system and established training colleges, most of the station teachers who hitherto had no teaching qualifications, ceased the opportunity to upgrade their status. Some became headmasters and senior teachers. These were almost automatically absorbed in the public school system when government took over schools from the missionary bodies and voluntary agencies. Most of the catechists and station teachers who could not climb the social ladder remained ordinary simple catechists, thus occupying not so prestigious position in the community social strata. In some cases, the catechist's most important role consisted in assisting the foreign missionary as interpreter or in the collection of Church money. He was also given some other minor assignments. With the growth in the number of the indigenous clergy, that no more needed the assistance of an interpreter the role of the old catechist continued to diminish. With such a subordinate position, the catechist was held in little esteem.

Again, while the salaries of teachers, civil servants and other workers have been increased and continued to be raised continually, those of the catechists have remained low and stagnant. Their poor remuneration is reflected in the employment or recruitment system and nomenclature – *full time, part time or voluntary catechists*. While the **full time** catechist, in terms of salary receives a stipulated amount of money, the others, part time and voluntary catechists are most often left at

the mercy of the parish priest or station council often charged with the disbursement of this miserable amount to the catechists. In dioceses where no clear-cut directives are given as regards the catechists' remunerations, there have always been conflicts and distrust. The result is that there is little or no motivation on part of the catechists to work and hence the ministry suffers. Still in some places where the station council or the church community takes over the maintenance of the catechist, his role has been reduced to that of the station teacher without school. He is simply the custodian of the station Church's patrimony and is just the station Church's porter.

Catechist ministry and the group apostolate

The traditional image of the catechist continues to shrink, much more with the rise of the **Group Apostolate**. Today, larger part of the work which the catechist had carried out for long is being taken away by the laity. In many dioceses of Nigeria the laity has become a strong force to reckon with in the grassroots evangelization programme. The Group Apostolate, sanctioned by the Vatican II Council Fathers, "in the present circumstances is quite necessary that, in the area of lay activity, the united and organized form of the apostolate be strengthened. In fact, only the close pooling of resources is capable of fully achieving all the aims of the modern apostolate and firmly protecting its interest."⁶

The Group Apostolate is therefore an important arm of the catechist ministry, now seen and understood in a new light. Group apostolate 'subsidizes' the catechist's efforts and tackles the new challenges posed by new changes in Church's methods and mission. It has many advantages. In the first place, it co-ordinates the little helps which many are prepared to give. Secondly, it provides a wider and more varied apostolate because it calls on people of different talents.

In fact Group Apostolate, stimulated, organized and co-coordinated by the clergy in every Parish completes the answer to needs of the local Church. These needs are:

- i. **Prayer:** Without which faith and grace cannot be obtained. Some of the lay apostolate organizations devote much of their time to prayer. Prayer sessions are regularly organized for spiritual growth.

- ii. **Active spiritual apostolate:** Instructions, preparations for sacraments and re-claiming of lapsed Christians are usually undertaken by various apostolate groups.
- iii. **Christian social work:** Groups like Vincent de Paul society and the Catholic knighthood engage in active social work for the poor and the needy and the above structure fits well into the Council's specifications or categories:

There is great variety of association in the apostolate. Some set themselves the broad apostolic purpose of the Church; others aim to evangelize and sanctify in a special way. Some propose to infuse a Christian spirit into the temporal order. Others bear witness to Christ in particular way through works of mercy and charity.⁷

Without doubt there are many pious associations in the African Church primarily established to promote life of prayer. The people are deeply religious and will advance in prayer if the clergy leads and encourages them. Prayer and hymn sessions pervade prayer meetings. The people have apostolic zeal and are ready to carry out assignments given to them or mapped out for their associations. The C.C.D. and the Legion of Mary, for example have since long been engaged in organizing catechism classes for both children and adults. Most of the instructions are conducted at the various mission premises or at the village squares. The people are equally generous. They are always ready to help the poor, the aged and the handicapped in their midst. Generosity can be extended to the needy through such associations or societies like Saint Vincent de Paul and the Red Cross. The Council Fathers seriously have appealed to laymen to respond to this call to discipleship and mission:

This most sacred council then earnestly entreats in the Lord that all laymen give a glad, generous and prompt response to the voice of Christ, who is giving them an especially urgent invitation at this moment, and to the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Younger people should feel that this call has been directed to them in particular, and they should respond to it eagerly and magnanimously [**Decree on the Apostolate of the laity – *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, par. 33**]

"Mobilaity"

This is an expression or slogan employed by the Catholic Laity Council of Nigeria (CLCN) to define its action-packed programme through which lay persons in Nigeria are to be totally mobilized for active role in the evangelization 2000. The term is coined from the phrase **Mobilization of the laity**. Both in concept and practice, it signifies the full in-cooperation of lay persons in the mystery, communion and mission of the Church, and with particular reference to Nigeria, it implies the full participation of the laity in the New Era of Evangelization, proclaimed by His Holiness Pope John Paul II during his historic visit to Nigeria in 1982.

Lay persons, therefore, are in union with all the baptized, and together with others they are in communion exercising their charisma, ministries and different forms of service. **Mobilaity**, is a means of sharing by lay persons in the missionary mandate to extend the kingdom of God especially in the world where lay persons are normally most involved and active. In the spirit of **Productive Sharing** in the evangelization mission, lay persons exercise their Christian role in the world, in association with and supported by the pastors and the religious who fulfill different tasks, but within the common mission. "Mobilaity" as understood by most active laity organizations in Nigeria is an active programme for the realization of the continuous Pentecost of the Church, and for the establishment of New Era of Evangelization in our own time.

Catholic action committee

In most parishes of Nigerian dioceses, catholic action committee (CAC) is as old as some of the lay organizations which played important role in catechetical activities during the pioneer missionary days. Today the CAC remains very active in religious and moral instructions at grassroots levels.

Generally the committee was formed in most parishes during periods of crises and emergencies, including violent confrontations between the young Church and the certain unorthodox local associations, social clubs and cultural organizations whose activities were in conflicts with the Christian faith. Some of these cultural organizations which existed before the advent of the missionaries claimed to represent the authentic cultural values of the people. Their violent opposition to Christian practices was a menace of Christian religion and weak converts

who could not withstand their threats relapsed to paganism. Their menace in most cases was subdued through the efforts of the **Catholic Action Committee**. Catholic faith and traditional religious practices had come into conflict. Among the set backs suffered by the young Church in early missionary days came as a result of fierce clashes with the traditionalists over matters of religious interests – felling of juju trees or destruction of shrines, eating of forbidden animals or killing of same. Others were the destruction of some devilish concoctions and doing manual work on forbidden market days or at forbidden areas.

The story of the famous diabolical ‘Obuoji’ masquerade (Mmanwu Obuoji) which was bent on destroying Christians and all Christian values is still told today in some older pioneer parishes in the Eastern states of Nigeria. The masquerade, which represented the head of the secret society cult was thought to be a spirit which could not be confronted. Those days ‘Catholic Action Committees’ were formed to fight the evil machinations of the secret cults. This committee usually made up of new enthusiastic converts to the Catholic faith together with the catechists were known to have fought fearlessly for the preservation of the faith. With the defeat of the enemies of the young Church, converts were free to embrace the faith without fear of victimization. During these days of expansion and consolidation of the activities of the church, the CAC functions as a strong arm of the lay apostolate organization and engages in religious instructions and in other works of charity and Catholic social development.

In the modern times some of the long abandoned cultural organizations are once again rearing their ugly heads in the name of the ‘cherished authentic traditional religious values of the people’. Many fallen Christians patronize such neo-pagan institutions and practices. In some Catholic communities these cultural organizations are emerging, taking strong roots. They enact laws re-establishing formerly proscribed festivals and pagan observances which are in conflict with Christian values. A typical example is the case of ‘Igba Iyi’ festival in some areas of Imo State of Nigeria. It is annual event during which nubile girls are expected to go naked or half-naked through the streets of the towns and market places in shameful ceremonies to prove their virginity. In one parish, a one-time chairman of the ‘Igba Iyi’ festival, a highly placed traditional ruler and government official was reported to have dragged the parish priest to court for opposing the shameful and primitive ceremony.

In such crises and emergencies as in the case narrated above, it used to be expedient to march force with force. Soldiers of Christ, members of the Catholic Action Committee are called out to defend the Church and fight for the abolition of strange un-Christian values. Sometimes conflicts which arise have to do with funeral rites and ceremonies, traditional title-taking, 'sacred' days of the week when work should not be done on certain parcels of lands, violation of primitive laws regarding marriage etc. Catholics who are accused of violating the laws of the land are punished in the most humiliating manner. Even certain pagan sacrifices are prescribed for the purpose of cleansing the 'desecrated' lands to appease the gods. But the Church has to intervene and defend its members. Violence may erupt. Catholic Action Committee is formed to settle such matters.

In parishes and dioceses where the above related sources of conflicts do not exist, CAC still exists to help and protect the priest and Catholic patrimony and institution. At the present times the work of the CAC committee can be summed up in the following outline.

- i. To identify and recognize active Catholic members of the parish or the station and their talents and areas of interest;
- ii. To monitor the activities of cultural organizations and supply information to the priest, catechists, or Catholic Community;
- iii. To contribute towards the organization and the running of the parish as a community within which one's faith can be lived along with the others;
- iv. To engage in religious instructions at all levels in collaboration with other Pious Organizations.

The Catechist's ministry: Which way forward?

Even with the services rendered by the Group Apostolate and other lay organizations, including the Catholic Action groups, the catholic knighthood, the ministry formerly reserved for the catechist will continue to weigh heavily on this Church's minister. And with little formation in the new methods of modern apostolate, the old catechist will not be in the

position to shoulder the big burden of work facing him these times. He is even no more effective in the animation of these movements.

Some people think that catechists should be upheld with the leaders of the lay apostolate groups. Some questions asked by both priests and lay people include the following: ‘Why go on discussing the maintenance and formation of catechists in order to cope with the burden of the modern apostolate, when members of the lay apostolate organizations can readily supply for the services rendered by the catechist, and much better?’ Some of these various groups can serve as finance committee, can range for the pastoral care of the sick, serve as building and works committee, teach catechism, organize liturgical and other prayer meetings. There are indications that these lay apostolate groups can perform more efficiently than the catechist. Some crucial questions remain as the development of these lay groups and new functions they assume in the Church rendered the catechist ministry redundant? Is the catechist’s ministry evolving into sometime unique in the modern times or has it remained static in a dynamic evolving new situations? In short no final statement on the matter is possible without a more careful examination of all issues raised in these pages.

Truly, many odd are facing the catechist ministry today. But for some it may be unwise to discard the catechist in preference to the new charismatic and action – lay apostolate groups. That may be dangerous. And as one bishop observes:

All this may sound well and true, but it may not be proper to leave the direction of a community in the hands of any leader of a particular Action Movement, just because that man happens to be a leader. No Catholic Action includes all the members of the Christian community, and yet the pastor of the community must be responsible and feel that he is responsible for everyone and not only for those affiliated to a particular movement [cf. *Questionnaire on Catechist’s Ministry*]

But, can the catechist ministry in its changing form still be undertaken and efficiently accomplished by the catechist? Definitely no.

The future of the catechist’s ministry in the African Church

From the on-going discussion, it is clear that the future does not favour the old type of the mission catechist. As we have already seen, there exists in many dioceses of the African Church today, among the young people and adults as well, a great reserve of potential leaders, professional in various fields eager to serve in the Church. There is no doubt that their resources and potentials have not been sufficiently tapped or utilized. These are men and women, from all classes of society, belonging to various Church organizations, associations and sodalities and have enthusiastically discovered the beauty of their Christian faith, and have experienced the desire to take an active part in the building up authentic Christian communities. As far as possible a more and complete formation can be given to these people, who are perhaps married and who have a profession which supports them. If these people agree to become **Catechists**, they would not do so just for the chance of getting a job. For them it is a big honour to be asked to serve the Christian community.

A wider distribution of ministries

Some people would argue for wider distribution of the catechist's ministries. Christians, in some places think that the different ministerial functions are the prerogative of the priest or of his right hand man, the catechist. But it is necessary today that the people should be led to realize that the whole community is responsible for these ministries. Each one should contribute his share, following his own charisma and talents as 'ideal catechists' – instructing catechumens, visiting the sick, organizing marriage courses as well as organizing prayer – meetings etc.

Thanks be to God! Today in Nigeria, at least we are sure that a change of mentality has been brought about by the phenomenon of 'Group Apostolate'. People like to be involved, to perform and most importantly they cherish leadership positions in community engagements. It is no more believed that only the priests or the catechists can fulfill these ministerial obligations. The Church is no more that of the missionary, the priest or his catechist. If these failed to perform or if they annoyed any member, they aggrieved one may not abandon the Church! No. There is that awareness of **Group Ownership and Group Concern**. In the same way, the catechist has been given all the tasks that many others could and indeed should undertake in the Christian community. Certainly, if this change was brought about, the catechist would be more

available, the problem of his salary would be less pressing and he would feel backed by the Christian community.

Voluntary and part-time Catechist

The ministry: *A vocation not a trade*

In the present circumstances, it is clear that voluntary and part-time catechists will be preferable to a permanent order of the ministry. The following arguments favour this proposition. Many think that if catechist's work is seen as a **Vocation**, like that of the **Priesthood** or **Religious life**, there will be less worries about maintenance and wage-earning. A voluntary catechist is a more eloquent witness than one who is paid. The value of the catechist as witness depends above all, on his complete dedication to work, whether he is paid or not much depends on his personality. With the equitable distribution of work in the parish, taking into account talents and charisma, employment of full-time catechists becomes un-necessary. Such a catechist may find work for only one or two hours a day.

Both in theory and practice, many people, including the clergy agree that the **ideal type** of catechist is the **voluntary**, or if that cannot be found in sufficient number, then the **part-time** catechist – partially paid, can do. As has been observed in many areas of this discussion, the present atmosphere favours a system of re-distribution of the functions of the catechist to 'more voluntary and part-time ministers'. Much would therefore depend on a *new theology* of the ministry of the catechist in the Church. The theological question of the catechist's function in the Church must be resolved. The main reason perhaps, many think, why our present day catechists are seen as **Ministers without status, formation or future**, is that no one knows exactly who they are or what role they actually play. Once the catechist's function is defined properly, as a key function in the Church's life, than most of the problems connected with this ministry will find solutions. Unfortunately with only little reference to it in the new code of canon law (Cn. 785) and therefore it never has been tied canonically as has the priesthood and the religious life. In short a renewed vision of the ministry of the catechist will contribute as much to a renewed interest in the vocation. It will offer more attraction of both young and old.

A new order of ministers

The future of Christianity in Africa will be affected by the way bishops, priests and the entire Church leadership handle the issue of the catechist's ministry. In the face of many challenges being posed by the proliferation of many African Independent Churches, the aggressive islamization of the African continent, the revival of old pagan cultural movements, and of course the problems brought about by secularization, it is obvious that the African Church, if it is to survive this onslaught of these growing problems, must gear up to the challenges. One of the most effective ways of living up to the expectations and avoiding disaster is by re-assuring the role and functions of ministers, who in one way or the other are charged with the pastoral care of the church in Africa. It is not only the ministerial Priesthood; the catechist ministry and the entire apostolate of the laity must receive close attention and reassessment. In our present task here, it has become urgent to re-examine the entire ministry of the catechist.

A new type and order of ministries

If any headway is to be made, whether in the bush-out-stations or in the urban parishes, a new order of catechists or ministers will have to be formed. The term **catechist** here covers a variety of **functions and ideas** and on the continental or provincial levels the term must be clearly defined to bring out its meaning. On the basis of the key functions being carried out, different types of catechists should emerge. Each regional grouping with common or similar problems must classify the catechist according to the order of functions assigned. This will help to determine the method of recruitment, formation and maintenance. In order to do this, it follows that different functions carried by the catechists at present must be analyzed and the needs of the Christian community determined so that the right **persons** are given the right **jobs**. The starting point of any reflection on the future orientation should be the urgent needs of the modern communities in the changing times.

It is certain that the catechist of **tomorrow** will share more and more with the other members of the community those functions which **yesterday** he was accustomed to be doing alone in his capacity as the representative of the priest. At long last the **present** catechist will discover that his new role will be that of the **animator**, who *coordinates* activities, a type of *catalyzer*, who allows all the baptized free exercise of those charisma so important in the Church. Thus the 'too-directive role'

of the catechist of a by-gone age will be lessened. And as the baptized are progressively able to assume the different roles needed by the Christian communities, the catechist will not have to assume those multiple functions for which he was responsible in the past when he supplied for the priest. Most of those catechists have all along been ‘jacks of all trade’, and like priest were supposed to be good preachers and competent teachers, good administrators, social workers and the ever-ready leaders of the Christian community. But it is obvious that catechists are not competent in all these functions. It follows then that those functions for which they are not competent should be taken over by other lay people in the local community.

The multi-catechist system

This system which functions well in urban parishes has for long been in vogue in many parishes of the Onitsha ecclesiastical province of Nigeria. Reports from various centres show that the development of these other ‘catechists’ in areas of catechetical has produced good results. What is actually needed is good coordination. In the area of catechetical the following types of instructions are covered:

- i. Preparing children for first communion and confirmation;
- ii. Marriage instructions, including family planning;
- iii. Preparing catechumens for baptism;
- iv. Bible classes, organized by the CBIU (Catholic Bible Instructors’ Union) are mainly for adults.

There are today more competent hands to handle various religious and moral instructions for children and adults. As in the past, members of the CCD and the Legion of Mary have featured prominently in the teaching of **Evening and Sunday** catechisms. Today members of the Bible study groups, Catholic Knights, Catholic Fathers’ Organization and the retired Catholic teachers are ready at hand to help in organizing and teaching of catechism.

Religion in schools

With the loss of mission schools, the standard of religious instruction in primary and Secondary Schools became very low. And few teachers ever teach religion within and outside school. The number of young lapsed

Catholics grows considerable; most of them fall away though want of care. Over 50% of Primary and Secondary leavers emigrating from rural areas are not confirmed. In some states of Nigeria, for example, well the teaching of religion and moral instructions is allowed once a week for about 45 minutes, it has become impossible for the parish priest to meet the challenge. In some parishes where you have more than two or three secondary schools it is impossible for the parish priest to be present in these schools at the same time. This is the area where lay apostolic groups can help out. Youth leaders and members of the Young Students Union, if well organized in these schools could look after the need of their students. Retired Catholic teachers can equally be of help.

While recognizing the necessity of the presence of the Church in schools, it must be acknowledged that poor results obtained shows that alternative way of reaching the numerous young people who should be instructed must be found. The school atmosphere at the present moment in Nigeria is not always conducive for effective moral and religious instructions, even where teachers are available. An unfriendly school principal can frustrate the efforts of the enthusiastic teachers and helpers. Worse still, it may not be possible to organize the students within the limited period of less than one hour for effective teaching. Like in countries and areas where religious teaching is completely forbidden within the school system, alternative ways of carrying out this important apostolate must be found.

Pastoral care of the sick

The catechist coordinator can be helped in this apostolate by the members of various pious associations whose specific assignments include visitation and care of the sick. When the need arises, they send for the priest. Those engaged in this type of apostolate are usually members of the legion of Mary, St. Jude, St. Theresa etc. Youths also help to provide practical help to the sick and the aged.

Here the **coordinating function** of the catechist can be limited to keeping records of sick calls while even members of the lay apostolate groups may accompany the priest to the communion of the sick and administration of the Last Anointing. Often various pious associations collect food materials, articles of clothing for the needy in communities.

Animators of liturgy and prayer meetings

In most of the flourishing pious associations in the Church today like the charismatic renewal movement, Catholic Bible movement, prayer meetings, interspersed with hymn-singing, reflections, meditation and doxologies feature prominently. In some prayer sessions these are done with reckless abandon that many young people are captivated. Special groups of members have the preparations and organizations of these prayer meetings as their special functions or assignments (Prayer Sharing) in the form of intercessory prayers, 'Bible sharing', in which certain chosen themes are developed and reflected upon are prominent features.

Action or dynamic participation in prayers and hymn singing dominates as new forms of prayer meetings continue to emerge, thus attracting the interest of both young and old. Days are passing when one person dominated and only the Rosary, the Litany or few other traditional Catholic prayers featured. Various forms of prayer including gestures have developed.

On station and parish levels it is very likely that these groups can be gainfully employed to help and organize devotional prayer meetings, including Holy hour adoration, Benediction, vigils etc. They are at their best if given such assignment. Aided by the multiplying and flourishing Block Rosary Crusades and Charismatic and Bible/Gospel bands, it is certain that catholic prayer meetings and devotional assemblies will cease to be unattractive and monotonous gathering for children and the aged. These days youths and adults are members of these lay apostolic groups and their impact is widely felt in the church. At the celebration of the mass and other sacraments their presence and participation add vitality to the holy assembly.

In some out-stations well organized prayer **sessions** can substitute for the old "Catechist Mass", where the priest is not available. What used to be the old function of the catechist in the remote out-stations can reasonably today be enlivened by the participation of the new prayer groups.

The 'Catechist Sunday Service' and especially in the remote local out-stations used to be an important function of the old catechist. There were then few priests, and parishes were so large that it used to be impossible to visit all the key stations within a space of six months. The parish priest celebrated mass in rotation. Only those who had cars, bicycles or other means of transport traveled to the parish centres where

mass was celebrated more regularly on Sundays. Children, women and the aged stayed at home to attend the Catechist Sunday Service (Uka Onye nkuzi or Uka Onye Katkis). In the old catechism books, the omission of the catechist's Sunday service was considered a *Venial Sin*. Today, however, with improvement in means of transportation and the creation of more and smaller parishes, some out-stations in the larger parishes receive mass more regularly on Sundays than in the past. With the establishment of one-town parishes, it may no more be difficult for people to attend masses on Sundays and even on weekdays. But in some African countries where insufficient number of priests operate and most of the parishes are still large, the catechist may still have to exercise this important functions of holding the **Sunday Services** for the people. Like the priest himself the catechist coordinates the pastoral activities to ensure that the people do not scatter on account of scarcity or unavailability of the priest. He can be assisted by the **Prayer Groups**.

The catechist and the permanent diaconate

To supply for the shortage of priests in the Church, the Second Vatican Council decided on the re-establishment of the diaconate as a permanent order in the Church. The ordained deacon may be a mature married man. He has power to baptize and distribute Holy communion, to bless marriages, to instruct and preside over worship and prayers.

The permanent diaconate has therefore great possibilities in the modern times. It could solve the problem of the shortage of priests. In some older Churches of Europe and America where the priestly vocation has been decreasing, lay married people serve as permanent deacons. This is true in Germany and France where there are a multitude of small parishes without priests. A resident deacon supplies instruction and worship. It would solve the problem of celibacy, for the deacon can marry. One who wishes to enter the ministry but does not want to remain celibate, could serve as a deacon. In some areas like South America, the bishops are said to be eager to re-instate married priests as deacons.

In our search therefore for a new type of catechist – minister, playing a defined role in the African local Church, especially where shortage of priests is a handicap in the pastoral ministry of the Church, it is appropriate to assign to our new catechist the role of **Permanent Deacon**. Among the lay people, workers can be found, who as the Council said already effectively occupy an appropriate **diaconal role**:

Where Episcopal conferences deem it opportune, the order of the diaconate should be restored as a permanent state of life, according to the norms of the constitution of the Church. For there are men who are actually carrying out the functions of the deacon's office, either by preaching the word of God as catechists, or by presiding over scattered Christian communities in the name of the pastor and the bishops or by practicing charity in social or relief work. It will be helpful to strengthen them by that imposition of hands which has come down from the Apostles and to bind them more closely to the altar. Thus they can carry out their ministry more effectively because of the sacramental grace of the diaconate [**Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, par. 16**].

From the Council's directive, it is obvious that our catechist both on station and parish levels already performs the functions of the diaconate without the necessary imposition of hands; 'which should strengthen them and bind them more closely to the altar'. If the deacon would take over the management of the Church's material affairs, finances, schools and buildings, the priests could say with the Apostles when the diaconate was established; "***We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word***". In this case the deacon need not be a financial burden for he would hold a remunerative post such as manager, teacher etc.

No Church can afford to ignore this council's decision and **not** the African Church! In dioceses of Northern Nigeria, where there are few indigenous priests, one can say that its implementation should be hastened. In Southern parts of Nigeria, where even though priests are found in sufficient number, the idea is still worthy of consideration.

Training and Maintenance of Catechists

In their priestly formation, the future pastors in the Lord's vineyard are given adequate preparation to face the task of evangelization in the modern world. On the promotion of strictly pastoral training of future pastors, the Council fathers were firm in pointing out the necessity for serious preparation:

Let them be taught to use, in a proper manner and according to norms of Church authority the help which the pedagogy, psychology and sociology can offer. Again they should be trained with exactness to ignite and fan the apostolic activity of laymen and to promote the various and more successful forms of the apostolate. (**Degree on Priestly Formation, par.20**)

This same emphasis on proper formation of the priests should hold for their co-workers – catechists, part-time or full-time in individual or group apostolate. The prominent role of the modern catechist in the modern African Church and the challenges this role faces make the need for proper information of the catechist imperative. These days, owing to the growing complexity of society and its care and needs, every profession demands a standard of specialized formation which must be undergone, conditional to exercising that profession. Given the responsibility of the catechist in the young Church, it is clear that great care must be given to his systematic and adequate training.

The catechist of the past never received a **systematic** or **technical** training to prepare them for their task in the Church. However, most of them, being men of great zeal, dedicated to the matters of the Church, capable of good human relationship, endowed with a practical knowledge of their community, coupled with some personal advice and instructions from the missionaries on the spots were able, with God's grace, to produce fruitful results in their ministry.

But today, the situation has changed. Catechists are no longer counted among the elite of the rural communities. The catechist loses prestige, both in town and village in Church and community, if he does not show any systematic knowledge of the work he has to do. Because of the rapid challenges in society, a greater challenge is posed on the catechist's ministry and this cannot be met with amateurism.

It was this situation which has given rise to a number of organized efforts towards the adequate formation of the catechists. A lot has been heard, discussed and written about the training of the catechists and the establishment of training institutes for the catechists. But generally, it does not seem that much have been achieved. Most catechists still rely on personal and practical experience. Apart from seminars and occasional lectures, prepared by some priests and other animators in some dioceses,

the training of catechists has remained a theoretical concept. Where chaplains are appointed to help and organize courses for catechists only a few benefits from such course which are not regular. Catechists themselves sometimes do not show much enthusiasm for such training programmes; some of them thinking that they are too old and unprepared for such training or re-orientation. Condolence visits to bereaved members of catechist association receive rather more attention. Monies are collected for food and drinks.

If any catechetical formation is done on the national, provincial or diocesan level, perhaps only full-time catechists attend. Some catechists who have received some training overseas, never exercised the functions when they returned. Some of them take up appointments with government bodies where better conditions of service are assured. Of course it is well-known fact that no meaningful formation of the catechist can take place if not undertaken within his own cultural environment. The questions of training African catechists in Europe should therefore be ruled out. Time spent in learning foreign languages becomes a waste as such languages may not serve the catechist exercising his ministry at home.

What is to be done therefore about the formation of the catechist? In the decree on **Missionary Activity of the Church, No. 17**, the Vatican II has carefully delineated the form of training the catechist of today needs for his ministry:

In our times, when there are few clerics to preach the gospel to such great numbers and to exercise the pastoral ministry the role of catechists is of maximum importance. Therefore their training must be so thorough and so well adapted to cultural advances that as powerful co-workers of the priestly order they can perform their task as superbly as can be, even though it is weighed down with new expanding burdens.

The Council Fathers went on to emphasize the importance of building special schools for the training of the catechists:

There should, then be an increase in the number of schools, both on the diocesan and on the regional levels, in which future catechists can study Catholic doctrines, especially in

the fields of scripture and liturgy as well as catechetical methods and pastoral practices. Let there be more schools in which they can develop Christian habits in themselves and can devote themselves tirelessly to cultivating piety and sanctity of life.

The council's directives are clear, and certain areas are given greater emphasis. On both **diocesan and regional** levels such schools for the training of the catechists should exist. Areas of study should include **Scripture, Liturgy, Catechetical Methods and Pastoral practice**. Certainly in some dioceses training schools for catechists have been established, although some of these 'centres' do not yet function as school. A detailed programme of formation must be drawn and whether the schools have to function as 'Summer Schools', 'Schools for refresher courses' or 'Sandwich', the type of catechist and areas of study will show. The tendency however has been that of making these schools centres of refresher courses for serving catechists and not necessarily schools or colleges for fresh students of catechetical ministry.

Catechetical schools for teachers of religion

The main function of the catechist as the name implies is that of teaching **Catechism or Catholic Christian Doctrine** to both children and adults, so that learners are able to make personal response to the message of God. If the catechist is to carry out such a ministry today, in the full sense of the word, it is obvious that this is an area in which he is most ill-equipped. Unless in certain places which can still today be described as completely 'Missionary' or 'Rural' – where the catechist is still in full command, where the priest visits once or twice during the year. Catechists who minister in most urban centres have greater role to play as **Regional Instructors**. In some areas of Nigeria, as we have already observed the **sacramental and liturgical** functions of the catechists in the community are becoming negligible. Most catechists generally work in area where the community is established, and the clergy in residence, with the result that their work is not considered very important and their formation is either ignored or done haphazardly. But the office of the instructor is still cherished in both urban and the rural centres. And the inability of the catechist to undertake catechetical assignments is more noticeable in the 'scholarly' and sophisticated atmosphere of the cities.

Because of his inability to take up this function, some dioceses employ the services of better trained and well equipped religious brothers and sisters. Where brothers and sisters and other better trained personnel are engaged in catechetical instructions, large number of people attend. Sometimes these instructors employ **modern techniques in pedagogy and educational psychology**. To attract wide audience, audio-visual aids and catechetical literature are used. To a greater extent Rev. Brothers and Sisters are assisted by seminarians and religious aspirants during holidays.

These developments do not render the catechist's ministry redundant. Rev. Brothers, sisters and seminarians are not always available everywhere. We may therefore have to lean back to the traditional catechist. With adequate formation, it is likely that he will be able to assume his duty as religion and moral instructor in the present day situation.

Maintenance of the catechists

The maintenance of the catechist has been a big problem in the African Church. Almost everybody agrees that the catechists have never been well paid. Some have long depended on the charity and disposition of the parish priest and his counselors. Often the catechist salary is not fixed. It is said that in Tanzania, for example, the expression 'poor as a catechist', is borne out in the missions. As a result of his poverty, the parish priest, station and parish counselors are ever suspicious of the catechist when these handle money. He is often accused of appropriation of funds, false accounting, occult compensation practices and embezzlements. Many a time he is probed, scolded and humiliated by the priest and the people.

But what baffles many concerned people is why this situation should be allowed to exist when huge sums of money are regularly dispensed by various Pontifical charity organizations and agencies responsible for assisting poorer mission lands. Large subsidies for catechists and their ministries are known to be dispensed by Pontifical missionary bodies.

The Pontifical mission societies have specific task in the overall mission effort of the Church. In order to promote missionary consciousness, the missionary union publishes **Omnis Terra** a monthly magazine on **Mission** that appears in various main world languages. The following societies are in operation:

- i. The society for the propagation of faith – Works to promote mission awareness among all the faithful and to generate financial support for missionary work throughout the world;
- ii. The society of St. Peter the Apostle whose specific work is to give financial support to seminaries and seminarians in all mission dioceses.
- iii. The Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood promotes mission awareness among children and sends financial aid coming from the children themselves to more than 90 countries.⁸

The Council Fathers were specific when they were addressing this problem: “The Council desires that special funds from the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith should be provided for due training and support of catechists (Missions, par. 17). Moreover some of the general principles guiding the dispensation of funds on behalf of catechists by the pontifical works – OPM (Opus Pontificium Missionarium) testify to the seriousness of deficiencies and poor economic status of the catechist in spite of global efforts being made to help the catechists. “Priority attention” was the watchword in the OPM document. According to specifications, help for the catechist has **absolute priority** over all other extraordinary subsidies allocated by the OPM. If the amount at the disposal of the OPM was eventually to be decreased in case of emergencies, the reduction in allocations would affect first of all the other extra-ordinary subsidies before affecting those destined for catechists. True to the fact of the situation, help for the formation and remuneration of catechists’ remains *an extraordinary subsidy* for which the demand must be renewed each year by the bishops. Generally, priority treatment is normally given to the dioceses which, owing to the shortage of priests depend almost exclusively on the catechists for evangelization and pastoral work among the faithful. The Commission aware that help for catechists is only partial, however strongly recommends adequate arrangements for the maintenance of catechists which must reflect in respective diocesan budgets.

The Commission continues to appeal for aids and makes it abundantly clear that missionary formation is the task of the local Church, assisted by missionaries and their institutes and by personnel from the young Churches. This work must be seen not as peripheral but as central to Christian life. The question then is, are the Commission's recommendations on the maintenance of catechists carried out by dioceses? How are the partial aids from the Pontifical Commission dispensed to the catechists? Some details are available.

The Pontifical Mission Aids Societies distributed some 133 million dollars during its 1990 general assembly:

Society for the Propagation of Faith \$84 million; Society of St. Peter the Apostle \$39 million; Association of the Holy Childhood \$10 million.⁹

Providing for the catechist should however not end in payment of salary or remuneration. The full-time catechist should receive adequate care, both for himself and the entire family. In the **diocese of Orlu, Eastern Nigeria** communities wishing to build fathers' houses in preparation for attaining parish status are required to include the **catechist quarters** in the project. **Catechist's office** is also to be provided. As comfortably as the priest lives, the catechist and his household should live within the mission premises attending to pastoral engagements. Also in the same diocese of Orlu the salaries for the full-time and part-time catechists are fixed and the Ordinary of the diocese insists that they be paid promptly. From **contingency funds** parish priests pay their catechists. It is the responsibility of the parish priest to pay the catechists as he pays his other workers. Thus the welfare of the catechist is no more left in the hands of the station or parish council.

Attitude of the Priest towards the Catechist

Relationship between the priest and the catechist is not always cordial. The poor attitude of some priests towards their catechists constitutes obstacles to progress in this ministry. Most catechists are bitter. Some priests do not trust their catechists. They despise and castigate them even before their parishioners. We will hear from the catechists themselves soon speaking on important issues concerning their ministry.

Since little or no arrangements are made on behalf of the catechists after retirement many remain in office even when they have really become old and redundant and are no more in the position to eject new energy and initiatives into their work. It is therefore not unusual to notice that little or no cordial relationship exists between the priest and his catechist. Accustomed to perhaps organizing alone, some priests have great difficulty in considering the catechist or even other collaborators. To improve the image of the catechist, the parish priest should learn to tolerate and work together with his catechist and other workers. He should respect them and not disgrace them.

Where there are other groups, associations of lay persons employed by the parish priest to help out in various areas of the pastoral ministry, it may be necessary to demarcate the area in which the catechist can operate. A typical case of an embarrassing situation illustrates this point. A new parish priest who on arrival to the parish thought he no more needed the services of the old catechist who had served in that parish for over 30 years, decided to recruit other ‘more capable hands’ in the parish. But he could not dismiss the catechist since the people had warned him on the consequences of such an action. And the catechist had however continued his usual assignments in the usual ‘old fashion’. He had neither been informed by the parish priest nor told to limit himself to one small area. The dramatic scene looked like this towards the end of the mass:

- Mr. A(in-charge of organizing Sunday collection) while the parish priest sprinkles holy water on the cheerful donors finishes his work and steps down;
- Mr. B mounts the pulpit to announce the arrangements for the forthcoming harvest and bazaar;
- Mr. C. steps up the altar with the microphone to inform all Christian mothers in the parish to wait after mass for important message from the C.W.O. secretariat;
- Mr. D. of the “Catholic Action Committee’ announces the arrangements to combat the menace of the masquerades during the forthcoming new yam festival.

Few other announcements were made by the chairmen or secretaries of other lay apostolate groups.

At last the catechist, thinking it was his turn to make some of his own announcements was suddenly interrupted by the parish priest, who sat all along patiently waiting while the previous announcements were made. He exploded; *“Go and sit down this old man. What have you come out to do? I thought I had warned you never to come out to make any announcements. Are you crazy! Come, go back to your seat and don’t go out there to lavish our time....!”*

As a younger fellow went up the rostrum to call out the **banns of marriage** the congregation in sympathy and disapproval of the way the catechist was insulted murmured: ‘Why’, they reasoned, ‘were other people and groups allowed to make their own announcements, but the catechist should be dismissed in that manner. In fact, the catechist at least should take the responsibility of making the announcements. But it does not seem that some parish priests appreciate that role any more. As far as they are concerned the catechist is not competent, even in the small area of calling out the banns of marriage. This is the type of humiliation to which many catechists are subjected in this new era of Group Apostolate and the fading image of the old catechist. Such public manifestation of disrespect has contributed to the tarnishing image of the catechist. If the services of the old catechist are needed in the modern times, his area of operation must be defined.

PART TWO

THE CATECHIST’S MINISTRY: THE CHANGING ROLE (QUESTIONNAIRE)

The second part of this chapter treats the questionnaire on the **Catechist**. It was sent to over 400 priests, religious, lay persons, various groups of pious associations and sodalities. The pains taken in the exercise were worthwhile. They yielded very good and exciting results. More than three quarters of contributors completed the questionnaire in which extra information and details, not even demanded were generously supplied. Of invaluable importance were those sent in by the catechists themselves. Almost all the principal catechists in the diocese of Orlu, full and part-time participated in the exercise. Also covered with the major seminarians were the following diocese in Nigeria; Port Harcourt, Owerri, Okigwe, Abakaliki, Onitsha, Uyo, Awka, Aba, Ogoja, Ahiara

and Ikot Ekpene. We treat the problems raised in the questionnaire serially here.

Section 1

This section was meant for all contributors, while the second section was for the catechist only. The principal problem dealt with was **the changing role of the catechist**. With the expansion of the work of the laity in the Church, many think that the catechist is becoming redundant these days. Today there are many more efficient hands that are ‘competing’ with the catechist.

Question One: *Do you not think that the figure of the catechist as teacher of catechism or religion is fast fading?*

The answers to these questions can be summarized thus:

- i. Yes. The catechist role is really fast fading because there are more priests and not just missionaries around than in the past. Masses are more frequent even in the out-stations and rural areas. This displaces the catechist’s services. Many young people these days have no idea of ‘Sunday Services’ conducted by the catechist.
- ii. Naturally the old catechist role will continue to diminish since there are many literate people in the communities these days. These can read catechism books and will no more depend entirely on the catechist or on the religion teacher. In short, days are gone when the catechist remained the sole interpreter of the white missionaries. Many can now hear directly from the horse’s mouth. The catechist is not more knowledgeable than most people in the community.
- iii. In most cases the poor educational background gives the catechist an old – fashioned outlook and is therefore not in the position to discharge numerous duties involved in the modern Church and in line with ‘the signs of the times’. Perhaps in the rural areas his services are still needed, but it is a different matter in the urban centres.

A large number of our contributors however maintained that the catechist is still an indispensable figure today, even in the modern African Church. A summary of their remarks:

- i. The fading role of the catechist can never be generalized. In some dioceses in Nigeria, for example Makurdi, Uyo, Abakiliki, the role of the catechist is still indispensable;
- ii. These other lay apostolate groups will not be able to take over completely the work of the catechist. They are not so near to the priest and the Christian community as the catechist. Moreover no one is sure whether these groups or 'structure' may stand the test of time. It will therefore not be wise to abandon the catechist in preference to these other groups.
- iii. The lay apostolate groups are voluntary organizations, which can decide when to operate or not and even may not like to be subjected to supervision of the parish priests and the Christian community. The catechist is an institution, whose functions surpass those of these voluntary bodies.
- iv. Even where lay apostolate bodies operate in full force and their activities found to be very useful in the growth of the local Church, the catechist still remains the chief coordinator of these catechetical activities.
- v. There is nothing wrong if other organizations help to lessen the burden of the catechist. But these cannot take over his work. They can supplement and help to reduce his work-load.
- vi. As regards the authentic teaching of the Church and the perennial tradition of the Church, especially in the local areas, the catechist is more competent, trustworthy and reliable promoter and defender of the Catholic faith. In spite of their enthusiasm and knowledge of the bible and catechism, these other bodies cannot be trusted.

It is astonishing indeed to note that from the many positive remarks made by contributors concerning the key role of the catechist, the image of the catechist is far from fading or tarnishing. Many reject the idea of replacing the catechist with the flourishing lay apostolate groups in the parishes. Although the influence and the role of these groups cannot be undermined, there is a ‘consensus’ that both institutions – the catechist and the lay apostolate can be allowed to function side by side. Truly there are more priests today than during the pioneer days of the white missionaries, the unique function of the catechist has ever remained indispensable. As one contributor puts it:

The catechist cannot be replaced by the Catholic Action Committee. These instruct mainly their own members. But the catechist helps to organize and harmonize the catechetical activities of these other groups under the special directives of the parish priest. He does not have anything to do with the father’s office administration and finances. His main work is to organize catechetical work in the parishes and stations.

It is interesting to observe that most of the priests who completed our questionnaire strongly maintained that the catechist is indispensable personnel in the work of evangelization in the young Churches. ‘Experience’, they say, ‘is the best teacher’. Most of the priests have worked with the catechists for long and therefore find them useful. He remains still the priest, an overseer in the parish.

Question 2: Do you think that our present catechists are properly formed to face the challenges of moral/religious education today in our parishes and schools?

In responding to this question, it must be made clear that there was no intention of making the catechist ‘jack of all trade’, in which his work should include teaching or overseeing the teaching of religion in all catholic institutions, including in our primary and secondary schools.

Every transition period carries its difficulties. Today the pastor is no more a traveling missionary. Large parishes have been broken down to create manageable parishes. The pastor resides at a well built-up centre within easy reach of his flock. Churches are being built to provide for

large congregations attending Sunday masses. True there are out-stations attached to the parish centre. They are visited by the priest but his visit may not be regular. He does not stay with the people.

There are new challenges in moral and religious instructions. Hitherto the missionary pioneer 'station –teachers' used to supply the much needed moral and religious instructions in schools. But with post independent and social changes, gone too are the mission schools.

The answers submitted by our contributors to this question demonstrate the awareness that we are living in changed and changing times. The Vatican II's 'signs of the times' have been recognized by many. While generally acknowledge that the catechist, right from the missionary days has not been trained or prepared to handle difficult religious and theological matters, they were never considered to be dogmatic and moral theologians. However the catechist needs some knowledge of vital theological, and moral problems of the moment, in order to face the present challenges. This is very important for effective catechesis. Once again we summarize the contributions made in this topic.

- i. Some of the catechists are academically below expectation, having not received the basic qualifications for such office. Since no standards were set or recognized, the office of the catechist became an open race. With poor educational standard, some of them suffer inferiority complex and are equally choked with problems and assignments requiring a high degree of academic qualification. Some are old even to learn now.
- ii. A new method of recruitment or selection of catechists must be adopted as to get people who are capable of learning new and modern techniques and receiving adequate training to face the challenges of the modern times.
- iii. If the standard should remain high to meet the challenges of our times, catechists should receive adequate training in catechetical schools or training schools, both on the diocesan and national levels. This is a task for individual bishops and bishops' conferences. The days of the 'village' catechists are gone.
- iv. Modern catechists need not only intellectual upliftment, doctrinally and pastorally they must be up to date. Formal training must be instituted and trained catechist must be

recognized as an expert in his work. He should not be just a voluntary retired teacher or civil servant who accepts the job to fill the loophole created by the absence of the pastor.

- v. The days of the ‘illiterate’ or semi-illiterate catechists are gone. Only catechists who have had basic training are fit to handle the job in present times. Even where the basic qualities and qualifications are present, there is still need for updating knowledge through refresher courses, seminars and workshops.
- vi. Where still the catechist is adequately prepared for his work, he should be given adequate attention, proper guidance and instructions by the parish priests and bishops.

Without doubt most of our present catechists are not academically well prepared for the job. Many take up the job simply because no competent and better qualified fellow may be available. Younger and more qualified people take other jobs where remunerations are attractive. It is imperative to give serious attention to the training of the catechist if their services are to be retained in the modern times. Some well informed Catholics today even talk of “professionalization” of catechist’s job. He is no more ‘anybody’, the village old teacher. He is to be a competent, industrious and qualified teacher in the first place. Knowledge of the **Subject matter** of his ‘profession’ requires adequate training in dogmatic, moral, spiritual and pastoral theology. The up-to-date knowledge of the canon law and old and new teachings of the Church is an indispensable material for him to operate today. Like the pastor whom he assists, he is expected to live exemplary and impeccable life in the community. Most importantly he must be a ‘mini-biblical scholar’ and well informed in all the Church’s current teachings in various Church disciplines. Only with such weapons can he face the challenges of modern trends in Christian life, greatly influenced by modern sciences of Philosophy, Theology, Sociology and Psychology. Lack of knowledge and vitality hinders efficiency and stagnates progress and productivity.

Question 3: What do you think are the main obstacles to proper appreciation of the catechists’ ministry?

Today the powerful and all important role of the catechist has considerably diminished. The following issues pointed out by our

contributors have been identified as responsible for the diminishing role of the catechist:

- i. **Low social status:** The ministry is unattractive to the younger generation, mainly because it does not enjoy public esteem as a high social class symbol. Most catechists are not honoured with Church and other social titles which are highly revered today, showing that they - the catechists belong to low social class. Most of them are not members of the knighthood or other modern Church sodalities. On a strictly Church circle, the pastor does not need the catechist's services as in the past. The catechist is no more an interpreter and an indispensable link between the priest and the people.
- ii. **The priest's lack of sympathy:** This is another factor that has contributed to the diminishing influence of the catechist. As society gets complex, so also many problems which today require new methods and techniques to tackle. The pastor who is better trained for the pastoral ministry today has little sympathy and patience with the old catechist who is poorly equipped to face difficulties and problems of the modern times.
- iii. **Lack of job satisfaction:** This is another factor that has helped to diminish the image of the catechist. This goes together with his low educational background and low income or remuneration he receive for his job. As 'modern ministers' encroach in his job, the feels redundant, unwanted and desperate. He patiently carries on as he is not in the position to change or influence the situation.

Question 4: Are there areas where you think that the catechist is indispensable today in the Church's pastoral ministry?

Whatever the case may be, there are still many areas where the catechists can still operate and their full services remain still indispensable. This however depends on places and on the availability of other competent personnel. As our contributors point out these areas include:

- i. Sick call and visitation of the sick;
- ii. Funeral arrangements, especially in situations where the priest is not available;

- iii. Marriage instructions and banns of marriage;
- iv. General supervision of Church activities in the community.
- v. General catechism classes.
- vi. Organization and supervision of lay apostolate groups;
- vii. Organizing catechist's Sunday services.

Going through the materials supplied by our contributors on the areas where the catechist should still operate we meet with ever-increasing burden of work for our catechists.

- i. Besides teaching and organizing catechism classes, he is the firmly established father's representative in the out-stations – in custody of the Church's property.
- ii. Generally he should assure adequate preparation for mass, including the readiness of the choir and the lay readers.
- iii. He should organize and assist at prayer meetings.
- iv. He should be involved in the organization of retreats and must be available at confessions and prayer meetings.

Many would also want the catechist to conduct morning prayers daily at the parish centres and out-stations. He should be available at morning masses where these hold regularly. He should not only be involved in pre-marriage instructions; he is expected to extend this service to newly married couples. In short he remains the accredited counselor in marriage cases and in other family problems. The catechist is also expected to organize vocation rallies, according to our senior seminarians' contributors. Catechists are also expected to **host and direct** seminarians during apostolic work. They should see to the general welfare of seminarians sent to work in their stations

As a community leader, the catechist is also expected to **mobilize** the people for 'Catholic Action', social and charity work. In cases where a confrontation develops between **Church and Culture**, the catechist, following the priest's directives inspires and mobilizes the people in 'fighting' for the rights of the Church and Christians. He helps **to preserve and protect** Christian/Catholic practices and heritage against adulteration and profanation.

With regard to **Catechist and Money**, many of our contributors never mentioned the collection of Church levies or contributions as part

of the catechist's area of operation. In fact many will not want him to get involved in the **collection of money** for the priest or parish. This is mainly to avoid conflicts. They would want him to concentrate in these other areas which have more to do with his ministry, namely that of teaching and instructing.

From all the above, we see that the catechist still has a large area in which to operate. If all the points raised are fully examined, it is almost certain that the work of the catechist is still in tact. Instead of removing from his traditional area of influence, even more areas have been added. He is simply not the old missionary figure who translated the language of the white missionary into the vernacular and perhaps collected the A.M.C. or other Church levies for the parish priest. Today the catechist is seen in a new and modern light. He is a **teacher, an instructor, counselor, community leader, social organizer and mobilizer, an animator, father of the priest, vocation promoter, custodian of the Church property as well as a Soldier of Christ – more important than the knight.** Most importantly, he is the priest's closest helper in the pastoral ministry.

Question 5: (*Cf. Questionnaire paper, no 6*)

The current debate on the changing role of the catechist today insists on establishing 'catechists' ministries', namely having as many catechists as possible, performing defined functions, instead of just having one catechist being the jack of all trade.

Our contributors generally identified four areas where this *distribution of labour* is found most useful. If adopted it is hoped that much progress will be made in the general work of evangelization and particularly in the pastoral work in the parish and station. These 'ministries or committees or departments' include:

- i. **Catechetics: The 'Ministers of Catechetics'** should include the members of the various recognized bible unions, the Catholic knights, Catholic teachers' association and other pious associations which formerly engaged in the teaching catechism in both parish and local levels.
- ii. **Finance Committee:** The finance committee will be responsible for the collection of Church's legitimate levies and contributions following the parish and diocesan existing

regulations. In the hands of a competent group or **ministry**, our old catechist will be spared all troubles involved in the collection of money and accounting. The parish priest supervises the work of the committee and defines their areas of operation and methods.

- iii. **The Liturgy:** The group in-charge of the liturgy will be responsible for liturgical celebrations which must include preparations for masses and devotional services. Preparations embrace readings and singing (lay readers and their choir), the establishment of **Mass servers' association, altar girls' association and Church wardens**. This group may also take charge of the sacristy and also help out during confessions and in the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism, Last Anointing and Marriage.

With the above **Ministries or Departments** being covered by the recruited and well-trained groups of lay people, what remains for our traditional catechist is still modest enough to engage his full attention, a job for which he should receive adequate remuneration.

Question 7:(Cf. no.8) Voluntary/Professional Catechist: Whether we choose to recognize the new type or ideal catechist or the old/missionary catechist, many argue that the work should be "Voluntary"

Voluntary or Professional Service

Should the office of the catechist remain a voluntary service where those who are willing may apply or should there be a set standard where *expertise and professionalism* should be guiding principles for recruitment?

Most of our contributors to the questionnaire provided a two-fold answer of yes/no.

- i. 'Yes', the office of the catechist like that of the pastor or the deacon should remain a **voluntary** service since it is a **vocation**.

- ii. Its voluntary nature will help to enforce full commitment and dedication to the job.
- iii. If there is no adequate remuneration for the job, then there is need for **volunteers**.

But many will insist on **professionalizing** the ministry of the catechist.

- i. As **full-time** occupation it cannot voluntary service. A volunteer does the job when he wills and may not be fully accountable to anyone. The priest or the Church community may not be able to exercise full authority over the catechist.
- ii. Like other professional jobs- like teaching, engineering, and medical services there are set standards or qualifications for those who wish to join. There are set rules or **code of conduct** for those in the profession. Those who do not qualify are not employed and those who perform below standard could be dismissed. So must it be in the case of the catechist.
- iii. If the ministry is not professionalized, the cult of mediocrity may continue to bedevil the ministry as incompetent fellows take up the job as volunteers.
- iv. There should be adequate remuneration for the job as in other professional jobs. Competent bodies should determine the salary scale and fringe benefits. The Church should accept the full responsibility of paying the ministers if high level of performance and commitment should be expected.
- v. If the catechist receives a just salary and is well equipped for his job a high level in-put in the job can be assured.
- vi. A permanent full-time catechist is a way of ensuring efficiency and dedication. A professional is proud to prove his worth.

Part-time or full-time service

Whether the ministry remains professional or voluntary, there is still need to consider making it a part-time or full-time service. Which ever way the Church community considers most profitable in view of the work-load or

financial assistance available, many contributors insisted that at least a **full-time** catechist should operate on the parish level. He is to **co-ordinate** the work of the station catechists and still give full-time to the other related activities.

But some others notice some forces which may mitigate the employment of full-time services of the catechist. The first is the availability of the desired **personnel** on full-time basis. Another is the problem of availability of **funds** to pay the full-time catechists. Where one volunteers to give a free service, this service may have to be a part-time occupation to allow the person the time for his main job from which he is making a living.

The consequences of **part-time** services, may be deplorable, some pointed out.

- i. Unavailability of the catechist when his services may be needed urgently, e.g. at mass, sick-calls or funeral ceremonies etc.
- ii. Laxity, arising from possible tiredness after completing his main assignment from which he derives financial support;
- iii. Haphazard attention may be paid to the part-time job.

Question 8 (cf. no. 10) MAINTENANCE: Whether we prefer “multi-system’ type of catechist or ‘mono-type’, some type of remuneration, salary etc may have to come in. how do you think the parish, diocese, province or region can meet the demands? How can funds be made available for this ministry?

Who pays the catechist-the parish priests, parish council, station council or the Catholic community? Should the diocese, province or the Propagation of the Faith or special commission be charged with the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of the catechist? Or should the task be ‘a no man’s business?’ This has for long been a nagging question. Many **propositions** and **suggestions** abound. We summarize the suggestions made by our contributors:

- i. The parish priest should collect the money from the stations or Church groups and pay the catechist directly;

- ii. A second collection should be made occasionally on Sundays and money collected should be reserved for the maintenance of the catechist;
- iii. The diocese, deanery, zone or province should take the responsibility of paying the catechist;
- iv. Part of the diocesan or parish annual budget should be reserved for the catechists;
- v. Parishioners should be levied so that the station or parish will not be starved of funds to pay the catechist.
- vi. Part of the A.M.C. (Annual Mission Collection), C.C.F. (Consolidated Church Fund), A.C.L. (Annual Church Levy), as known or called in various dioceses in Nigeria should be kept aside for the maintenance of the catechist. The parish priest should pay the catechist from this fund,
- vii. A special catechist fund should be established.

Whichever method or means employed in raising the funds for the maintenance of catechists, all agree that the catechist should be paid. The important thing is to work out the best and easiest means of raising the funds. There is strong evidence however that the **Pontifical Commission for the Evangelization of Peoples** places top priority on the maintenance of the catechists in Africa and in the mission lands. Investigations confirm that large sums of money are disbursed annually or periodically for the **Catechists** and projects connected with the building up of this important ministry in the African Church. What happens to these funds then?

Question 9 (*cf. no. 11*) **Nomenclature**

Some think that the term ‘catechist’ has become old-fashioned. Are there new or modern names that could fit in well these days?

The term ‘Catechist’

In defining the changing role of the catechist today, some people think that the term ‘catechist’ is old-fashioned. They think that some modern nomenclature should be introduced to reflect the office. Some would suggest names like **Lay minister, Animator, Evangelist or simply the Parish or Station Teacher**. Generally many do not see the need for changing the term catechist. They regard the name old fashioned and

would like it retained. But others rightly point out that the ministry is mainly that of teaching and instructing. Originally the catechist was the one who taught by question and answer method or by the use of the Church catechism. The term obviously is limited and not wide enough to include the multi-functions of the modern catechist. Apart from the derogatory and historic connotations which it has carried along. On the other hand, as one of our contributors pointed out, it is not a matter of old-fashioned or new-fashioned terminology. “We must beware of being merely fashionably, I think we should retain the traditional name, ‘**Catechist**’ and spell out functions for the modern catechist”. As another contributor pointed out also some of the suggested new titles do not fit in and are therefore not useful. **Station Agent**, for example is too **commercial**; **Evangelist** is too **protestant**; **Lay minister** is confusing. **Lay worker** might be a more useful alternative, but to what extent are these comparable to the name **Catechist**!

Question 10; *(cf. nos. 13 14 15) in what areas of the apostolate do you think the catechists need deeper and consistent formation? Where will they be trained? What minimum qualification do you think our modern catechists should possess?*

The training of catechists

In the past only lip service was paid to this all-important task. Lack of proper training has been identified as the greatest handicap of most of the catechists. To meet the new pastoral challenges posed by new problems requiring new solutions, not only priests need adequate preparations for their ministry. The catechist, too needs adequate training and refresher courses in order to keep abreast with the times.

As for centres for the catechetical formation, some dioceses in Nigeria have already established pastoral institutes, which take the formation of catechists seriously. In **Onitsha** Archdiocese, for example a pastoral centre takes adequate care of the training of the catechist and other Church social workers. The address is **Onitsha Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre, P. O. Box 2032 Onitsha, Nigeria**. A well trained priest is in-charge of the centre. In **Owerri** diocese, the **Emekuku catechist training centre** serves the desired purposes. In **Uyo**, Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, a catechetical centre for the training of the catechists is in full operation. In **Markurdi** diocese, catechist training centre **Ogobia, P.O.**

Box 13 Oturkpo, Benue State, Nigeria is run by the Vincentian congregation working in that diocese. In the **Kaduna Archdiocese**, there is a catechetical centre **Makumfashi, Katsina State**. There are Pastoral centres in **Lagos, Ibadan** and other dioceses of Nigeria which take care of the training of catechists. The **Catholic Institution of West Africa (C.I.W.A.)** in **Port Harcourt** like some other bigger pastoral centres organizes Diploma courses and workshops for catechists and lay persons engaged in the teaching of religion in schools and colleges. In **Owerri**, a much larger programme is organized for all the catechists of the dioceses every year. Lectures, discussions, interactions and spiritual exercises form part of the programme. Theology senior seminarians are usually sent to help the sisters who are in-charge of the programme which lasts three to five weeks.

There is concrete evidence that Church authorities in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa have taken adequate measures to ensure that catechists receive the necessary formation which would enable them to cope with the pastoral challenges of the present generation. While such measures are expected to make the ministry more attractive to younger people, there is need equally to organize regular refresher courses for the serving old generation catechists. There is need to up-date their knowledge on current theological and doctrinal issues of the modern Church. Funds spent on adequate formation of catechists and for their welfare, would be seen by many as money well spent. International aid organizations for the Propagation of faith are involved in the support for the catechists.

These days that paper qualification is a sine-qua-non in employment opportunities everywhere, there are not a few Catholics who insist that the catechist should possess a basic qualification befitting the ministry. In the labour markets today in Nigeria employers in government require a minimum qualification of an Ordinary Pass in Primary School Certificate Examination for local government labourers, while messengers and store keepers may be required to present Senior Secondary School Certificate or G.C.E. (General Certificate of Examination) Ordinary Level. Sales clerks and third class office clerks may be expected to pass the G.C.E. with **Six Credits** including **English Language**. Experience and other qualities may also be attached to the conditions for employment.

For our catechists many agree that the basic qualification should be **West African School Certificate, WASC**; in West African regions and General Certificate of Education, **G.C.E.** or its equivalent. Teacher training Grade 11 certificate is also acceptable. As one contributor puts it “Ordinary Level G.C.E. or WASC with at least **Five credits** including **English** and one major **Local Language** should be enough for our modern catechists. This will enable him receive further education and to check inferiority complex. While some would demand a higher qualification like **National Certificate of Education (N.C.E.)** or a diploma certificate, others think this is unnecessary. They would rather think that a certificate in religious studies and Church history is a necessary requirement for all the recruitment of present day catechists. The importance of good knowledge of English and the main local language and dialects can never be over-emphasized.

With these proven certificates, supported by religious education and practical exposure, the catechist is set to face challenges posed by the complex nature of his job and society. Set academic standards are also part of the guiding principles of every profession.

Questions 16 & 17 *In the foreseeable future, do you think that our modern catechists can assume fully the role of married deacons in the Church in Africa? Do you see any obstacles on the way towards the realization of this noble objective (Catechists as married deacons)?*

The Catechist – a married deacon

The issue being examined here is whether in the foreseeable future, our modern catechists could assumed fully the role of married deacons in the African Church. This office already functions in many parts of Europe involves the administration of the sacraments and other duties which the Church in its tradition has assigned to this order-The Last Step of the Priesthood in the conventional seminary training for the priest. The only difference is that the married deacon is not bound by the law of celibacy.

Once again, like in all related debates concerning the lifting of the law of celibacy for priests, most Catholics in Nigeria, including most of our contributors are very slow in giving approval to the office of **married deacons as catechists**. They argue that more problems would be created by such an establishment and the already many problems confronting the catechist would be more complicated. These problems will include those

of maintenance, more demanding assignments and availability of time. There should be higher level of training in theology, philosophy, canon law and other Church academic and moral disciplines. These would be too much for the Church to shoulder. But for some other people, the establishment of the order throughout the African Church is a welcome idea. It already operates in full force in some dioceses of Northern Nigeria, where there is scarcity of priests. But as the story goes, some bishops of the Northern states of Nigeria who have tried the experiment of the married deacon are warning their Southern counterparts not to try it. Through, the story has not been fully investigated there is still time to experiment on the issue.

Some however, do not see this as an urgent issue in some parts of Africa. With the vocation boom, especially in the Southern part of Nigeria, the establishment of the permanent order of the diaconate may not have arisen. But there is need to include preparations for such an office in the courses organized for catechists. If it flourishes in the African Church, that will be one of the signs of growth and maturity.

**“Hearing from the horse’s mouth”
(For the Catechists only)**

At the time we were assembling together the data of our questionnaire and interviews, the Catholic diocese of Orlu had 72 parishes and well over 350 out-stations. Some of these out-stations were already preparing to attain parish status and were located at the rural areas of the diocese. Three of the biggest parishes then had over 16 out-stations which may not attain parish status in ten years’ time. Because of scarce catholic population these stations may have to remain without resident priests for long. The same statistics will be valid for the neighbouring dioceses of Owerri, Ahiara, Okigwe and Awka.

It all follows that catechists will continue to exercise their traditional ministry in these out-stations which the priest does not often visit. Preparing the people for various sacraments and for full administration of the stations would still remain the primary function of the catechist.

About 300 catechists who completed our questionnaire especially **Section 3**, which was reserved for catechists only, 145 indicated that they were **full-time** catechists, and the rest were **part-time** catechists. Full-time catechists are mostly located at the parish centres and may be

assisted by part-time catechists. Their own section of the questionnaire was most interesting as they spoke out on both their personal problems and those confronting their ministry. We thought it necessary to note their views concerning the overall assessments – successes and failures of the catechist's ministry.

Question 18 (*cf. no. 1, section 3*) *Are you happy with the changing role of your ministry? Why?*

Many responded **positively** to this question affirming that for better achievement in administration and field work, the changing role is a welcome development, and there is need to adapt to the modern age. The Church should move with times and new fashions.

Those who responded in the **negative** thought that the intrusion by the lay apostolate bodies makes caricature of the ministry. According to them it reduces the power and influence which the catechists had hitherto enjoyed. Grudgingly, those who answered in the **negative** were quick to add that the whole ministry could equally be taken over by these other groups, as one contributor puts it. "For long catechists have toiled without recognition and remuneration". But whatever impressions this group might create in the minds of people, many priests and other lay people agree that the changing role of the catechist was a natural development and extends to other aspects of life, professions as well as institutions.

Question 19 (*cf. no. 3*) *Name some areas of your ministry which have already been taken over by other lay apostolate organizations.*

In practice, it was necessary to discover those areas of his ministry into which others have 'encroached'. When the different areas of the ministry are matched with the **modern ministries**, the table will look like this:

1. Visiting the sick: **The Legionaries**
2. Helping the poor: **St. Vincent the Paul society**
3. Conducting morning prayers: **Prayer groups**
4. Reading at mass: **lay readers**
5. Religious instructions: **Bible instructors and C.C.D. groups**
6. Preaching: **Charismatic renewal movement, C.B.I.U.**
7. Leading in prayers: **Block Rosary Crusade**

8. Catechism (proper): **Rev. Brothers and sisters and the Knights**
9. Collection of A.M.C.: **Parish priest**
10. Collection of levies: **Finance committee**
11. Church services: **Liturgical commission**
12. Supervisions of the choir: **Choir masters, Charismatic bands etc.**
13. Co-coordinating the Apostolic work of seminarians: **Parish Council, etc.**

There is no doubt that most of the changes have taken place in most parishes. Indeed some type of mutual understanding and trust exist, while in others such virtues have to be established. As one full-time catechist put it “though they contribute in their own ways, they have not completely undertaken us in any area. We are their general overseers, while the parish priest is our managing director”. Although some of the catechists claimed that they still exercise their ministry fully without any interference from the lay apostolate bodies, a larger number admitted that they have been confined to a small corner from which they still derive joy and satisfaction.

Question 20 (*cf. no. 4*) *To which little areas are you confined? Or do you still exercise your ministry without any interference?*

As for station catechists already confined to their stations, most of them are almost in full command and not even the main parish catechist have free hand in the station. Generally, the catechists are still in-charge in the following areas:

1. **Pastoral Care of the Sick:** This includes visitation of homes, sick calls, arrangements for Christian burial. In most cases the people may not approach the parish priest for funeral arrangements until they had conferred with the catechist and perhaps too the station council. Parish priests depend almost entirely on the catechist on matters concerning Christian burial in the stations and parishes.
2. **Baptism:** Another area in which the catechist exercises full control is that of the Sacrament of Baptism. While he may not be the sole instructor, he supervises catechism classes,

particularly for catechumens and conducts all baptismal enquiries. He keeps meticulous records of infant baptism.

3. **Marriage instruction:** The catechist seems still to be the most qualified to undertake **marriage instructions**, calls out the banns of marriage, receives ‘petitions’ or objections to marriages which he passes to the parish priest.
4. **Leading in Church prayers:** The catechist leads in Church prayers, including morning prayers before the Holy Mass, prayers before and after Holy communion and other traditional prayers of the Church.
5. **General Announcements:** Of all the traditional functions of the catechist, one specifically has not been tampered with. As the “Public Relation’s Officer” of the Church, he makes all relevant announcements, concerning daily and weekly activities in the parish.

Question 21 (*cf. no. 5*) *How do you assess your relationship with your parish priest? Are you well treated? If not so, why?*

While some of the catechists report that their relationship with their parish priests is cordial and that they are equally well treated, others are not so happy. Stories were told in the past about old catechists who were publicly insulted or even slapped by the white missionaries. It was alleged that the abused catechists were either lazy, incompetent or dishonest. Some were said, to have interpreted the white man’s homily poorly. How the white man knew he was wrongly interpreted should be everybody’s guess!

As we were able to discover, the following factors contribute to the unfriendly relationship with the priests:

1. **Poor salary or remuneration:** Almost all the catechists who complete our questionnaire affirmed that they had not been well looked after. As cost of living continues to rise, their poor salary has remained the same. Many confessed that on account of poor salary they would have abandoned the ministry, if not for the sake of their station Church and people.

2. **No allowances:** The salary is hard to come by. Who should then talk about allowances. Many parishioners as well as the catechists strongly

share the view that catechists should receive some gifts as the priest receives. The priest is expected to help the catechist in some of his domestic problems, including medical problems. On the diocesan level, it is a commendable act of charity if the bishop now and again encourages the catechist with cash gifts. Catechists should not be levied for their maintenance during their seminars and refresher courses. They should rather be paid some allowances at the end of such conventions or conferences. Such gestures encourage the catechists.

3. Distrust: Another area of friction is lack of trust on the part of the parish priests on their catechists, especially in the area of money and accounting. Today this problem is being resolved, since the parish priest himself or finance committees are in-charge of collections of levies and annual mission collection. The catechist is thus spared the pains and problem arising from suspicion and distrust over money.

4. Lack of love: Some of the catechists are bitter with their parish priests whom they accuse of maltreatment and showing of disrespect. Some priests, they insist abuse them publicly and would threaten to remove the catechist from the office. Such public show of disrespect can always be avoided. Corrections can be made in private and public scolding of catechists by priests should not be tolerated.

There may be some other areas of friction, but generally most of the catechists feel that the relationship with their priests is cordial. Some simply reported – ‘just fair’ or not too bad’. One wrote: “I am not well treated by the parish priest. There are always open, oral abuses and corrections. He despises me and has no trust on anybody. He ignores my presence, even when he conducts marriages and baptisms in my station. He does not visit me and my family.”

Question 22 (*cf. no. 6*) ***Are you happy with your salary or remuneration?***

To the question, “Are you happy with your salary?”, **all the catechists** answered “No”. or the negative answer, reinforced “Not at all!” From whatever angle one looks at the catechists’ remuneration, it is an issue that need careful assessment and we have already discussed this matter enough in this chapter. There is need to review their salary and equally make it uniform everywhere.

Miscellaneous

There were some other questions of general interest which were also put to the catechists. These include:

- i. **“What benefits do you people derive from the catechists’ association. What do you discuss in your meetings”?**
- ii. **“Are you ready to go for further training or formation? Where? In Nigeria or overseas”?**
- iii. **“Have you important recommendations to make to the Church authorities as regards the catechist’s ministry in Africa?”**

Our last question dealt with important recommendation from the catechists which can help Church authorities to solve some of the problems marring progress in the ministry. Such recommendations will also help to determine the way forward. We select some of the recommendations which the catechists made:

1. The Church authorities have for long been paying lip service to the improvement of the status of the catechist. It is time the matter is giving a serious treatment.
2. Parish priests should cooperate with the poor catechist and should stop insulting or making mockery of them, their low social status notwithstanding.
3. Parish priests should set out time to discuss with catechists periodically. Catechist should be given the opportunity to ask questions concerning most of the current and confusing issues in the Church today and in their ministry.
4. Adequate remuneration for the catechists should seriously be considered.
5. Good and outstanding catechist should be accorded recognition for their services to the Church through the conferment of the knighthood or other titles of recognition and honour approved by the Church.

6. Catechists should not be money collectors for the priests. The parish priest should set up finance committee to handle monetary matters.

7. Free accommodation should be provided for the catechists within the mission premises.

CONCLUSION

Although we have centered most of our investigations on the role of catechists in the modern African Church, around parishes and stations in Nigerian dioceses, we cannot rule out the possibility that the phenomena should look the same elsewhere on the continental level, in East, Central and Southern African Church regions. It is not necessary and possible to carry out the investigations to other African parishes and dioceses. The key point we have discussed is the role of the catechist –past and present. Our questionnaire, personal interviews with individual catechists – retired and those still in active service helped to enrich our findings. Of invaluable importance are the result of our discussions with **parish priests, the religious, young and old, some bishops and the laity**. Also ‘hearing from the horse’s mouth’ was an indispensable method of getting to the grassroots facts and figures. Most of the catechists spoke out fearlessly, although some were bitter and complained throughout; others still feel satisfied in the ministry and are always ready to change with the times.

In the figure of the ‘old’ catechist is really changing? The consensus is that truly the traditional role of the catechist has considerably changed, though he, the catechist is still an indispensable minister, a co-worker and the father the priest and the leader of the Church community at various levels. Timothy A. Osuagwu of C.K.C. parish, Abba, diocese of Orlu, does not think that traditional functions could be taken over by the lay apostolate groups or other bodies. He maintains:

The figure of the catechist as the teacher of catechism and religion has not faded. The new emerging religious groups do not teach as the catechist does. More over most of these groups do not exist in many parishes or not active at all.

These groups – so-called Catholic Action Groups, Catholic Instructors' Union, The Movements, are only prayer groups and are more interested in their own members.

Mr. Osuagwu forecasts bright future for the catechist's ministry and advocates proper training to improve the educational and social status of the catechist. He insists that the catechist should be familiar and up to date with current theological and moral issues, discussed within and outside Church circles. As teachers of religion, catechists should be well prepared to take up the teaching of religion in our secondary schools. Limiting his sphere of influence to the Church precincts may not reflect the true situation today where a small number of the youths gathers at the mission premises for catechism.

APPENDIX; QUESTIONNAIRE

(Questionnaire administered to over 400 priests, religious and lay persons, Church groups, pious associations and other sodalities)

The catechist's ministry: The changing role

Preamble:

The catechist in the pastoral ministry of the Church will continue to receive attention as an important 'institution' in the younger churches in Africa and the developing countries. His diverse role in the past, especially during the white missionary era will still be appreciated today.

The catechist has ever been known as the Father of the Church, of priests, sisters, brothers and bishops. He has always remained when they departed for the towns, the seminaries, for Europe and America. He remained in civil war, in famine and in other troubled times, in the life of the young Church. He has remained teaching, baptizing, preaching and re-preaching eloquently enough the sermons he heard years ago from some historic missionaries, long returned to retirement in their homelands.

But today the situation is fast changing. In modern times, the catechist has been criticized, maligned, mocked and almost theoretically

phased out of existence. It is necessary therefore to re-examine, re-assess the role of the **catechist** the in African Church and see where he fit in today in the new era of evangelization. This will enable us forecast his future in the development of the Church in Africa in general.

Kindly help us in this research work by meticulously completing this questionnaire. Additional materials include will be highly appreciated and acknowledged. Thank you for your kindness.

Section 1

The Catechist Ministry vis-à-vis the Lay Apostolate:

With the expansion of the work of the Laity in the Church, many think that the catechist is becoming redundant these days in our parishes, catechists are being replaced by more competent hands, e.g. Catholic Action groups, Catholic Bible Instructors Union {CBIU}, The Charismatic Renewal Movements, Laity Council, Lay Apostolate Organizations, etc.

1. Don't you think therefore that the future of the catechist as teachers of catechism or religion is fast fading? Yes/No. give reasons for your answer.

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.....

2. Do you think that our present catechists are properly formed to face the challenges of moral/religious education today in our parishes and schools?

.....
.....

3.What do you think are the main obstacles to proper appreciation of the catechist's ministry? Write them down here in the order of importance. Choose from the list. You can add other obstacles and problems not mentioned here, please (*diminishing role, low family and social status, unattractive ministry to younger people, catechists have been by-passed by superior social classes, poor and disrespectful attitude of the parish priests, lack of motivation etc.*)

.....
.....

.....4. Are there areas where you think that the catechist is still indispensable today? Name them. Examples (*sick call, visitation of*

the sick, banns of marriage, general announcement in the Church, prayer meetings, organizing 'catechist's mass', funeral arrangements especially when the priest is not available etc).

.....

.....

Section 2

5. What do you think are the main sources of friction between catechists and (a) the parish priest; (b) and the parishioners?

.....

6. The current debates on the changing role of the catechist today insists on establishing 'catechists' ministries', namely having as many catechists as possible, performing defined functions, instead of just having one catechist being the jack of all trade. Do you share this view? Can you name any four areas where this 'distribution of labour' is almost imperative?

.....

7. What can be reserved for the old catechist if some insist on retraining that figure?

.....

.....

8. **Voluntary/Professional Catechist.** Whether we choose to recognize the new type/ideal catechist or the old/missionary catechist, many argue that the work should be voluntary. Do you agree?

.....

9. **Part-time/Full-time catechist:** Whichever type we prefer, do you think that this ministry should be part-time or full-time?

.....

10. **Maintenance:** Whether we prefer 'multi system' type of catechist or 'mono type', some type of remuneration, salary etc may come in. How do you think the parish, diocese, province or region can meet the demands? How can funds be made available for this ministry?

.....

.....

11. **Nomenclature:** Some think that the term 'catechist' is old fashioned. Can you suggest other 'modern' names that would fit well these days?

.....

12. As 'modern' type of catechists most people are advocating what role would you assign to religious sisters and brothers in the dioceses? Please give details?

13. In what areas of the apostolate do you think the catechist needs deeper and consistent formation?
.....

14. Where will they be trained? Do you know any functioning institutes, houses etc in Nigeria? Give full addresses.....

15. What minimum qualification do you think our 'modern catechists' should possess?

16. In the foreseeable future do you think that our 'modern catechists' can assume fully the role of married deacons in the Church in Africa?
.....

17. Do you see any obstacles on the way towards the realization of this noble objective (catechists as married deacons)?
.....

Section 3 **(For catechists only)**

Full-time/Part-time

.....Parish/Station.....

1. Are you happy with the changing role of your ministry? Why?.....

2. What changes have you made observe? Or what functions can't you perform today, those you performed in the past?.....

3. Name some areas of your ministry which have already been taken over by other lay apostles. Match the ministers with the ministries.....

4. To which little area are you now confined? Or do you still exercise your ministry fully, without any interference?.....

.....
5. How do you assess your relationship with your parish priest? Are you well treated? If not so, why?

6. Are you happy with your salary or remuneration? As full time, how much monthly? Part-time?.....
.....

7. Are you ready to go for further training or formation.....
Where? In Nigeria? Or overseas? State your reasons for preferring overseas.....
.....

8. What benefits do you derive from the meetings of catechists' associations? What do you discuss in your meetings?.....

9. Have you important recommendations to make to the Church authorities as regards the catechist ministry in Africa? Please (without fear) state them here. You can also use extra sheets.

CHAPTER FIVE

JUSTICE FOR AFRICAN

Introduction

The African Church of **today** is overburdened with many problems emanating from the ugly consequences of political instability, poor economic situation, social and religious upheavals. The numerous Africans who are victims of injustice and other forms of oppression look to the Church for succour. For the African Church **tomorrow** such problems are growing and will equally be demanding.

In this chapter, we wish to examine **the situation of injustice** in Africa from various perspectives, including the problem of **leadership**. What presently is the role of the Church in the search for justice in Africa? In the world community of ideologists and liberationist thinkers, have African theologians anything to offer? A **theology** distinctively African, influenced by African Thought and Culture, and forming the solid base for the search for solutions to African problems, is urgently called for.

Africans and most of the nations of the black continent have been known for long now to be subjects of unjust treatment, and have even remained same today in the world community; the worst victims of injustice and untold hardship – colonialism and slavery in the past – in the hands of the foreign masters; exploitation, oppression and denial of basic necessities of life – in the present times – in the hands of fellow citizens and leaders of government. Struggle for political independence from the colonial masters was the first stage in the struggle for liberation from the oppressive forces within Africa itself; forces which have hindered development and human promotion of the African man and woman. There are not a few commentators who insist that Africa is as of now in its initial stages of a second liberation (the first being political independence in the early '60s).¹ The entire continent is involved in this battle for freedom and "true Independence". Even as far back as the late 1950s when the African agitators for independence were chanting the

“Freedom Songs” in schools, colleges and public squares, many were skeptical about the outcome of the movement for political independence. Pupils in primary schools as well as students in secondary schools were forced to learn and chant the freedom songs –

“Africa must be free!
 Africa must be free!
 Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!
 Africa must be free.
 Africa stand up against injustice,
 Exploitation, oppression.
 Africa fight for your freedom
 Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!
 Africa rise and fight for your liberation now!
 Freedom – Freedom – Freedom!

In Nigeria, during the pre-independence period, some of the politicians who visited schools and colleges, addressed the youths and taught ‘Freedom Songs’ included Mazi Mbonu Ojike, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kingsley Ozuomba Mbadiwe, Obafemi Awolowo and others. While the young people were enthusiastic about the liberation or freedom that would emerge from political independence, most parents and elderly Nigerians scoffed at the freedom movement. The freedom fighters in fact were objects of ridicule. The older people doubted the ability of the black political leaders to run efficient government and institutions as good as the White Man had done. When after a few years of Independence things started falling apart in most African countries, the fears of the “ignorant old people” were confirmed. In Nigeria today, among the Igbos, the Black Man’s rule or government is generally referred to as “*Ochichi Nchigbu*” at all levels – local government, state government and federal government. “*Ochichi Nchigbu*”, expressed with various English words and terms connotes violence, oppression, murderous, wicked, heartless, undemocratic, dictatorial, forceful, bitter rulership. Literally meaning “a type of rule or government which leads to death”. Skeptics do not see the black rule as truly liberating or leading to true freedom. As such the government is looked upon as corrupt, inefficient and worthless. The operators are seen as comrades in crime as their main concern is the plundering of the nation’s wealth for self-enrichment. They have no

interest in the people they govern and therefore the question of providing the basic necessities of life for the people is not seen as part of good governance. Among the same Igbos "*Ochichi Nchigbu*" is juxtaposed with "*Ochichi onye kwuo uche ya*". Literally, "Let one speak one's mind", that is; democratic rule. This distinction is always made when a new regime is set up – military or civilian. While democratic rule is cherished by the people, the dictatorial type of government is abhorred. At the time of this writing, 52 African States were claimed to have been "liberated from the shackles of colonialism", but it is widely known that most of these African nations are still 'living in bondage', and in worse state than before Independence. Hence the cry mostly among the oldest generation of Africans for the return of the White Man's rule. Anathema!. But it is a fact, that if an option is given, if a referendum is to be conducted in all African states, the colonial masters may clear the polls with an overwhelming majority. They may be welcomed enthusiastically or unenthusiastically like the Asians returning to Uganda after 12 years of exile!

In most African countries, great disillusionment and desperation have always followed the euphoria of independence celebrations. The big promises of the young politicians are hard to come by – no more exploitation of the African nations or payment of taxes. With the seizure of all positions of power, Africans will become masters of their own destiny and thus Africa will be turned into paradise on earth! What an illusion!

"The legacy which the young politicians had to take up with their Independence proved to be burdensome. They had to begin almost from the scratch to make long term plans, to build up trustworthy cadres and to established monetary liquidity. They had gone to meet freedom with élan and enthusiasm, but on the day after Independence they saw their real problems at once beginning to show up".²

THE SITUATION OF INJUSTICE

Independence in most of the African states did not usher in the expected bliss and fulfillment. The political, economic and social situations become rather chaotic as new political elite in military uniform arose to

replace the “incompetent and corrupt” erstwhile civilian regimes, promising a new era of economic boom and good government. Some of the military men who later turned politicians and ‘Presidents for life’ were initially well received by the long exploited and oppressed masses of the Black continent. New hopes were raised that “true liberators” had arrived, “true lovers” of Africa who would heed to the yearnings of the masses – good government which would bring about peace, unity, development and prosperity. But these dreams were not to come true as struggle for political leadership shifted completely into the camp of the military. The ousted political leaders were either thrown into jail or were murdered in cold blood and their would-be civilian successors went into oblivion. An era of military dictatorship thus evolved in Africa and even in the rank and file of the new leadership, struggle for power has continued unabated as ‘palace coup d’etats’ were frequently organized to replace one dictatorship with the other and at a particular post-independence period most African states were being governed by military dictators.

Such situation never ushered in the desired justice and peace as even the disappearance of the hitherto powerful leader – civilian or military leaders brought about a more chaotic political, social, economic and even religious upheavals. A state of anarchy has often set in an unprecedented political impasse which in most cases attracted foreign military interventions. But have such interventions succeeded in restoring order? In some cases equitable solutions to the political impasse have not been found. The experiment in political leadership in Africa has shown that in the pre-independence period all forces used to be united during the struggle for independence. But when the common enemy had left the scene, all the old tribal, social, cultural and religious conflicts flared up again and the struggle to maintain internal unity among the various ethnic groups becomes an uphill task. The entire energy of any new regime that takes over political power is often sapped or consumed in an effort to maintain internal cohesion in the independent state. The results of the struggle for the political leadership in Africa have thus left a dark spot in the history of African independency.

THE POLITICAL SCENE

Perhaps on account of the inadequate or completely unsuitable political system or legacy handed down by the colonial masters, the first all-black political leadership never fared well. Political instability brought about by poor operation of the inherited or newly-set up systems by the new political leaders led to dissatisfaction among the masses and hence popular uprising by the military and leading to overthrow of the elected governments, characterized by despotic rule, victimization of political opponents and complete elimination of the opposition and political parties; massive corruption, leading to the impoverishment of nation and people. Such regimes – civilian or military – had always degenerated into one-party dictatorship administered by a sit-tight president or “president for life” despots. Their overthrow by any other power seeking clique often received massive approval or popular acclamation. Most African dictators have made a caricature of the Western political system of democracy, though grossly unsuitable for Africa, but which the political actors had embraced with enthusiasm, but could not operate. But the only option left to the harassed African masses is hope, that in the future a more efficient and suitable type of democracy will develop which will offer the Africans the much needed peace, economic, prosperity and human development.

Political instability and injustice have brought about ethnic rivalries which have often led to civil wars with the disastrous consequences of refugee problems, destruction of life and property. Where injustice and oppression eventually led to civil conflicts and secession, wars fought to keep a disintegrating nation together again had always taken a heavy toll of the nation’s human and material resources. It is recorded that in Africa, between 1960 and 1991, within a space of about 30 years, out of the 52 independent nations, about 46 have experienced coup d’etat (although some unsuccessful). The civil and military conflicts in Liberia, Somalia, Sudan and Angola have been in the top news alongside those of Bosnia Herzegovina in the former Yugoslavia. In Sudan, we are told about slavery, ethnic cleansing, deportation and force conscription into the army which are in fact ongoing realities in that African country.

“Ethnic cleansing” is a term that has become familiar from the conflicts in Bosnia, where it is used to describe the forceful removal and possible extermination of one ethnic group by another. In Zaire, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Togo, Guinea, Chad and Nigeria, the desperate

political situation could always erupt into more devastating armed conflicts between the military and the people. There is a limit to human endurance. Through bad governance the leadership of some African States has at one time or the other reopened old wounds touching on ethnicity, tribalism, sectionalism and of course on sensitive religious issues. Definitely, the unwelcome consequences of ethnic and religious rivalries can be averted by responsible and honest political leadership. It may be wise to leave the sleeping dog lie. Africans could be spared the memories of past disasters and horrifying scenes of massacres, victims of ethnic and religious killings, pogroms and genocide which continue to point to the main sources of such disasters, namely injustice and irresponsible leadership. As Bühlmann notes, ‘We no longer speak of recent events in the Congo and in Biafra, but they could be repeated anywhere in the world tomorrow’.³ Since the days of the Congo and Biafra, the worst had taken place in Uganda, under Idi Amin Dada, in Liberia, under Samuel Doe and Charles Taylor, in the modern Congo (Zaire) under Mobutu Sese Seko; in Togo, under Eyadema, Burkina Faso, under Captain Campaore, in Sierra Leone, under Sergeant Valentine Strasse. The list could be surely extended. The South African situation would require a separate book to document and analyze the political system of government there called Apartheid.

“Here and there military heads of government or presidents have assumed as their right, a royal or even despotic status. Or else one political party dominates the country, spreading an atmosphere of fear and oppression, so that one dares to speak or write against it or against the government”.⁴

There is no doubt that in many African countries today, as perhaps elsewhere, much is still very far from what is meant by freedom in England or the United States. On the political scene, therefore, one may ask, what type of freedom does African need? How should the programme of Justice for African” be pursued to ensure true liberation?

THE ECONOMIC SCENE

Some of the most disastrous consequences of political instability in Africa have been economic backwardness, poverty and hunger. Economic

progress and self-reliance, many believe, will bring about true freedom and independence from foreign influences. Political stability will create an atmosphere of peace which constitutes the basis for any meaningful progress and development. There will be no development in a land devastated by war and civil strife which naturally uproot the masses and thus create refugee problems across the borders and right inside neighboring countries. If development is the new name for peace (*populorum progressio*, No. 87), then African underdevelopment, with its own characteristics in different areas of the continent is an unjust situation which promotes tension that conspire against peace. Such situations constitute positive menace to peace and they exist in many parts of Africa. The economic future of Africa will remain bleak unless peace is given the chance to reign and all the forces that contribute to political instability are removed. This is a Herculean task for the political leadership in every African nation and elsewhere. Surely what happens in one part of the world affects the other. Political systems have much impact on the economy.

On the international level, if, for example, the super powers decide to end the cold war, reduce or scrap entirely the arms race and destroy all dangerous weapons of mass destruction, and of course keep their promise and terms of treaty and agreements never to produce and proliferate new ones, the world may have peace. The small and poorer nations of the world, among which are the African States will definitely join the 'Grand Masters' in the search of peace, political, social and economic stability. If the 'Grand Masters' and the rich nations have the will to sink their differences, what alternatives have the servants who normally feed from the crumbs that fell from the masters' table? What alternative would the UNITA in Angola have if the Super-powers withdrew their support and showed the rebel faction the way to the negotiating table? Will the millions of displaced Angolans, Sudanese, Somalians in the war-torn African countries not breathe an air of relief and freedom?

The same can be said of millions of oppressed Africans who have been suffering untold hardship and oppression under military rule and oppressive dictatorial regimes (in many other African countries). The 'Grand Masters' who excel in military armament have the available and the only effective 'weapon' in the possession to deal a death-blow on hunger, poverty, injustice and oppression. And these evils, once

destroyed, the new era of international cooperation, peace and justice can begin. There is no doubt that Africa can benefit from such a programme.

A conducive atmosphere can thus be created for a meaningful human promotion and economic development.

Corruption and economic development

There is no doubt that corruption among the ruling class in Africa constitutes the greatest hindrance to economic development and many will agree that corruption is the greatest misfortune of Africa today as newspapers carry endless stories of corrupt practices found among high and low government functionaries and politicians. These are more concerned with their own pockets and take less care about the needs of the people whom they govern. These and often with their foreign collaborators defraud the state and siphon out huge amounts of public money to enrich themselves. They operate fat accounts in foreign and local banks.

There are not only a few people in Africa who believe that corruption has been institutionalized in the national psyche. It has become almost a way of life that in most cases the evil practice receives little or none of the condemnation it requires from the people, no matter the magnitude of the offence. Maybe, some argue that the evil is practiced by all in one form or the other, that very few people actually notice the harm it does to society. They say ‘a snake can swallow a snake to grow’

On official circles however corrupt leadership has brought untold hardship on the Africans and has left development at a stand-still. In actual fact struggle for political power is no more born out of patriotism to serve one’s fatherland, but mainly to ascend the top of the social ladder in order to accumulate enough wealth and become disgracefully rich. The main avenue through which government functionaries accumulate illegal wealth in so short a time is operated through the system referred to as “kickback”. This is a graphic expression for the all-perverting system of corruption in which government contracts are inflated and purchases over-invoiced, so that officials could have a share. It is not a phenomenon limited to Africa. In Italy, it is known as **Tangenti**. And this in a simple language means “You pay what you are told”.⁵ “Kickback” is a financial scandal and system of bribery and corruption which has colossal

implications on both international and local levels and for generations yet unborn.

On the African scene “Kickback” has become one of the sources through which government loses money. It leads to bankruptcy. Often government functionaries who award contracts demand kickbacks even before awarding contracts or providing a ‘mobilization fee’. It all follows that the contractor who actually gets the job borrows to pay the government functionaries and often spends more than he would gain from the job. In past, government functionary who award contracts used to be referred to as “ten-percenters” since the kickback provided by a contractor was suppose to amount to 10% of the total sum which the job would cost. It was the business of the contractor to make up for this “loss’ in any way he preferred.

These days, ‘ten-percent’ is presumed to be the minimum. It is believed that most contractors pay as high as “fifty-percent” before securing any government job! And how they make up for the colossal losses can be anybody’s guess. The consequences of this type of financial ‘malpractice’ are really grave. As far as large part of the money meant for the execution of the project has been given out in kickbacks, the contractor is left with little or no reasonable option. He may begin the project and abandon it at any stage. Some do not begin at all. But where pressure or force comes from the side of government today for the completion of the project, the quality of work done is always poor. Because the government functionaries who award contracts are accomplices in bribery and corruption, they rarely supervise work and do not complain or prosecute contractors who perform poorly. Uncompleted and poorly executed projects littered all over township and countrysides are living witnesses to the poor economic situation of various African nations, born out of inordinate greed to amass wealth by individuals at the detriment of the nation and its poor citizens. Often the large sums of money involved, which run into millions of dollars are borrowed from banks, local and international bodies. The servicing of debts owed to international monetary bodies, consumes a large part of the nation’s budgets. Such poor economic situation, create by man’s selfish and inordinate ambition to get rich quickly and by all means have brought about constant changes in governments. The new “Messiahs” who promise improved situation and crusade against bribery and corruption in most cases do not fare better.

Economic strangulation of nations through corruption in the nature of kickbacks is not the only avenue through which people accumulate illegal wealth at the detriment of the masses of the people all over the world. In Nigeria, for example, as possibly in some other African countries, fraudulent practices employed by various public officials and individuals are many. Some sit down in their offices and use the pen to defraud government and individuals in both public and private sectors. The phenomenon which Nigerians refer to as '419' or "OBT" summarizes these fraudulent practices and their operations. "419" is a reference to the number of the Nigeria criminal code which prohibits fraudulent practices and prescribes punishment for offenders. "OBT" simply means 'Obtain By Trick'. "Advanced Free Fraud" or (AFF) points to the level and sophisticated systems of these malpractices. Many sectors of the economy – public and private are affected as well as government parastatals. These include banks and various monetary systems and operations, supply and distribution of commodities. Forgery is the most lucrative area of these fraudulent practices. Through carefully worked out systems syndicates penetrate the most secret areas of government and public sectors and obtain vital documents which facilitate traveling to any country for visit and business. Thus an effective network of connections has been made possible through which people defraud government and renders services to individuals and other bodies in need.

The rate at which fraudulent practices are growing in Nigeria has become so alarming that many worried citizens have called for an open 'war against corruption and all fraudulent practices'. In fact, at one time or the other, government and independent bodies have set up commissions to enquire into the activities, malpractice or allegations leveled against government functionaries, management of establishments and institutions. Sometimes the results of such inquiries are announced or published and punishments are meted on convicted culprits. One heaves a sigh of relief: "at least there are people with good conscience in our country". These are many however, who believe that embezzlement of public funds by the ever-increasing insatiable, conscience-ridden individuals will never stop, armed robbery will ever be on the increase, forgery and other fraudulent practices will never be stamped out of our society unless more positive and practical steps are taken to expose and subject all culprits to public disgrace.

Some worried members of the National House of Assembly in the Babangida government of Nigeria were in fact speaking the minds of millions of Nigerians when they sponsored a bill seeking to make it as difficult as possible for those who steal government money and property. If the bill is passed, reports say, any person who steals, converts, misappropriates, diverts or embezzles government funds with or without violence would be guilty of felony. On conviction, punishment would be a straight ride to jail – a 21-year term for that matter. This is not all. The convict will be stripped publicly of all national honours and titles if he held any. There are surely encouraging reactions from worried Nigerians over the growing crop of mass embezzlement of public funds and various types of fraudulent practices. Unless harsh measures are courageously introduced to deal with fraud in both high and low quarters, the country will surely be drifting towards bankruptcy. Millions of dollars are regularly lost by government as a result of mismanagement and fraud. It is perhaps only repeating the obvious when one observes that contractors and their masters who award contracts have in no small a measure contributed to the economic woes of our nation, as through contracts, sums of money are and inflated masters and house boys' share the booty.

War against corruption and fraudulent practices is war against injustice, poverty, hunger and other social evils which have kept most African nations in perpetual bondage. Campaign against corruption in all its ramifications is an honest approach to the process of liberation and human development in Africa. If the evil is not checked it is possible that African nations may still be for long, poor and underdeveloped. Good management of the scarce resources and funds is crucial for any meaningful development.

LEADERSHIP AND THE GROWING FRUSTRATIONS

“The trouble with Nigeria”, may also be “the trouble with Africa”. Both foreign and local observers have identified this fundamental problem, which has faced Africa for long as the problem of *leadership*. It does not mean that other nations of the world including the ‘first and second worlds’ have no leadership problems. They have; but it seems the leadership problems of the African nations are more acute and extremely serious.

Before invoking our ‘talisman and magic word’ for Africa *liberation* we still have to identify more of the force militating against progress and development in Africa. *Political instability, economic mismanagement and corruption, social upheaval* – all **contribute in one way or the other to the misfortunes of the Africans** and thus help to maintain a state of injustice throughout the black continent hence the call for true liberation.

Frequent changes in the political leadership of most African nation are clear signs of disorder and constitute a dent in the political system of any nation. If the successive government assumes power through democratic electoral process, then there may be need to lament much. An unpopular or inefficient administration can be unseated or sacked through democratic process. A whole administration or leadership can decide to resign and give way to a more capable one. This is often a welcome development and seen by many as sign of political maturity and stability. Most Western democracies operate this way and change in the political leadership are normally not violent. The leadership or regime or political party that resigns often does so out of humility or moral pressure from the opposition. It is presumed generally that the succeeding leadership would perform better than the out-going one. Promises to do better than the predecessors are taken seriously.

Among most African nations and the so-called Third World countries, particularly Latin American nations, changes in government are usually violent. Those who succeed in seizing political power are not always the best and since they are not voted into power by the people, it is presumed that they are not accountable to anybody except perhaps to the clique that helps to keep them in power. Since no election promises are made, no firm commitment to development or good government is also made. With virtually no opposition in the political set up, leadership is bound to be dictatorial. When an efficient and more often an ignorant leader takes up leadership position, his administration is bound to be poor and the country suffers untold disaster and economic backwardness as long as the wrong leader remained in position. Perhaps before he is overthrown by another powerful leader, an irreparable loss has been done to the nation. This has remained the situation in most African States for long. Those who cling to political power do not perform well and they have not the will to resign and give way to better leadership. Truly most African leaders and politicians have never been offered the opportunity to

lead. They have always remained on the periphery of power politics watching military boys or life-presidents mess up the economy and make a caricature of political processes and the institution. In Nigeria, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, one of the fathers of Nigerian politics is still referred to as “the best president which Nigerian never had”. Instead of Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Aminu Kano, Waziri Ibrahim and other prominent and perhaps more knowledgeable and efficient politicians who vied for the highest political office in Nigeria in 1979 and 1983, a relatively younger but feeble and incompetent Shehu Shagari was declared victorious in the elections.

His regime was overthrown by the military with the usual reasons of incompetence, corruption and economic mismanagement. And from then before a new democratic political process was to be put in position the slogan changed: Nigerians preferred henceforth “new breed politicians”. The old politicians were now decadent. They were no more capable to lead but could advise the “new breed boys”. Both the new breed politicians and the majority of Nigerians were convinced that for a more effective governance, there was need for a radical change of leadership which could once again place Nigeria in its old position as a giant of Africa. The old politicians could rest now; after all it was the inefficiency of Tafawa Balewa government which brought military intervention in Nigerian politics in 1966 barely six years political independence. Since then the situation has not normalized.

The names of some veteran African political leaders, living or dead, may not be easily forgotten. But history will judge whether they performed well during their own time and why there are social and political upheavals in their countries today – Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, President Jomo Kenyetta of Kenya, Mr. Oginga Odinga, one time president of the opposition Kenyan People’s Union, Dr. Milton Obote of Uganda, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and his one time veteran foreign minister Mr. Simon Kapwepwe, Sir Albert Margai of Sierra Leone, Albert Bongo of Gabon, Mathias Ngiema of Equatorial Guinea, Sekou Toure of Guinea, President Houphouet Boigny of Ivory Coast, Dr. Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, Ahmed Ahidjuo of Cameroon and others.

At the time of this writing some of the well known political leaders who were sworn in as presidents of their various nations on the day of political independence from the colonial masters were still holding to political power after 25 – 30 years in office! Having stifled all opposition,

they entrenched one-party system of government to perpetuate despotic rule. Some have even, in the name of 'democracy' organized "mock elections" in their countries – elections in which they were the only contesting candidates! There were such examples in Kenya's Arap Moi, Togo's Eyadema. Some have escaped so many assassination attempts but remained undaunted in their bid to cling to power until death. A typical example is Gnassingbe Eyadema, the self-declared 'life-president' of Togo, who had ruled Togo since 1963 after overthrowing Sylvanus Olympio, Togo's first president. In 1967 Eyadema had a remarkable escape from death. It was reported that a member of his own presidential guard fired point blank with a rifle at him. The assassination attempt took place while the soldier-politician was driving to his office along the streets in Lome. That was only one out of the many unsuccessful assassination attempts on Eyadema's life. There are many soldiers who have turned politicians after organizing 'mock elections'. We have the Ghana's Jerry Rawlings. Museveni did not need elections to install himself president of Uganda.

There were however not a few African veteran politicians who have performed well and won the admiration of many within and outside Africa. These include President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and his first Vice-President Sheikh Karume and of course too, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. It was reported that in February 1967 at a ceremony in Zanzibar, a gold medal was awarded to Sheikh Karume by Afro-Shirazi Party for Karume's heroic and honest leadership.

In the modern African political scene there were some leaders, though military men, who could be described as heroic and honest leaders. Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria come readily to mind. In spite of high level of corruption and poor rulership which has for long characterized the political leadership of the African nations, there is strong evidence that the African masses, politicians and the common folk cherish honest leadership. In songs and with souvenirs they remember those leaders who have excelled others in hard work, efficiency, political astuteness and of course honesty and administration devoid of corruption. Dedication to duty, love of the nation before self and of course an establishment of some meaningful economic programme to ameliorate the living standard of the masses are definitely among the most important characteristics of successful leadership and thus highly expected of all political leaders of Africa.

A REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP

It often requires a revolutionary leadership to salvage a bad situation. In the eyes of the arch-opponents who prefer a 'status quo regime', a revolutionary leader may be looked upon as a destroyer of a system that has dominated the scene for long. It may not have achieved anything, but must be maintained. Such a leader who assumes a revolutionary stance may be done away with before 'a real harm was done to the system!' A military putsch may be organized to un-sit him. But in the eyes of the common folk he may be a God-sent messiah, a true liberator of his people. There was such a leader like Jean Bertrand Aristide of Haiti.

Burning with zeal to liberate his people from injustice oppression and particularly from poverty and destitution, the former Jesuit priest had to abandon his Cassock, defying the Church's laws and regulations prohibiting Catholic priests from participating in politics. The Reverend Father was a revolutionary and wanted to fight injustice from within the political system in order to liberate his people of Haiti from the oppressive regimes – civilian and military which had for long left the Haitians in a perpetual bondage. In Nigeria, Reverend Father Moses Adasu, another Catholic priest had to defy opposition from the leaders of the Church in Nigeria and Rome to engage in active politics during the Third Republic. He became the governor of the Benue State of Nigeria in order to fight some of the ills that have bedeviled honest political leadership in Nigeria and Africa. In spite of the consequences, there are many Catholic ministers who are ready to take risks in order to identify with the poor and fight for honest leadership through the political system. In most cases, such leaders have won the support and admiration of the poor masses but may have failed to win the sympathy of the political class that sees them as enemies and arch-rivals.

There is need for revolutionary leaders in Africa today who are ready to work towards the true liberation of the people. Economic woes, political instability, poverty and hunger have continued to ravage the lives of the Africans, and the leaders turn their faces away from the horrifying scenes of hunger and starvation. The so-called redeeming economic-adjustment-programme, invented by the operators or copied from Europe and America and inspired by international monetary bodies have rather worsened the situation and widened the gap between the poor

and the rich. There is need to close this gap a little bit. A dedicated, selfless leader must be set in place so that the expectations of the majority, the suffering masses of Africans can be met.

There is need for a leader who can say “No” to corruption and abhor all the systems which corrupt leaders and officials have always employed to perpetrate enormous scandals associated with this hydra-headed monster which men have been constrained to accommodate in the boardrooms, in the offices, bus stops, in the classrooms, hotels and even in the Churches. There is need for a leader who can improve on the poor system of management and accountability, inefficient bureaucracies and laissez-faire attitude to work. If radical improvements are not effected in these important sectors, any attempt at improving the economic well-being of the poor masses would look like a bad dream. Harsh economic measures, meant to correct the anomalies of the system can only worsen the situation and dash the hopes for prosperity on the rocks. While the number of billionaire clubs and personalities continue to rise steadily, the disillusionment of the dispossessed and miserable masses generates great fear and anxiety, thus leading to a process of disintegration. Violence can erupt, and if uncontrolled it can easily lead to hellish situations. Such scenes are not rare in many African cities, results of a lamentable insensitivity of a corrupt leadership and the privileged class to the cries and the misery of the poor. There is nothing wrong if “revolutionary steps” are taken by committed leadership to restore a state of justice and peace.

NATURAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

By natural leadership we are referring to the elders in African traditional as well as modern societies who play recognized leadership role and command considerable respect among the political ruling class and the common folk. Among such ‘natural leaders’ of influence we include the following: traditional rulers and Chiefs of various grades who ascend the ‘throne’ of rulership by inheritance, appointment or election. The system of ascension to the ‘throne’ varies from place to place. In Nigeria, traditional rulers may also include local Chiefs who are conferred with chieftaincy titles by the Traditional Eze, Obi (Igbo land); Oba (Yoruba land); Obong (Efik or Ibibio); Emirs, Sultans (Hausa/Fulani).

These are often consulted by the ruling political leaders and are respected as the accredited leaders of various autonomous communities. During times of emergency they are expected to take the lead in restoring peace and order in the country. Another group of natural rulers, together with the traditional chief can be referred to as “leaders of thought”, who come together at various times and circumstances to take major decisions in the name of the people and communities. They include “elder Statesmen” – those who have held or have not held political offices – those who have served their communities or their nation in recognizable leadership position. They may have retired from active service but exercise influence at various levels of the social, cultural, religious and political lives of the nation. When these come together to deliberate on important issues or make recommendations to the political leaders, their decisions are rarely ignored or repudiated.

In the past and during the colonial era such leaders played significant roles in the political life of the nation. The colonial government recognized them and assigned them specific roles in the community especially as peace-makers and fathers of the people, custodians of Africans religious, social and cultural heritage. Thus the Emirs, the Sultans, Obas, Obis, Ezes, the Obongs and others as they are known in various parts of Nigeria, were and are still recognized powerful leaders of Africa. Even in the pre-colonial period the traditional rulers possessed vast ‘kingdoms’ and were in fact seen as embodiment of authority. An arbiter of a first class importance, the traditional ruler mediates in various litigations among the people and in most cases his decision is final. He is known to be impartial and would not lie.

In the annals of missionary and colonial history and enterprise in Africa, many powerful African traditional rulers are prominent. Although illiterate, most of them were wise rulers who welcomed the missionaries and colonial masters to whom they donated lands for the development of Africa – land for the building of schools, Churches, hospitals, residential quarters, etc. They supported the activities of those pioneer missionaries to liberate Africans from ignorance, poverty and disease. Most of them cherished the presence of the missionaries in the various development projects. They offered protection to the missionaries, the catechists, school teachers and other assistants and attendants. They were liberal and friendly with the various religious denominations and sects that arrived with the colonial masters, who came ‘scrambling for Africa’. Though

some of those great African traditional rulers refused conversion to Christianity or other religions, they were tolerant with the missionaries and their representatives and even the colonialists whom they saw as agents of peace, progress and development and true liberators of the people from those forces which hampered human fulfillment.

With the above glowing picture of the African natural rulers and leaders of thoughts particularly in the past, in pre-colonial and pre-independence era, the question being asked today in the many quarters is whether our modern or present-day natural rulers of various categories, have like their fore-bears, remained true leaders and agents of peace, justice and human development? Whether they contribute in their various capacities to peace and development in Africa and in various communities: Do they identify with the aspirations of the people they lead and listen to them when they cry? Like the *good* ancient biblical kings and leaders of Israel, are our African natural leaders seen, ruling, interceding for the people and administering justice? Or do they oppress the people and join hands with the political leadership to perpetuate wicked hegemony in their communities? Do they represent that kind of wicked kingship which Samuel the old prophet and leader of Israel abhorred and warned the people to beware of, when the prophet of Israel were asking for a king: “No!” the people insisted, “but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us ...”[**1 Sam 8:9**]. But the warning of the prophet! “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you” [**1Sam 8:11 ff**]:

He will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horse-men, he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, he will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.

He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and Olive orchards and give them to his servants. [**1 Sam 18:11-18**]

And according to biblical accounts of their leadership, most of the Israelite kings and leaders were wicked. They oppressed and made slaves of the people whom they were supposed to liberate from evil. They were not just in their dealing with people, and rather compounded the problems

of the people through their despotic rule and wicked acts. Thus the prophecy of the true “Statesman” came true.

African rulership and the growing frustrations

In Africa today, it seems that the traditional rulership, like its political counterpart has not measured up to its ideals as in the former times. Most of the Ezes Obas, Obis, Obongs, Emirs and others in the group cannot be identified any more as men of peace, justice and progress. Rather have most of them, sadly of course, constituted themselves into stumbling blocks to peaceful co-existence and progress in the communities. Many towns and cities are riddled with problems and endless litigations and rivalries which the rulers are unable to contain, because they are the very ones at the centre of the conflicts.

Instead of remaining a good representative of the good ancestors, a just arbiter in the land cases and community squabbles, lover of peace and progress, the true custodian of the black man’s rich cultural heritage, the traditional ruler of today in the African community may no more be described as a ‘man of the people’. He often takes sides in the village squabbles, ethnic and political rivalries and does not stand by the truth when asked to intervene in cases. Many traditional rulers are known to have dragged their very subjects to court or called in the police for mass arrests of their subjects whom they are supposed to protect and defend, thereby setting in motion long processes of court litigations and enduring bitterness, divisions and dissension.

In many towns and communities there are many endless controversies and litigations between traditional rulers and members of their cabinets on one side and town unions and social clubs on the other. Even in the era of burgeoning democratic principles, like their counterparts in the political scene, some of the traditional rulers cannot accommodate any opposition or any institution in their little “kingdoms”, which operate on undemocratic principles. Therefore in order to have all the citizens and institutions under his command and tutelage, some of the traditional rulers often fell out with the town unions, youths, cultural and social organizations. Some are responsible for most of the religious conflicts and riots all over the communities, tension arising from unnecessary clashes between religious faith and culture.

These conflicts have continued to widen as same people, brothers and sisters, but different religious faith and conviction unsheathe their

daggers aimed at others' throats. When uncontrolled, village rivalries develop into open wars. Not a few had led to devastating civil wars. Between the traditional ruler and his subjects, court litigation have often led to break down of peace and order and social and economic life of communities have been paralyzed. And peace has continued to elude many towns and villages. As an atmosphere of fear and suspicion grows, no meaningful development can be embarked upon by the people.

Many traditional rulers want more power as well as their own "kingdoms" or areas of authority. And to satisfy their desires, government has often created new autonomous communities where the new rulers can exercise influence. There are therefore too many divisions of larger communities and people leading to total disintegration of order and more stable communities. Such disintegration brings about hatred and often peace is threatened.

Sometimes governments' meddlesome attitude in traditional institutions creates atmosphere of uncertainty and disunity among communities and traditional rulers. One rich and ambitious personality emerges from somewhere and organizes his own people or faction against the leadership of the community. The people break away from the central traditional authority and pitch camps with the emerging leader who feels that his own people have not been well treated by the traditional ruler in the past. For him it was time to redress the past wrongs by backing away from the community. In some cases, a compromise is reached by the creation of a new autonomous community or enclave to satisfy the new aspirant to leadership position and his "aggrieved" people who have perhaps vowed never to have any dealings with their former traditional ruler or the entire traditional community. Through such acts of omission or commission seeds of disunity and discord are sown. It is usually a bad situation and one expects nothing but hatred and instability.

Instability in traditional rulership in Africa has grave consequences for the social, economic, cultural and political development. For the *Christian Church* in Africa, the consequences of such a bad situation can be so grave than one can imagine. As for the *Muslim communities*, for example the matter can be simpler. Power and rulership – whether political or traditional belongs to Allah who must be obeyed. Seekers of power must always submit to Allah's will. But Christianity must reckon with political and traditional rulership within the entire Christian community especially where Christianity is the predominant religion of

the people. There will be need for both Church and civil authorities including the traditional rulership to work together for peace, justice and human development.

In the Africa traditional rulership, it is today imperative to re-establish the old principle and system in which the traditional ruler was seen as an embodiment of truth, honest living and fair play. Like the Roman Catholic Pontiff when he speaks ‘*ex-Cathedra*’, the old traditional ruler was ‘infallible’ when it was a matter of truth and justice, hence the saying: “*Nze kwuo okwuchala*”, literally, “when the chief has spoken, he has spoken”. He does not quibble, lie or repeat or change his words. It was like “*Roma Locuta est*” – Once Rome has spoken, the matter is closed’. By the nature of the traditional rulership, in its unadulterated state, the chief had once been a respectable and trustworthy leader. If that original image of the traditional ruler was to be restored today, maybe the true role of such figures will be enhanced in the African society. The communities, towns and villages and in fact a whole nation can be saved from innumerable problems, and most importantly, political instability. But such dreams are hard to realize these days.

Traditional leadership obligations in jeopardy

The dented image of the African traditional leadership should be a cause for great concern among all peace loving people of Africa. In the past the traditional institution, known to be sacred, had little or nothing to do with politics. Politicians paid homage to traditional rulers when these political leaders step into the domain of the natural rulers to canvass for votes and political support from the people. They asked of the blessing for the natural rulers in the struggle to serve the people and nation in any political office. “Politics” in African context often connotes deceit, lies, bad faith, false promises, arrogance, inordinate ambition to grab power by fair or foul means. “He is a politician” can mean or imply that “the fellow is a crook who should not be trusted”. “He may be deceiving”. “His words should not be taken seriously”.

Today most African traditional rulers are known to be actively involved in politics and some belong to political parties. The laws of the country which prohibits them from participating in politics seem not to apply in practice. The inordinate romance with the political ruling class has in recent times helped to drag traditional rulers into politics and thus isolate them from the people. The masses already weary of the political

mess in their country by politicians in both civil and army uniforms do not like their traditional rulers to meddle in politics. But most often, the contrary is the case and the people think that it is a sell-out, a betrayal by their traditional rulers who should remain neutral as the “Father of all”. The people also entertain such feelings when their religious leaders take part in politics.

On the business sector, many traditional rulers are known to have abandoned their sacred function of traditional rulership and joined the race for big money and business. Many win government contracts which run into millions of dollars. They tour parts of Europe, America and Asia on business trips and in search of hard currency and more business opportunities. These “traditional rulers” now turned politicians and business men carry their title in name and no more exercise their sacred functions; and when they do, everything is done haphazardly. Thus having estranged themselves from the people, they are no more regarded as the “fathers” of the land. The government baits and the business world’s offer are more attractive and can really be tempting. The story was told of a governor of a state in Nigeria who “donated” a fleet of Benz cars to Emirs. The newspaper report precisely runs like this:

“It was a memorable Eid-el-Fitri for all Emirs in Niger State as the state governor handed each of them a brand new Mercedes Benz car, a special “Sallah gift”. Governor Lawan Gwadebe who announced the gesture in Minna said that the state government decided to replace their fleet of cars to strengthen the existing working relationship between the government and the traditional institution as well as enhance the prestige of the latter [**National Concord, April 18, 1991**].

Many Nigerians were not even in the least pleased with this extravagant show of friendship and government romance with the tradition rulers. This, many saw as un-called for spending spree, characteristic of corrupt governments especially in times of economic strangulation of the masses, poverty and hunger. Naturally many tongues wagged in criticism of the government concerned as many national dailies devoted large parts of

their pages on editorials and articles on what they called unusual “Greek Gift”.

African leadership and the north/south dichotomy

North/South dichotomy in African politics and leadership generates political tension and also creates social upheavals. This situation exists in many African countries including Nigeria, Liberia, Sudan, Ghana, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Kenya, Senegal, Burundi. Perhaps parts of the post-colonial legacy, sometimes this dichotomy which threatens peace and progress has religious basis – Muslim North versus Christian/Animist South. It extends to political lineage and voting patterns. In a federal system of government, if the president is a Muslim, his prime minister or deputy must be a Christian. Likewise some other major offices and functions in government and even in private sectors are shared out in the same pattern of equal or balanced representation. Where the distribution of offices is not strictly followed according to the North/South interests, a section of the people who feel cheated may protest. In the citing of amenities, government must be careful that the geo-political pattern of the country and people is taken into account. There are many instances and number of “dichotomies” found in almost every sector of the political and social life of the country and not least in the Church.

In Nigeria, the slogan “economic domination by the South, political birthright of the North” summarizes the phenomenon of dichotomy in the African situation. It simply breeds an atmosphere of disorder, disunity, fear and suspicion. The term “educationally disadvantaged” may refer to the Northern part of the country. Compensation or redress must be fought to balance the ‘equation’, otherwise violence may erupt. “Nomadic Education” may be one of the ways to promote an equality of educational opportunity for all Nigerians. It must include cattle rearers, fishermen, market women and traders who must be pursued by teachers and taught, even using force, at every available opportunity of time and space! But we forget that at times some of the contributory causes of backwardness and “disadvantages” can be borne out of religious and cultural beliefs as well as natural disasters which often include climatic conditions. These may be difficult to redress.

Leadership problem in Africa will long remain a difficult nut to crack as many who aspire to leadership positions of influence and power are even unconscious of the implications of their aspirations. The problem is not limited to politics and traditional rulership. It extends to the *Church* and the *religious* sphere. Although leadership in the Church is largely religious or spiritual and charismatic in nature, natural endowments are equally important. Church leadership in Africa may not be entirely free of the characteristics and defects of the political and traditional rulership. It is on account of these defects that the Church in Africa has not fared better in the areas of administration, development, justice and peace. Love of power and influence and even greed, instead of service is often the primary motive of some clerics who aspire to leadership positions in the church. The role of the church in the political, social, cultural and economic development of any nation can never be ignored. The Church's place in human development, search for justice and peace is of course crucial. Many governments of world bodies have therefore never excluded the Church and its leaders in the scheme of things. Leadership in the Church in order to play its role in modern society is expected to be an embodiment of all the revered leadership qualities in politics and traditional rulership.

All those who aspire to the exalted leadership positions in government, community or Church must be aware of the burdens and commitments that go with them – “uneasy lies the head that wears the crown”. The lack of the knowledge of the implications of leadership struggle in Africa is practically demonstrated by the way people cross hills and mountains and great rivers and deserts in search of leadership positions. Yes, if not, why should about 400 to 500 Nigerians have registered for nomination into the presidential race of a country so bedeviled with all sorts of economic, social and political problems! This is unfortunate. Some simply see it as only a position of honour, prestige and enjoyment. Political struggle in Africa is often a “kill and maim” business, a mad open race for all – no matter the experience, educational qualifications, moral uprightness and even physical ability. It is often an open race for all categories of men and women, crooks and jail breakers, rich and poor, corrupt and honest servants, soldiers and civilians, boys, fresh from secondary schools and ignoramuses. Those with no basic education qualification are equally accommodated. It is for grant opus and grannies, who have celebrated or are about to celebrate their 110th

birthday. These would have loved to live in the prestigious presidential lodges for even a few hours before their death! Their names will at least go down in history as one of those who ruled Africa!

The sooner the Africans learnt what it means to lead a people, a nation and to serve, the better for the poor black continent. It means that the rules of the game of leadership must be known and thoroughly followed. There should be no short-cut to that position. The basic characteristics of true and honest leadership must be there – knowledge, ability, honest service and accountability, love for justice and fair play, peace and development. Of course the all-important virtue of humility must be there. This will induce the leader to submit to the verdict of the people at the polls and give up power and leadership when due.

LIBERATION AND THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

We have so far exposed some phenomena which abet injustice in Africa and thus limit human development. The consequences of corruption and other fraudulent practices on the economic, political and social development of any nation are grave. The type of leadership which operates the economic or political system makes a lot of difference. Does the leadership ameliorate or worsen the situation?

Today the whole world is talking about liberation and human Right and Democracy. The first theologians of liberation were seriously concerned with injustices or unjust situations in Latin America, outrageous inequalities and intolerable class divisions which had left so many poor and marginalized. “What are African theologians up to?” some worried Africans ask. In Latin America, clerics through their liberation theology have made recognizable contribution towards human development – ‘preferential option for the poor’ and “conscientization of the people”. Have African theologians anything to offer the Church in Africa and the entire world towards the development of Africa, improvement in the socio-economic conditions? Can the Church in Africa speak with one voice especially at this time of desperation and emergency and champion justice in Africa. Is it possible that in countries where the force of the opposition and critics had been silenced and the people intimidated by the dictatorial regimes, the Church using the gospel can become the voice of the oppressed, the only effective pressure group that

can rouse the conscience of the political leaders? Can the Church in Africa, in her own type of liberationist movement, contribute in the dismantling of oppressive systems in society and in the promotion of Human Rights?

The Church in Africa can do much through evangelization, which is a 'complex process' made up of complementary and naturally enriching elements, such as: proclamation of Christ to non-believers, inner adherence to Christ, entry into the community, witness and apostolic initiative, the Church can contribute a lot to the development. In her evangelization programme which also includes *human promotion* and *the transformation of cultures and unjust structure of society*, the Church in Africa and her clerics have a wide area in which to operate to bring about improvement and development in all spheres of life.⁶ At the centre of the Good News of Jesus was the reign of God, an expression of God's caring authority over the whole of life. The kingdom is also that "great gift of God which is liberation from sin and the evil one".⁷

What initiatives and tasks are called for in the troubled situation of the continent in order to bear this salvation and liberation? As far as Dr. Theophilus Okere, a Nigerian theologian is concerned:

"It would be unfair to play down the inhuman conditions that have inspired the theology of liberation. But I am contending that we in Africa have much more cause to make liberation a starting point and an issue. As the wretched of the earth we in the continent have been on the receiving end of the slave trade, colonization and neo-colonialism, apartheid and international exploitation and more than any other human group, we have a just reason to talk of liberation and to articulate our anguished perception of it in the light of the gospel. But we have lazily abandoned it to others to say in their own way what we feel even deeper and what touches us even more".⁸

There is therefore need for the Church in Africa to embrace the realities of liberation with courage and in its widest dimension. Liberation theology for which Latin America is widely known has had great impact, not only in Latin American countries themselves, but in many other countries of the other continents. Africa can equally learn from those

situations in Latin America which provoked the 'Movement'. Those realities and forces should also influence us here in Africa to rise to expectation.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY: DEVELOPMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

When in November 1962 Father Juan Luis Segundo gave a talk to a group of Catholic students in Paris, only a few saw in that talk titled "**The Future of Christianity in Latin America**", a real beginning of the much talked about 'Liberation Theology'. And no doubt this development in this area of theology has given the Latin American Church a special recognition and place in the universal Church. The contributions to human development and social justice constitute a challenge to other Churches and their leaders in both West and in the so-called Third World. Has Africa anything similar to offer? What of the other Third World countries? Bühlmann has predicted what he called "*The Coming of the Third Church*". The contents of the book were more or less an analysis of events and developments which have characterized the Third World countries in the past and have continued in the present. Such analysis definitely offers in-sight into what the future would look like.

In "The future of Christianity in Latin America" Segundo analyzed the situation of the Church in the missionary period which rested on the culture of the west. This culture of the Western World was changing in Latin America – and changing at a great speed. Socially, politically and economically, Latin America was a *Christian* world on the move and religion was involved in this change. "And it was precisely the speed and depth of this movement which was changing Latin America that posed very difficult problems for the Christian – deeper problems, or at least more obvious problems than those posed elsewhere. Change calls for a reaction; one has to respond with a clear vision of what one wants".⁹

Segundo identified some of these basic problems which he meant must be carefully studied and solved. They include:

- the breakdown of closed societies and the impossibility of maintaining the old Christian structures in the changing situations;

- new tasks and roles of civic institutions and programmes in which Christianity should exercise influence and revolutionize the people;
- Christian action in a pluralistic world and the need for the Christian bodies to cope with the revolutionary process.

Christian message is now being addressed to change people and change situations. The world is becoming a village as the modern society uproots persons because of the power of its mass media in communicating ideas and images. The closed society of the village no longer exists. Rural citizens no longer have to come to the city to be overwhelmed with distractions and contradictory appeals; even in the countryside; they participate in the life of the city.

“With the demise of the closed societies their Catholic atmosphere and the power to form the inhabitants of the village have also disappeared. Today they all have many ideologies in front of them; as available as in a shop window and they can choose the one they like.”¹⁰

It follows then that the opportunities which the Church once had at her disposal to Christianize the persons of closed society well could in the twinkling of the eye disappear. New methods must be invented to carry on the work of evangelization with success. One of the consequences of the breakdown in the old system of evangelization and in the Catholic institutions was what Segundo referred to as “dechristianization”, in which the percentage of Catholic population continued to go down – results of superficial foundations and structures built on foreign culture and ideologies. It was like borrowed life, lent by the social pressure within an omnipresent Christendom. Here one discovers a real difference between a Christianity living on its own strength and a Christianity living within imposed structures.

What is to be done, if the situation was so critical? Segundo offers some insight:

- There is need for a theology which will take into account the needs and aspirations of the people. It will be based on deep Christian commitment and not on superficial religiosity and social habit.

- To attain to this new height there should be some *flexibility* in the pursuit of Christian principles and keeping to traditions. If the seeds of an authentic Christianity were to be planted, there is a price for it.
- *Serious conditions*, may not be set down for members in the Church, otherwise so many will be excluded. And to avoid such an ugly situation, “we need a theology that will discuss what is going to happen to those souls from the point of view of salvation. And after all, we do not want to create a perfect Church if this perfection is going to bring about the damnation of other.”¹¹

By making these observations, Segundo implied that the Latin American Church had not been able to make a choice up to that moment of the modern history of the Church in that continent. There was no adequate theology to back up any available option. But we all know that from this “thesis” also emerged the liberation theology of the Latin American Church, which was taken up by the Medellin Conference of Latin American Bishops followed by other similar conferences. As Alfred T. Hennelly put it:

“There can be little doubt that the Medellin Conference marked a momentous watershed in the history of the Church in Latin America, analogous but with significant differences to the effect of the Second Vatican Council on the universal Church”.¹²

The Medellin contribution was unique – the discovering of the world of the poor and the struggle on their behalf, and a new Church dedicated to the service of the poor. Of utmost importance was that it institutionalized in its decrees the experience and practice of a significant number of Catholics in every stratum of the Church, from peasants to bishops. It thus provided legitimization, inspiration and pastoral plans for a continent-wide preferential option for the poor, encouraging those who were already engaged in the struggle and exhorting the entire Church, both rich and poor, to become involved.¹³

One of the messages of the Second General Conference of the Latin American Bishops addressed to the Latin American people and the

international body as a whole touches on similar problems facing Africa and its peoples.

“We call on all persons of good will that they cooperate in truth, justice, love and liberty, in this transforming labor of our people, the dawn of a new era ... We remind other peoples who have overcome the obstacles we encounter today that peace is based on the respect for international justice, justice which has its own foundation and expressions in the recognition of the political, economic and cultural autonomy of our peoples”.¹⁴

At that moment in the history of the Church in *Latin America* there came the *Medellin Conference*. In Africa today peace seems to be seriously endangered and the aggravation of other numerous problems will no doubt produce explosive consequences. Then there came the **African Synod – Special Assembly for Africa**. Expectations were high that the African Synod would revolutionize the Church in Africa in some ways as did the Medellin in the Latin American Church. The title we have given to this chapter is **Justice for Africa** and not Liberation Theology for Africa. *Justice* and *Peace* go together and are fundamental for any meaningful development.

“Peace is, above all, a work of justice. It presupposes and requires the establishment of a just order in which persons can fulfill themselves as human beings, where their dignity is respected, their legitimate aspirations satisfied, their access to truth recognized, their personal freedom guaranteed; an order where persons are not objects but agents of their own history”.¹⁵

JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT: THE MANY FACES

Africa is in urgent search for justice and peace, the basis for development. It needs peace which is not simply the absence of violence and bloodshed. It needs liberation, a movement that will bring about changes in the present structures that have hindered development and kept the masses almost in a perpetual state of poverty and under-development. But

what type of movement for liberation? In the sense of a new political ideology? In violent terms? In the nature of violent revolutions – coup d’etat, protest marches, demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience, burning of government properties etc? These measures and means of bringing changes may *not* help but can compound the problems and already bad situations. It is the same poor on whose behalf such violent protests are organized that suffer more, they are shot by security guards. Houses and properties burnt and destroyed often belong to the poor the shanties, the taxi cabs, the work houses and markets. It is never easy to gain access to the heavily guarded quarters of the rich and the political leaders. It is still the poor people that die en mass.

But whatever the case may be, certain initiatives and tasks are called for in the troubled situations of the African continent in order to bring to bear this salvation and liberation. In the first place is a commitment to peace, justice, human rights and human promotion which is a witness to the gospel when it is a sign of concern for persons and is directed towards integral human development.¹⁶ Hence, “it is impossible to accept that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. This would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the gospel concerning love of our neighbour who is suffering and in need”.¹⁷

THE CHURCH IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE FOR AFRICA: AFRICAN BISHOPS SPEAK

Although there were expectations that the African Synod of April 1994 would articulate more the role of the Church in the search for justice and human development, African bishops had not been silent in any of these issues in the past. They have shown great concern and commitment to changes in the political, economic and social situations.

In 1981, the Catholic bishops of Africa produced an action-document on Justice at their annual meeting in Cameroon. Their proposals, which we summarize here are reminiscences of the Latin American situation, even as far back as the early sixties.

Christ and the victims of injustice

As the bishops reminded their co-pastoral workers, Christ preached love and justice and made himself the relentless champion of the poor, the children and the oppressed, and all the marginalized people in the society of his day. He identified Himself with man and every time that man becomes the victim of justice and oppression, it is Christ himself who is wounded.

Situation of injustice

There are still many serious situations of injustice, which also breed fear and dissension in today's world and particularly in Africa – armed interventions which create new dependencies, the unjust distribution of the earth's possessions between rich and poor, the “dialogue of the deaf” between North and South, the powerful hold of multinational companies and the deterioration of exchange.

The bishops, however, did not blame all Africa's ills on outside forces. Among the sons of this continent, there are many violations of human rights especially by those who hold economic or political power.

- Constitutions are being flouted and the common good gives way to the interests of individuals or of particular groups.
- There is also the buying off of consciences, and even the buying of conversions.
- There is the squandering of the national patrimony for purposes of prestige or the maladministration of public funds which sometimes entails the breaking down of the economy in countries otherwise well endowed by nature.
- There is again the disorganization of administrative services that have been drained of the spirit that should animate them namely, professional conscience and dedication.

As if to ‘update’ the bishops’ “Litany of the African woes”, Abiodun Aloba, in the African Guardian magazine of September 1991, in a write-up “Things Haven’t Change”, had the following to add. We give a summary:

- Bribery and corruption has not changed, except that it has increased in its various forms.
- One does not need to be an economist or to be in political scholarship these days to appreciate that the greatest ailment of our economy is that it hangs in the air –

“We allowed ourselves to be led by our colonial masters! To chase after some sophistication without a traditional base; to grow some insatiable love for shimmering cars and clothes about which we have no clue how to manufacture, cars which we knew how to ride but not how to repair; to hand on bribery and thrive on corruption as the basis of our economic growth. Deceit and social robbery became the cornerstone of our political development. As it was in the 50s so it remains in the 90s”.

Inefficiency compounds our problems; as one finds it difficult to tell what we can really run efficiently. ‘Not banks, not political parties, not social clubs, not anything...But we can afford to chase cocaine, and its money, to jails of Nicaragua, gold to Kiribati. Nothing else really works in the hands of our fellow country-men. Not public power or water supply. Not the telephone. Nothing”.

Surly this is not a happy hour, writing about the chronic plagues of our society; painting the picture of a poorer tomorrow. But the truth is there for everyone to see. If Africa must grow and its people must prosper, then a change is not only desirable, it is imperative and inescapable. One disturbing question should really worry us: who will reap the bitter fruits of these injustices? No doubt, the lower classes of the rural areas, and the workers, or the ordinary civil servants whose purchasing power is crumbling away from day to day, in the face of the offensive prosperity of the wealthy majority.

The Christian, also perpetrator of injustice

It is depressing to note that part of these injustice are perpetuated by some of the Africa’s millions of Catholics and other Christians of the various

denominations. The African bishops in their action-document on justice pointed out the need for deeper evangelization by posing two rhetorical questions: “In this world which is so disfigured by injustice, have Christians understood that their faith calls for a different kind of behaviour? Have they grasped the fact that works of justice are part and parcel of the Christian ethic which they profess?”

It does not seem that the large number of Africans who profess one religion or the other and even engage in fratricidal wars in the name of religion, in the name of Allah, God or His Christ understand the ethics of their religions, expect, perhaps that unruly bands of fundamentalists, Christian as well as Muslim, are growing larger and stronger. Not that they have come closer to God or to His Messenger in faith. *Drugs* – their sale or their purchase, is the number one item on the agenda in the kit of the many African pilgrims on their way to Mecca or to Jerusalem because they need money very badly for frivolous and extravagant style of life.

Education for justice

No amount of lamentation or compilation of catalogues of African “woes” can bring about an automatic solution to our ills. The bishops of Africa were convinced that one of the ways out of our ‘dilemma’ is to pursue “a programme of education for justice”. “We Africans are sensitive to the fact that every man is my brother”. The bishops stressed, urging pastoral workers to go into greater depth and instruct the faithful on what the gospel requires in matters of justice and not be satisfied with easy rhetoric. “A programme of education for justice should therefore be worked out and consciences should be mobilized”.

Education for justice can overcome the antagonisms of tribalism, racism and discrimination by instilling mutual understanding and love, and an appreciation for the qualities and talents of other groups in our society. Education for justice should follow the Christian through life. In African culture, it starts in the family which is still this first school of justice and which has traditionally taught the children their social responsibility. Then as they grow, more emphasis should be placed on liberation from sin, the social dimension of life, the Church’s social teachings and the spirit of service. This should continue through the whole gamut of education and even after one takes his or her place in society as an adult.

Action for justice

Proposals for justice should be put into action and should not be left to rot away in large documentaries and archives. Such actions on the part of the Church in Africa should include interventions in the cause of justice when due. This, most of the bishops' conferences have always done through communiqués and pastoral letters. Speaking out in the cause of justice can never be overlooked no matter the consequences for the Church. Intervention in the cause of justice includes too, getting in touch with those who are responsible for, or even guilty of these situations. Well-trained laity who are in direct contact with the social and the political realities of the country are indispensable co-workers in this field. The bishops of Africa in their action document for justice, and for most effective results recommended that each bishops' conference must decide on the structure it wishes to use for this work, be it a *national commission for justice and peace, social action or human development*, but what was **essential** was that the structure chosen should be adequate to the challenge.

FORMS OF OPPRESSION AND CAUSES

The bishops of Africa have not been sitting on the fence. The majority of them born and brought up in African rural communities are well informed about the ills of the black continent. If the present Synod of Bishops, the Special Assembly for Africa is to sit with the seriousness of its preparations and with the spirit of its prime mover, Pope John Paul II, many believe that the outcome will be nothing short of improved situation of peace and justice in Africa. *Education* and *action* for justice must be the guiding principle for any meaningful result in the campaigns for change. But above all, action for justice presupposes a knowledge of all the forms of oppressions and causes of corruption from the grassroots up and an awakened critical faculty which will lead us to reflect on the society in which we live and its values. In other words, we have to discover the evils, the situations from which we have to liberate ourselves. Such evils and sinful situations are many: Deep awareness and correct identifications of these phenomena can even be seen as an accomplishment of a great part of tasks of liberation and lead towards an establishment of a just order.

1. Corruption

We have already come across this ‘monster’ in the introductory part of this chapter as one of the chief causes of injustice and breach of peace in the African society. One of the few incorruptible and great African elder statesman, President Nyerere had as far back as 1966 spoken the truth when he identified this evil which has continued to corrode the entire fabric of the African political and economic life. According to him, the great misfortune of Africa is no longer colonialism but the new castes of corrupt rulers, who are more concerned with their own interests than with those of the people.¹⁸ That is stating the obvious. The main reason why corruption has continue to grow and spread is that the leaders of the people, the fathers of the nations, the adults, heads of families and institutions are the real leaders and accomplices in the crime. Because these leaders of the people cannot give what they have not got (honesty and decency), corruption in various forms and quarters has continued unchecked. Since it seems that ‘everybody is involve’, it follows then that ‘nobody’ is interested in seen the evil rooted-out, since, again everybody agrees that corruption is one of the greatest evils and crimes today in the African society, the only *meaningful solution* to the problem is the emergence of new leadership in Africa which can say ‘No’ to corruption. There is need then for incorruptible leaders, and only these have the right and the most effective weapon to check, fight and root-out the evil, or in the least minimize it.

If corruption is rooted-out, all the other attendant evils or “appendages” may likely disappear or be suppressed. These include *dictatorial rule and misuse of power and disregard for human rights and democratic processes*. Exploitation of the nation and people, whether by a few or many in positions of influence may equally disappear. Because the nation and the masses are exploited and large parts of the nation’s wealth lie in the hands of a few, the majority of the people remain poor. If corruption and all entrenched corruptive influences in society are wiped out, there will be equitable distribution of the nation’s wealth and natural resources and then poverty will be minimized. Campaign against corruption, a campaign carried to the doors and camps and offices of African leaders of various categories may be the beginning of the great revolution for change in Africa.

2. Ignorance, disease, poverty

In fact the great concern and the great hope of the African nations is liberation from these three evils –ignorance, sickness/disease and poverty. They have hampered development and human fulfillment in Africa up to the present times. The three enemies go hand in hand and together drive people to desperation.

Lack of knowledge which should be there, is often described as peculiar type of ‘disease’. Because of lack of *basic education*, a good system of democratic electoral process is impossible to operate in most African states. Inability to read and write, namely illiteracy, for example makes nonsense of any operation in whatever field of knowledge that requires reading or writing. Because the people are ignorant they do not understand even the basic rules of healthy habits and therefore fall easy prey to sickness and disease. Certain diseases and sicknesses continue to ravage African towns and villages and decimate the African population, not only on account of ignorance of their causes and possible methods of cure and prevention. Because the people are *poor* they have no money to raise their standard of living and even procure drugs. Many resort to unorthodox methods of medication and die. On account of poverty, government is unable to develop the educational system and many Africans have no access to basic education. So they remain in ignorance and the sad story begins all over again.

“When people are ignorance or illiterate the situation becomes worse. These two evils makes people unaware of their rights and force them to accept a life of resignation and fatalism. The hunger for instruction is indeed not less depressing than the hungry for food: an illiterate is a person with an undernourished mind. The ruin of the economy, sometimes hastened by the unjust conditions of the world market, should be considered a major cause of the violation of basic human rights in Africa” [*Instrumentum Laboris*, p.94].

The pioneering work of the missionaries in the field of education and health services is still a living witness to the untiring measures of governments and private bodies including the Church to free the African masses from ignorance, disease and poverty. Liberation through educational services, in practice simply means that efforts should

continue in the up-grading of the standard and quality of life through mass campaign for basic education. The Church should continue to play a leading role in this mass literacy crusade. The social gospel of the Christian Church urges on all Christian bodies, active commitment to liberating humanity from *poverty, suffering, disease, ignorance* and oppression. All are to unite to fight these evils, since their members are among the actors and the oppressed.

3. Hunger and starvation

Africa is often identified with hunger. Many are really hungry and if relief materials are not in constant supply many die daily. Why hunger in Africa? Why should Africans be fed by emergency relief agencies, and always carry the bowl in hand? For how long? What are the causes of undernourishment and mass starvation?

Outside the usual natural disaster and climatic conditions which can disrupt normal supplies of food and other human necessities of life, Africans need not be in a perpetual dependence on foreign food aid. But often these causes of hunger and starvation are man-made and Africans are thus responsible for the ills and deprivation which they suffer. Wars, social and ethnic conflicts often lead to mass displacement of people and cause refugee problems. Hunger and starvation are the direct consequences of such ugly situations, and often lead to a depopulation of the people. Many African nations are yet to enjoy any long period of peace and freedom from civil wars arising from religious, political and ethnic conflicts since independence. If the causes of mass displacement of people from their homes as a result of insecurity were to be removed, these people may be able to settle in their God-given lands, cultivate the lands and enjoy the fruit of the land. Hunger and starvation may disappear.

Hunger arises also as a result of corruption. Unequal distribution of the earth's resources and concentration of same in few hands can bring hardship on the masses – when an individual grabs what belongs to a whole community, the deprived people are bound to suffer. The numerous documents of the Church including the papal documents have a lot to teach us on human development and certain situations which permit evils of deprivation and poverty to thrive. In Pope John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* (The redeemer of man) the evils of greater consumption, exploitation and abuse of the resources of nature are

thoroughly exposed. The gap between the richer nations of the world and between a small percentage of the scandalously rich individuals on the one hand and the majority of the poor masses on the other, has continued to widen. “The socio-economic injustices are becoming increasingly structuralized, with a few individuals and nations squandering away the resources of the earth in conspicuous consumption, while the greater majority are dying of starvation”.¹⁹ In the Pope’s (John Paul II) *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern), the Roman Pontiff observes that the situation of poverty had worsened. Innumerable multitude of people – children, adults and the elderly suffer. In other words, real and unique human persons, are suffering under the intolerable burden of poverty. In this tragedy of total indigence and need in which so many of our brothers and sisters are living, Jesus comes to question.²⁰ Surely the poverty which the Pope speaks of, appears in various forms. It includes certain deprivations which impoverish the human person – housing conditions, unemployment and lack of basic needs of man – light, water, good roads, etc. But we all know that among all these human necessities of life, one is particularly and conspicuously basic, namely, *food*. “A hungry man”, they say, “Is an angry man”. There is no doubt that the great English author Bernard Shaw had this most basic necessity of life in mind when he declared that “the greatest evil and worst of crimes is poverty”.

To eliminate the evils of hunger or starvation therefore, there is need for all the nations of the world to join hands in the crusade for peace, the abolition of war and ethnic strives. In Africa there is urgent need for the end of civil wars brought about by political misrule, religious and ethnic upheavals. The suffering African masses should be given at least a breathing space to enjoy some peace, and settle in their homes. It is only after this that any campaign for *self-reliance* can be meaningful. Self-reliance in food production and distribution and generally in economic growth needs an atmosphere devoid of war and particularly political tension and instability.

4. Socio-religion-cultural oppressions or discriminations and taboos

Leonardo Boff proposes that the concept of the “poor” and the oppressed should be enlarged.²¹ On the national and international level this concept of “oppression” and the “oppressed” should include all types of discrimination against blacks, indigenous people and women and on

relatively ethnic levels, particularly on religious-cultural sphere, the working paper on the African Synod, “*Instrumentum Laboris*” also outlines some of the types of discriminations!²²

- Clan consciousness which is inclusive;
- Customs of widowhood which are generally oppressive of women, the role of women within society is something unduly restricted. In some tribal societies women are practically reduced to beasts of burden and are subjected to untold suffering and inhuman treatment.
- In some places, especially among the Igbos of Nigeria the practice of “Osu”, a type of caste system, resembling the Indian caste system of the “Untouchables” still persists in spite of the influence of Christianity.
- In many parts of Africa secret cults are sometimes used to manipulate society and certain aspects of initiation seem to offend against Christian values and morals. Witchcraft and sorcery are persistent social ills in many places and their practices often play upon and deepen the hatred, divisions and discriminations in society.
- There are some aspects of marriage laws and customs in Africa which are oppressive against women and really dehumanizing.

Combating most of these evils has for long been the preoccupation of the Church in Africa and some successes have been made through studies and inculturation. The Church has been in the forefront in the crusade for the abolition of all dehumanizing customs and traditions. The dialogue with the African Traditional Religionists had yielded some encouraging results. African theologians have equally carried out studies on some of the taboos suggesting ways of handling the problems posed. Some recent critical studies include those of three Nigerian theologians – **Oliver Onwubiko** – *Facing the Osu Issue in the African Synod (A Personal Response)*²³ and **Jerome Okafor** – *The Challenges of Osu Caste System*

to the Igbo Christians²⁴ and **Emmanuel D. Jinehu**- *The Osu Caste System in our Society*.²⁵

Listed in the working paper for the African Synod (*Instrumentum Laboris*)²⁶ as one of the negative influences of the African Traditional Religion (ATR), most Christians and non-believers in Igbo land today see “Osu” caste system as an aberration in the traditional practices of the Igbos who have been widely influenced by Christian teaching of love and universal brotherhood, Christ having brought down the fence which formerly separated the Jews from the Gentiles.

Although our theologians who have carried out extensive research and studies on the Osu system have come up with suggestions on new approaches to the solution of the problem of Osu caste system in Igbo land, many Catholics including the Igbo bishops strongly believe that the system in no distant time will die a natural death. Writing and talking about it may not resolve the problem. We agree also with those who hold the view that a new generation of Igbo Christians is emerging who may be completely ignorant of such customs and traditions which are not cherished among people any more. Many other obnoxious customs and traditions have disappeared because nobody was talking about them, condemning or justifying their existence. The young generation which never knew about them or even heard about them may have no reason to practice them.

Still on a wider concept, namely “Enlarging on the concept of ‘the poor’”,²⁷ Boff reiterates that liberation theology is also about liberation of the oppressed – in their totality as persons, body and soul – and in their totality as a class! The poor, the subjected, the discriminated against.

“We cannot confine ourselves to the purely socio-economic aspect of oppression, the “poverty” aspect, however basic and “determinant” this may be. We have to look also to other levels of social oppression, such as racist oppression’ discrimination against blacks; ethnic oppression; discrimination against indigenous people or other minority groups”.²⁸

As far back as early seventies, the bishops of the south African nations had spoken out against the evils of racism and other systems of oppression. There was full realization that South Africa had entered a

critical phase in the rejection by the majority of its people of a social and political system of oppression which called for a radical revision. The bishops' statement at the end of one of their plenary meetings in Pretoria drive the realities of the bad situation home to both the oppressed and the oppressors.²⁹

- People starved of freedom, deprived of their just rights and humiliated in their personal and corporate dignity will not rest until a proper balance of justice is achieved;
- We are on the side of the oppressed, and as we have committed ourselves to working within our Church for a clearer expression of solidarity with the poor and the deprived, so we commit ourselves equally to working for peace through justice in fraternal collaboration with our other Churches, agencies and persons dedicated to this cause.
- We are convinced that the only solution to our racial tensions consists in conceding full citizenship and human rights to all persons in the Republic, not by choice on the false grounds of colour, but on the grounds of the common humanity of all men.

What looked *interesting* and *revolutionary* in the "action-document" of the Catholic bishops of the South African countries on racism/apartheid and other forms of discrimination operating in these parts of Africa was in the first place their acceptance that the Catholic Church in South Africa was lagging behind in witnessing to the gospel in matters of social justice. That was a good beginning. Like the All-African bishops' meeting in Cameroon, their *Action for justice* recommendations demonstrates serious concern to find solutions to the problems of the oppressed Africans. Among such recommendations the following should be mentioned here.³⁰

(a) Concerning social attitudes and customs

- i) To strive for the elimination of terms which of themselves or in their South African context are derogatory and even insulting, even when no slight is intended, such as "native",

“Bantu”, “boy” or “girl” for an adult; “non-white”, “non-European” etc;

- ii) To eradicate all differentiation on purely racial grounds in the treatment of persons in \Church and various institutions.
- iii) To identify with the deprived and to make the Church recognizable as the Church of the poor and to refrain from patronizing places which are reserved for whites or for wealthy mixed groups.

(b) Concerning social justice, liberation and development

- i) To re-assess the distribution and function of Church personnel, clergy and religious, in relation to the needs and numbers of racial and ethnic groups, to bring about a more equitable distribution.
- ii) To speed up the promotion of black persons to responsible functions and high positions in the Church
- iii) To signify, by the appointment of black priests to the charge of white parishes, the breaking away by the Church from the prevailing social and political system.
- iv) To give practical expression to the conviction that the Church’s mission includes work for complete human development, and to the teaching of “Evangelii Nuntiandi”, that evangelization includes transforming the concrete structures that oppress people.
- v) To promote solidarity with all those who work for the promotion of human dignity and the legitimate aspirations of oppressed people, on the side therefore of black consciousness in regard both to those who promote it and those who suffer for it.

- vi) In addition to the campaign for public social justice, Christians be urged to give their time and energy to assist in development on justice and peace the Church's true commitment to liberation of Africans who suffer all sorts of discrimination and oppression. It was a clear manifestation of an understanding that wholeness of liberation always includes a preferential option for the powerless and marginalized.

The Church should in fact be mindful of her duty to minister to Christ where He most suffers in society. The salvific mission of the Church in relation to the world must be understood as an *integral whole*. Though it is spiritual, the mission of the Church involves human promotion including of course its temporal aspects. This point is well buttressed up in the final report of the 1985 Extraordinary Session of the Synod of Bishops called by Pope John Paul II to celebrate and reflect on the Second Vatican Council, 20 years after its conclusion. For the bishops the mission of the Church cannot be reduced to a monism, no matter how the latter is understood:

“In this mission, there is certainly distinction – but not a separation – between the natural and the supernatural aspects. This duality is not a dualism. It is thus necessary to put aside the false and useless opposition between, for example, the Church's spiritual mission and *diaconate* for the world”.

It should be emphasized that it is the more the Church pursues its mission in the world by practically getting involved in human development of the poor that it becomes more acceptable to the people, “not of implanting Western Institutions at any cost but of proclaiming courageously what Christ is doing in the world; not narrowly concentrating on saving ‘souls’ but struggling for justice in the world and salvation of the whole men. Only such a commitment will make it possible, even partly, to re-awaken the interest of those youngsters who at present stand aloof from the Church.”³¹

On the international level it will be proper for both the Church and international bodies engaged in crusade against oppression to condemn in no mincing terms the type of “selective discrimination” in vogue now in

the Western world. It is as bad and exploitative as “total discrimination”. Leonardo Boff makes the point when he observes that “it is one thing to be a black taxi-driver, quite another to be a footballer idol; it is one thing to be a woman working as a domestic servant, quite another to be the first lady of the land; it is one thing to be an Amerindian thrown off your land, quite another to be an Amerindian owning your own faith”.³² Discrimination in all its ramifications and all levels is an evil that must be fought against. While the pro-Nazi Germans and other Western allies will be ready to do away with asylum seekers (Gäste Arbeiter) from Turkey, Greece, Italy, the Middle East, the Eastern Block and Africa, their youths and sports enthusiasts may not be ready to let go the black stars and other foreign stars in their football and sports teams. It is therefore not enough to engage in false condemnations of the evils of racisms, exploitation, discrimination and oppression of the poor people and nations of the world when the monster continues to rear up its head in other forms. It requires hence a total commitment on the part of local and international communities in order to eradicate the evil in which ever situation and form it thrives.

THE CHURCH IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE FOR AFRICA

In their Action-document on justice for Africa, the Catholic Bishops of Africa who met in Cameroon at their annual meeting in 1981 suggested that each Episcopal Conference should decide on the structure it wished to use in order to pursue the programme for total liberation of the suffering masses and oppressed people of Africa. It recommended the establishment of National Commission for Justice and Peace or any type or programme of social action or human development. In fact, what was more important which the document indicated was that the structure chosen should be adequate to the challenge. It is over 12 years when the bishops made the recommendations and since then several other conferences had been held on the same topic and other issues and problems facing Africa and other areas of the world. Certainly national commissions for justice have been established and these have diverse programmes and activities meant to awaken individuals and groups to the realities of injustice and social disorder both within and outside Africa. So the Catholic Church in particular has never remained silent to the cries of the suffering masses in Africa. The Church has remained committed to

the campaign for social equality, equitable distribution of the material resources of mankind, education for all, elimination of poverty, sickness and disease, tribalism, ethnicism and various forms of discrimination found in society. On the restoration of democracy in most African nations, some African Church leaders including the bishops have played significant roles leading to peaceful transition of government from dictatorial to democratic system, some bishops have been personally nominated to head some national conferences which helped to defuse political tension and restore confidence in certain regimes and political leadership. In many African nations the voice of the Church through the bishops and Episcopal conferences is rarely ignored in matters of national interest. Many Church organizations direct emergency relief services during civil conflicts. These include resettlement of refugees and other displaced persons. Most of the medical services during these periods of strife and conflicts are run by Church personnel including sisters and Catholic lay workers. “Preferential option for the poor still remain high in the priority list of the Church’s commitment and programmes for the liberation of man from evil. In the area of peaceful negotiations between warring parties and communities the Church has never lagged behind in the re-establishment of peaceful co-existence among all peoples.

INSTITUTES FOR DEVELOPMENT, JUSTICE AND PEACE

The birds eye-view of the Church’s activities in the ‘crusade for justice’ in Africa which we have presented shows how the Catholic Church in Africa is deeply involved. In the following pages we will further endeavour to show how the Church engages in the ‘action for justice through – the institutes and commissions for development, justice and peace, human development and social action. We recommend that the Church should pursue her programmes through these areas, for through the results and contributions of the various agencies and groups involved; the impact of the African Church will be felt in the programme of “Justice for Africa”. Perhaps through such activities, a type of “liberation theology” in the African context can emerge and then the African Church and her theologians can offer to the universal Church and the entire world something for which the black continent can be remembered or identified.

Professor E.A. Ayandele of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria gave the Church in Africa that challenge a long time ago:

“Misuse of power and disregard of human rights in many independent African states admonish us to demand a broader understanding of the word ‘Liberation’. Seen in this way, ‘liberation’ goes on and the Churches in Africa have not only the task of baptizing children and looking after the sick; they are also inserted into the conflict between the poor and the rich, between democracy and dictatorship. The Churches have much more influence than people think and they should make use of this influence”.³³

Contributing to the “debate” on the “liberative” role of the Church with regard to social justice, another Nigerian theologian, Udejaja A. Nebechukwu, suggests that the pursuit of justice could be carried out in some of the following ways:

“The Church should involve itself directly in the fight against the causes of social and political oppression with the sole aim of effecting historical change of the situation. This includes developing critical awareness of, and actual naming of the plague. It can take the form of denouncing real persons, social, political and economic institutions or structures, or formalistic religious worship, in so far as any of them violates justice”.³⁴

To do this effectively, Nebechukwu insists that the Church must develop critical awareness of the causes of injustice, and participate in actions to change the social, economic and political structures that cause human suffering in Africa today. This involves conscientizing the Christians to begin to listen to the demands for justice for the poor and the oppressed in every concrete situation. It also requires creating training centres for social justice.³⁵ Many have suggested a serious programme of studies of the Church’s social teachings which have appeared in the form of major Church documents and papal encyclicals. There are many of these documents but many people including the clergy are ignorant of their existence. It has been suggested that if they have not already done so,

seminary authorities should include social sciences and other related courses in the major seminary curriculum to enable the priestly candidates begin early enough to be aware of the social structures that cause injustice. As Bishop Alexius Makozi, one time chairman, justice and peace commission, National Episcopal Conference of Nigeria, wrote in the “foreword” to George Ehusani’s *The Social Gospel, An Outline of the Church’s current Teaching on Human Development*:

“*The Social Gospel* is to be taken as part of the contribution of the Nigerian Church toward disseminating authoritative teachings of the Church on human development, which are so little known that some writers have called them “the Church’s best kept secrets”.³⁶

it may not, however, be enough to simply ‘disseminate’ the authoritative teachings of the Church. Of great importance is the work of making the Church’s social teachings relevant in the world of today.

CATHOLIC INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT, JUSTICE AND PEACE (CIDJAP)

At the grassroots level, CIDJAP is becoming a household term for the action-oriented institute for justice and peace in the Eastern Province of Nigeria. Before the Institute came into full operation from its Enugu headquarters, Nigeria, barely four years ago, little or nothing was known of any organization or commission fully engaged in the search for justice and peace and development in Nigeria. Where there was any such organization, not much was known of its operations.

Today through the operations of CIDJAP, the provincial branch of justice and peace commission, established by the National Episcopal Conference of Nigeria, the Catholic Church in Nigeria is seen to be involved in efforts to establish peace and justice in various sectors of development. With the establishment of justice and peace commission on the diocesan and even parish levels, the programme of CIDJAP reach grassroots level. The programme of animation and social awareness are being handled by diocesan and local coordinators. Among the programmes and projects which CIDJAP handles, as outlined by its

provincial coordinator and project manager, Dr. Emmanuel Idika and Dr. Obiora Ike, in an interview with a Nigerian Catholic magazine³⁷ are:

(i) Campaign against all traces of injustices found within the Church itself. These include unfair treatment of Church workers and personnel as far as salaries and remunerations are concerned. Most of the people who work for the Church on national, diocesan, parish and station levels are usually not paid just wages and allowances – the cooks, drivers, houseboys, gardeners, catechists, teachers and other Church ministers for whom these people work, rarely take notice of inflation and the deplorable value of the local currency with which these workers are paid. As Dr. Idika rightly observes:

“I think that these are some areas where justice and peace have to operate before we talk about regional or international injustice and insecurity. It is unfortunate we talk about justice in South Africa etc. when we are not even just to those who work for us. We need to go back to ourselves and search our consciences and see whether we are being just”.³⁸

In other words, Dr. Idika was calling on the physician ‘to heal himself first’. Fr. John Aniagwu agrees with Dr. Idika when he writes:

“It goes without saying that if the Church is to bear prophetic witness where justice is concerned, the place to begin is within her own ranks. It has to be admitted, with much regret, that the Church in Africa falls far short of being a perfect example of justice. One does not know where to begin to list the injustices that the Church has been guilty of. Any catalogue of them would be too boring to contain within a paper”.³⁹

Even though the injustices perpetrated within the Church circles are many, Aniagwu went on to enumerate the most serious ones. They include:

- discriminations in appointments and promotions; where merit has been in most areas completely disregarded, and all kinds of

dubious criteria have been applied in *selecting instead of appointing* candidates to offices.

- calumnies, detractions, barefaced lies have been freely used to discredit real or imagined rivals for ecclesiastical offices.
- unjust wages are paid to employees of the Church;
- one hardly needs to mention structural injustices within the Church which concentrate powers in the hands of a few people that wield it at will, to the detriment of their subordinates.
- Among various Christian denominations justice has often counted for very little whenever privileges were at stake. Unjust tactics have been employed to edge out one another in areas like land acquisition, appointments to government sponsored boards, committees, etc. scholarship boards, government grants-in-aids and the like.

The point thus becomes inescapable that if the Church is ever going to be able to *speak out convincingly against injustice* in Nigeria, she must first put down and out the injustices within her ranks. As far as Aniagwu is concerned this is an uphill task, one that must be doomed to failure *ab initio*, to attempt to bear witness to what one does not practice. One could then easily be told what a Chinese proverb aptly says: “What you are speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say”.⁴⁰

(ii) Promotion of human rights, human dignity

On both national and international levels, the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace (CIDJAP) in Nigeria organizes and sponsors lectures, workshops and seminars meant to create public awareness on justice and peace. In these lectures, lessons for the Church in Nigeria are drawn from the Catholic social teachings. One of those sponsored lectures was that organized for the Enugu diocesan priests’ association. The proceedings of the lectures were published by CIDJAP under the title “Human Rights, Human Dignity and Catholic Social Teachings”.⁴¹ The Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace initiated and animated the Enugu seminar, while the German bishops

conference through its International Agency for Justice and Peace sponsored the seminar. Some of the topics treated were:

- The socio-pastoral relevance of the Vatican II's call to the "Signs of the Times".
- A Historical Overview of the social teachings of the Church.
- The Catholic Church's social teachings on the leadership training of the youth.
- Human Dignity considered from the document *Mater et Magistra* – political options for the Church in Nigeria.
- Human Rights in Africa – Contextual Theological Reflection.

“Catholic Social Teachings En-route in Africa”

This is the title of one of the most important CIDJAP's publications on justice and peace. Marking the *first* centenary celebration of Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (published in 1891), as Obiora Ike, the general editor of the publication writes in the introduction “for us here in Africa the celebration called for a great deal of soul-searching and brain-storming, in the light of the harsh realities of Africa's socio-political and economic life. What can we learn from the social teachings of the Church? Is there a contextual adaptation of these teachings?”

As part of the effort to discover the relevance of these teachings, prospects and possibilities for adaptation in the Nigerian and hence in the African Church, the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace organized a week-long inter-continental symposium on the theme: “Catholic Social Teachings En Route in Africa”, bringing together over one hundred participants (clergymen, religious men and women, academics, entrepreneurs, social workers, students, artisans, etc.) drawn from across Europe and Africa. As the editor informs us, the presence of the representative of the Vatican Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace gave credence to the very weighty importance which the world Church has in very recent times shown to the knowledge and spread of the social teachings of the Church. The broad continental participation and the series of goodwill messages from various Episcopal Conferences within

Africa, go a long way to buttress the continental nature of this symposium, and CIDJAP was happy that it could serve the Church in Africa via this means.

(iii) Rural development

It is not only through lectures and symposia that the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace makes its existence and operations felt within the national and international communities. CIDJAP is also involved in various development projects particularly in rural areas of the Nigerian communities. As its coordinator indicates, the institute gives loans to farmers for small projects in agriculture which include the cultivation of farm products, poultry farming and animal husbandry. In the Orlu diocesan branch of CIDJAP through the ‘self-reliance’ project – **Catholic Concern** – initiated by the diocesan priests’ association, the following projects meant to help the priests get involved in the financial development of the rural communities have already taken off, while plans to put others into operation have been completed. They include –

- An oil mill project
- Garri processing industry
- Palm kernel processing plant
- Rice mill project

In order to help young school leavers especially the junior secondary school drops-out train in middle man-power trades, ‘Catholic Concern’ plans to open mechanic workshops, domestic centres and other skills acquisition centres. Already there are many commercial schools run by some parishes. These centres and schools help towards self-employment in the more practical oriented jobs.

Finance and development projects

Most of the development projects undertaken by CIDJAP and the allied publications and enlightenment campaigns are sponsored by overseas development agencies for the Third World. Featuring in most of these projects are the German “Misereor” and “Missio”. Financial aids come too from other European and American development organizations. Local and Provincial CIDJAP coordinators write projects, some of which receive approval for financial aid.

But the crucial question now is whether these foreign aid organizations will continue to come to the rescue of Africa. The chances that massive economic and development aid will continue to flow to Africa from Europe and America are now remote. In the past, and precisely before the re-unification of the two German states (East and West), development aid from the particularly rich Western Germany used to flow to Africa and to other poorer nations of the world like water. The 'German charity' in fact knew no bounds. Germany 'exported' to Africa, not only money, but also personnel and social development workers who directed aid programmes in most parts of Africa. They helped in the training of middle man-power needs of the developing nations. Some other international charitable organizations like the WHO, UNICEF, WCC, Caritas International, Red Cross and Save the Children Funds have always played key roles in the lifting and distribution of food, clothing and medicine and other emergency requirements to the needy in Africa during civil conflicts, starvation, epidemics and natural disasters. Most of these times the relief-material carrying planes, ships and trucks used to head to Africa by air, sea and land. Food packets are dropped by special helicopters to impassable areas in the sun-baked deserts or drought stricken parts of Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan and other areas around the Sahel region.

Today, the situation is fast changing and the future may no more look so bright for Africa and the poorer nations of the world as before. With many stories of poverty, hunger situations, civil strives and depressed economics with the accompanying social and economic upheavals emerging from the Eastern European nations, formerly under totalitarian regimes, it is likely that the attention of the Western charity and aid organizations will be diverted to their more intimate brothers than to Africa. Already massive aid programmes have been mapped out for these areas formerly under communist influence. The former DDR, German Democratic Republic, has drawn the attention of almost all the Church relief organizations in the former West Germany, and Africa has almost been forgotten. The poor liberated citizens of Albania, the people of the former Yugoslavia and others consume what remains of the crumbs from the 'master's table'! There are many mouths to feed as hunger and starvation signals and cries for help continue to reach the Western aid organizations, including the Western Church. The burden weighs heavily on the Western economic aid pockets. The Church continues to summon

its members to come to the rescue of the unemployed, the starved and victims of civil strife and the needy all over the globe.

What are the consequences for Africa! In the first place, Africa should read “the signs of the times”. Although still a “baby” in need of care, Africa should see clearly that there are many other ‘big babies’ around focusing their big eyes on the master’s table. They too need help, and there is no doubt that the attention of the masters have turned almost completely to the new group of destitutes. But come what may, it is unlikely that the shrill cries of the smaller and more tender baby can ever be drowned by those of the big ones. There is hope that the little figure of the baby with a bowl in the hand will not escape the attention of the “passers-by” from the West and world community.

Africa and its poor masses who have in the past benefited in a large measure from foreign aid programmes and Church charitable organizations should not grudge other non-African beneficiaries the magnanimity of the “giver-nations and Churches”, who as a result of the prevailing circumstances have been forced to extend their benevolence to other needy peoples. The donor nations and Churches should however not take offence if they hear Africans complain of neglect for the Lord of the vineyard may even be right if he retorts: “Friend I am doing you no wrong. Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?” [Mt. 20:13].

AFRICA FOR SELF-RELIANCE: WHAT THE CATHOLIC INSTITUTES FOR DEVELOPMENT ARE DOING

Rather than lament over lack of foreign aid or what looks like misfortune or set-back, Africans and their governments and the local Church should instead learn from the present experiences and also “save for the rainy day”. The days of ‘spoon-feedings’ are almost gone and Africa should no more depend on charity from foreign organizations. Independence and self-determination should not be limited to the political sphere. It should extend also to the economic life of nations and maturity to be able to manage their own affairs satisfactorily. Assistance to the poor, to the victims of natural and man-made disasters, to the sick and the orphans, to the handicapped and the oppressed should not stop because the West and its charitable organizations are no more responding to the needs of the

Africans as before. Here of course the African Church has a major role of play. It has to expand its own local and domestic aid programmes and solicit aid from the rich among us in order to help the needy ones in our midst. There is need for reflection over the lavish life-style of the very rich Africans in the midst of whom live the majority in the worst state of poverty. There are numerous discrepancies between the accounts of the life-style of the scandalously rich minority who spray money, local and foreign currencies at social gatherings, while the poor scramble for relief materials at Caritas distribution centres. If these “Akajiakus” (hands full of wealth); “Osisi na ami egos” (trees that bear money); “Iyis” (rivers that never dry) as they are known in Nigeria can only give out as much as ten percent of their riches, the phenomenon of starvation and hunger in the land can be minimized, the irony of “Uberfluss” (over flowing richness) in the midst to wants!”

Dr. Idika, the coordinator of the CIDJAP – Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace, Enugu addresses fellow Nigerians and Africans in this urgent matter. He urges Nigerians to reflect and think of ways and means of helping our brothers and sisters who are poor. He insists:

“There is a lot of wealth in this country, we should try our best to do what we can to help people who are underprivileged people who are marginalized, who are suffering, instead of using the wealth for title-taking, marrying many wives and making festivities all over the place”.⁴²

The coordinator of CIDJAP rightly observes, those Europeans and Christians who help Africans are simple workers, simple farmers and most of them are not in any way richer than other people including some of us.

“But they make their own sacrifices. Some will not even use their vehicles during the winter, some will even cut their holidays short to make contributions to help our suffering people. So it is time we thought out ways of helping ourselves. Funds cannot come from

Europe for ever and now the funds are no longer coming as they used to come before”.⁴³

Local aid and finance programmes

The diocesan and local coordinators of the activities of CIDJAP in Nigeria do not meet just to submit written projects and collect money that comes from “Missio” and other international charitable organizations. As funds are necessary for any meaningful development project the coordinators regularly embark on enlightenment campaigns to raise funds locally for the numerous projects initiated by CIDJAP in the various zones. Such campaigns yield good result when the people, the poor and the rich see the need to support the projects. They donate generously towards locally sponsored development projects. In some dioceses a large part of the Lenten campaign contributions is channeled to the justice and peace projects as the Orlu diocesan coordinator and the bishop’s first secretary, Father Patrick Obinabu outlines. As needs continue to rise special collections are made in various parishes at various times of the year. Diocesan priests’ associations through the inspiration of the CIDJAP embark also on fund raising campaigns to run the numerous development projects.

There are many priests who insist on “*action now – fast money yielding projects*”, while others suggest buying of shares in banks and other business ventures in ‘slow but big money yielding projects’. Both sides of action-oriented programmes can be accommodated. They are all geared towards human development and particularly the alleviation of the suffering of the poor. Many of the younger Nigerian priests are eager to get involved in human development beginning from their various parishes. They no more entertain the vision of the clergy in the immaculate white soutanes, sitting in the spacious and lavishly decorated and equipped office blocks, attending to parishioners who come to ‘consult’ them. Like some of the pioneer missionaries, they want the Priest to be involved in development projects actively as masons, carpenters, painters, mechanics and farmers. They want to help the people morally and materially in the development of oil and palm kernel industries. These ventures may not be difficult to operate among peoples and communities who are already engaged and also used to self-development projects. There are many other priests who feel strongly that the Church should even be directly involved in community development

projects like water, light and road. Small and large scale agricultural and poultry farming projects have already been undertaken by Church organizations and communities. This has been encouraging development in the local African Church in the struggle for liberation and self-reliance.

As Peter Akaenyi⁴⁴ rightly points out, when Pope Paul VI at Entebbe, Uganda (1969), declared that “Development is the new name for peace”, he obviously did not understand the term “peace” to mean the mere “absence of war”

“By the term ‘peace’ he certainly must have intended an almost utopian situation – *human*, in which people live together in happiness and security, totally emancipated from all that dehumanize and divide, a situation of loving justice in which men discover human dignity, have the means wherewithal to attain a comfortable degree of material well-being and prosperity and freely play out their role in society along with others for the common good”.⁴⁵

We believe however that these lofty ideas of peace, justice and development cannot be realized if they are not pursued from the grassroots.

The African nations and Church have for long been on the receiving end of development aids from foreign charitable organizations. Since they have received much, Africans too must learn to give, to sustain the Church’s universal mission to be the brother’s keeper ...’ “I was hungry you gave me to eat, naked, you clothed me, stranger and you welcomed me, sick and you visited me...” [Mt. 5:35ff]. To be able to arrive at that value judgment at this point in time and accept the commitments of responsible leadership, is a sure sign of maturity for the African nations, Church and their leaders. To shun its obligations or ignore its responsibilities will be unmitigated disaster for the African leadership. On the part of the African Church it will be a bad omen for the future of Christianity in the Black Continent.

THE WAY FORWARD

Stories of disasters, poverty, disease, ignorance are not the best we can write and narrate to the future generations of Africans. In fact, this is not

a happy hour writing about the chronic plagues of our society, mostly brought about by irresponsible leadership; painting the picture of a poorer tomorrow. But the truth is there for everyone to see. If Africa must grow and its people must prosper, then a change is not only desirable, it is imperative; it is inescapable. First a labourer must be worthy of his hire; a business man a little more honest than he has been up till now; a politician and the clergy must practice what they preach. With a little bit of justice observed in our private and public functions and activities peace will reign and there will be room and good atmosphere for development.

The role of the Church of Christ in this development cannot be over-emphasized. Where the communities have not taken the initiative the church can provide the personnel and prepare the ground rather than carrying the entire burden. Religion and human development are not separated from life. The Church cannot restrict evangelization to the simple proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments to the hungry and harassed people. Evangelization geared towards human development must embrace a progressive liberation from evils of various kinds, especially from the classic evils of poverty, ignorance and disease. As far as Akaenyi is concerned, the term “human development” properly understood must embrace in one train both the spiritual and physical aspects. In fact, attempts to effect liberation from either while neglecting the other are in the final analysis meaningless.⁴⁶ As for Bühlmann, the question is badly put. It is not a matter of doing one thing or the other, of a dichotomy between evangelization and humanization, between the horizontal and the vertical dimension, but rather of different aspects of the one reality; of the hope of Christ’s Church in this world, of the two dimensions of the one Church realized in this world by *Kerygma* and *Diaconia* preaching and service, workshop and social commitment.⁴⁷

Between evangelization and human promotion, development and liberation, there are in fact profound links. And as the working paper on the African Synod rightly pointed out, socio-economic and political concerns have vital links with evangelization. “Therefore, the Church in Africa, as she reflects on and pursues her mission of salvation in the continent, cannot neglect becoming actively involved in efforts for human promotion, justice and peace”.⁴⁸ We thank God, that at last the Church in Africa has come to the full realization of these facts. Right from the missionary era, the Church has not neglected the fact that there is a strong

link between evangelization and the provision of educational, health and social welfare needs of the communities being evangelized. Maybe, we must admit that the Church's understanding of this relationship right from the beginning of its mission in Africa has helped to sustain the Church and make its existence relevant to the modern man in Africa today. At least the Church's various educational, health and social welfare structures confirm this assertion. She should not relent in her efforts to promote justice and peace, but should rather double her efforts. And as the author of *"The Coming of the Third Church"* succinctly puts it:

Whether we wish it or not, in the future more stress will be laid on development and if evangelization cannot consent to be the soul of development it will be put on one side".⁴⁹

On the part of the Africans themselves, the leaders and the followers, there is an urgent need to restore confidence in the survival and true independence of the African nations and avoid every cynicism that "nothing good can come out of Africa". And in order to dismiss the cynic remarks of our detractors, we must begin to chase less after the shadow and show a little more love for the continent and countries of our birth. We must learn to be true "managers" who train to serve and not to be served. We must wave aside all forms of corruption and not wink at them with approval. We have a duty to serve our nations with the sweat of our brows and from the depth of our hearts before we recount what our nations should do for us: As the Europeans and Americans made their countries tick, it is the Africans who can build the Black Continent and make it great.

THE AFRICAN DILEMMA: THE NIGERIAN DILEMMA

Whichever way Africa decides to go, some fundamental problems may still remain with us for long. There is need for deep reflection in order to find more lasting solutions to these problems. Generally speaking, what we refer to as "The Nigerian Dilemma" obviously extends to other nations of Africa.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, in a public statement issued on June 28th 1993, addressed itself to the crisis situation in the country. At that same point in time a sore political crisis was raging in Eyadema's Togo. The arch-dictator who had ruled that West African country for 30 years had organized a "mock" election in which he secured 98.8% of the popular votes thus "receiving the peoples' mandate" to continue governing the country till death! His opponents in the shamefully rigged election secured only 1.2% of the votes!

In that same time, the crisis in Nigeria, practically brought to that height by the annulment of the June 12 election in which Moshood Abiola of the Social Democratic Party was said to have won worsened. That action taken by the outgoing military dictatorship which had governed Nigeria for the eight years, after of course a series of coups and counter coups, did not please Nigerians as well as many international bodies. The crisis had unfortunately deepened to warrant an emergency plenary meeting of the Conference of the Bishops, the first of its kind in a decade. The bishops touched the key problems in their communiqué:

- The nation seemed to be presently adrift in area of confusion. There was large movement of people from the big cities to the villages. They were scared by the explosive nature of the political crisis which could lead to a civil war.
- There was break down of law, order and security of life and property, and fear and despair filled the air.
- There was a general disintegration of the nation's educational system.
- The banks are stripped of cash by the Central Bank and there was no cash for purchases and business transactions.
- Some people were taking undue advantage of the difficult times to further exploit fellow citizens by hiking prices of goods and services.
- A prolonged scandalous fuel shortage in a nation rich in petroleum products had inexplicably defied any solution.

- The clamp down on the press by the ruling clique and in fact the closure of some media houses, a measure which went contrary to the freedom of the press and peoples' right to authentic information had create room for disquieting rumours and conjunctures

Special prayer for Nigeria in distress

We can understand why the bishops were filled with apprehension. As chief shepherds and part and parcel of the nation, they had to express their deep concern over the situation of affairs and give directive and admonitions. They were convinced that the crisis situation called for God's special intervention:

“We invite all people of goodwill to continue to pray for the nation. In particular, we direct that the ‘Special Prayer for Nigeria in Distress recently composed by the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria be recited by Catholics in all dioceses

PRAYER FOR NIGERIA IN DISTRESS

“All powerful and merciful Father
You are the God of Justice, Love and Peace.
You rule over all the Nations of the earth.
Power and might are in your hands and no one
can withstand, you.

We present our country Nigeria before you.
We praise and thank you for you are the source
of all we have and are. We are sorry for
all the sins we have committed and for good deeds we
have failed to do. In your loving forgiveness keep us safe
from the punishments we deserve.

Lord, we are weighed down by uncertainties, but also by
moral,
economic and political problems.
Listen to the cries of your people
who confidently turn to you.

God of infinite goodness, our strength in adversity.
 Our health in weakness, our comfort in sorrow.
 Be merciful to us your people. Spare this nation Nigeria
 from chaos, anarchy and doom.

Bless us with your Kingdom of Justice, Love and Peace.
 We ask this through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen”.

[Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, Enugu. 27-07-93].

A very important ingredient of the prayer, bemoans the nation’s sad fate – political, economic and moral problems, but the bishops as well as Nigerians themselves are aware that our individual and collective misdeeds have contributed to our political and economic woes – “We are sorry for all the sins we have committed and for good deeds we have failed to do”. At last and in despair God is asked to “spare this nation Nigeria from chaos, anarchy and doom”.

It is not only Nigeria that needs God’s special intervention and mercy; *all* the African nations in particular, and the world at large need such prayers. And in their prophetic role, the bishops as watch-men did not fail to *warn* as well as *encourage* the people, reminding them that, that was no time for despair and inertia. All hands must be on deck to rescue the nation. All our resources of good sense and goodwill must be mustered to rescue the nation from the brink of disaster. Everyone and every group has a role to play. “As bishops, we have a prophetic role: to proclaim the truth at all times, to warn against dangerous trends in the affairs of the nation; and above all to remind all that God is just and powerful, good and merciful”.

LASTING SOLUTIONS TO AFRICA’S PROBLEMS?

Nigerian’s and all Africa’s problems need very close studies to effect more lasting solutions. “Ad hoc” and isolated attempts at resolving those problems may not help. There is urgent need to examine, for example, the system of political arrangement suitable for Africa. It does not necessarily need to resemble the Western pattern. Which political system is both

simpler and cheaper for Africans to operate? The “Nigerian Dilemma” exposes more of the problems most Africans, both rural and urban dwellers encounter at the polls. At the beginning, it was the *open ballot* system. Voters were simply required to queue up in front of the photographs of the candidates of their choice. Many Nigerians especially the cream of society boycotted the elections, describing the “open ballot” system as crude and primitive. Later, the system was modified and named *open secret ballot* system. There was still queuing up, but a voting card was introduced. Still there were loopholes, but the majority of Nigerians thought that the “*open secret*” system was better. But it did not remove completely the possibility of rigging of elections and the manipulation of the final election results.

Many worried Nigerians, old and young, educated and illiterates have seriously questioned the usefulness of adopting the Western electoral system which does not offer the best means of selecting the best candidates. Often it has turned out that the richest political aspirants or the ‘highest bidders’ received the mantle of leadership at the polls. What is the use in conducting expensive and tedious elections which could just be annulled by an incumbent to a political office or by a high-jacked electoral commission? Why all the waste in time and scarce financial resources in a venture which often neither guarantees fair play, justice or even peace? Has Africa not got any other system most suitable to the Africans by which aspirants to political offices could be selected?

In Nigeria many communities still maintain the age-long system of representation at various levels in the traditional governance. Communities, villages or kindreds, according to population or status, as need arises, present their own candidates who represent them in government and Church. Equitable representation is often rotational. If adopted in the modern political system, it is evident that a lot of problems could be resolved over the equitable representation of various communities, wards, constituencies, from the local, state to the federal levels of government. At least the leadership aspirants would realize that they are accountable to the people up to the grassroots level.

The ‘son of the soil’ dilemma

The ‘son of the soil’ dilemma is a reality which must be reckoned with in the African politics. It is also present in the African religious politics. One can see in it tints of tribalism or ethnicism, and in the present level of the

African political development, it may not be easy to ignore the value and sentiments, which the Nigerians, for example, attach to equitable representation of their people, communities or tribes in government and religion. The sentiments attached to the phenomenon of “sharing of the national cake” are too deep to be over looked in any political arrangement which can satisfy the aspirants of the people. Publish a list of commissioners and secretaries, and managers of boards and companies, the Hausa/Fulani, the Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Tivi, Ogoni ethnic groups will first glance through to make sure that their own people are there and that they are equitably represented in government. It may not worry them if the person selected is not the best. But justice should be maintained and cheating avoided. Negatively, this type of representation may encourage mediocrity as well as tribalism and ethnicism but we should not forget that what we are after is an arrangement in the political development of Africa which can ensure peace and justice. It should be *simple* and *cheap* to operate and should give satisfaction to the majority of the leaders and their people. If such people perform poorly and are impeached by the operators of the system, they can be replaced by others more suitable and duly selected by the same people at the local level.

It is not necessary that Africans should operate a ‘Presidential system’ of government which may suit the Americans and not other nations. Africa can invent her own system and give it any name, as long as it is suitable to the people and takes into account the level of development and political awareness of the people. Indiscriminate borrowing of foreign systems of government and endless experimentation on one or the other system has helped to worsen the state of instability and chaos. There is nothing humiliating, shameful, primitive in adopting a system of government, quite different from the ‘popular’ or usual ones, in order to ensure peace, justice and political stability in the Black Continent.

Have we learnt our lessons? The dilemma of the military and democracy in Africa

Military intervention in Africa and elsewhere are usually brought about by what many regard as reckless misrule of the civilian elected democracies. Soldiers who come in to take over governments by force have always justified their intervention by listing the number of atrocities which they claim were being committed by the ousted civilian

administration. These soldiers come in as ‘Messiahs’ and ‘God-sent saviours’ who were forced to take over by the deplorable economic, social and political mismanagement on the part of the elected leaders of the people. Since these leaders had misused the authority given to them, the messiah-soldiers and patriots were bound to intervene to restore peace, justice and progress.

Nobody may dismiss the soldiers’ claims as mere rhetoric, or the accusations leveled against the civilian leadership as unfounded. Many of the oppressed people could vow seeing the elected leaders of the people abuse power bestowed on them with reckless abandon, embezzle government money and even loot the treasury. Most of the leaders had really forgotten the poor masses that elected them into office. They had not cared to listen to the cries of the hungry and starving masses, the unemployed, the poor and the destitute. The schools from the primary to the tertiary levels have been closed for long because the school teachers have been on strike. The children and students continue roaming the streets. Inflation has reached over 1000% and cannot even be measured by any known standard and the scarce local currency in circulation has been declared ‘worthless’. No amount of it that the rich among us carry can buy any reasonable quantity of good to last for a family of four in a week. As if to say that God had equally abandoned the people, a state of insecurity, fear and despair reigns. Armed robbery is on the increase and the already desperate people are harassed from all sides.

There are many more ‘woes’ and problems which the elected leaders of the people – the president and governors, local government chairmen and their ministers – had neglected. There are no roads, water, electric power supply and other basic necessities of life. Some of these leaders could even be accused of ‘chasing the rat while their homes were burning’ – making expensive foreign tours and pilgrimages and taking titles and feasting sumptuously with the government money. No one may therefore blame immediately the army for overthrowing the government and thus sacking the discredited leaders of the people. But would such a measure be the best solution? Will the new military leadership really succeed in bailing the people out of their predicament? Whether they succeed or not, the question facing any future elected leaders of the people – old and new breed alike – who also promise paradise on earth for people, *only* if the military men were to give up power and troupe back into their barracks, *is*, whether “we have learnt any lessons from our

past". Is it possible that the so many years of dictatorial rule by the military, and possibly too, to be regarded as years of darkness and disaster, could be seen by new aspirants to political office as a period of 'retreat, reflection and ethical re-orientation'. In a simple language 'have we learnt any lesson from our past mistakes and differences? Certainly many African politicians including soldiers who turn politicians have learnt little or nothing. For as soon as they are reinstated into power they begin singing the old tunes again. They prefer to grab and make *money* and *not name*, and we return to square one'. Some of them at the expiration of the tenure of their office do not like to retire in peace and with honour. Instead of stepping out honourably, they prefer to be forced out of office, dead or alive. Most of them go by the way their predecessors or comrades did, namely by violent and shameful death. There are so many examples of such cases in the African struggle for political power. They go to join their wicked ancestors in the under-world (sheol), part of the society and world of the dead that lives by vice and crime. Some spend the rest of their lives in exile or in prison, in weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Military hegemony versus democracy

"The military propounding democratic principles", is another African dilemma. They take power by force and in most cases for selfish reasons. They have not been elected into power by the people and yet the military dictatorship in the African politics assumes the posture of 'defender' of democratic principles and human right. And having tasted power and learnt a part of the game of politics during his many years as 'president, head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces; the soldier-politician may decide 'to retire from the military' and take to political life, now in the *civilian*, and no more in the *military* uniform. Many have forced their way to the nation's highest office through such master plans and intrigues. Examples are many. Those of them who decide to contest the elections with other aspirants normally win 'with overwhelming majority!' They usually 'trounce' their opponents, who normally finish up behind the giant of the polls with less than one percent of the peoples' votes.

The role of retired generals and soldiers who become fully politicians in African politics constitutes a big dilemma in the future of politics in Africa. The retired generals often form pro-democracy groups

and not many people are at ease with this development. There are contradictions. Sam Ikoku, a leading Nigerian politician and elder statesman, expressed doubts on the sincerity of retired military officers in Nigeria who later turned pro-democracy advocates when he stated that “retired military officers that came to prominence and power through the overthrow of constituted authorities have now become advocates of democracy and good governance” [Newswatch, August 30, 1993]. Having ruled through the barrel of the gun and in most cases never achieved much, but sufficiently enriched themselves, these generals are retired or voluntarily bow out of office, with the intention and well marshaled plans to return to power. With the overflowing wealth fraudulently acquired and well established multi-billionaire business ventures, they are in the position to finance election campaigns, contest and win elections. Why the “second coming” to power when the retired army generals never performed well in their first tenure of political office? Their motives are not sincere when it comes also to pro-democracy movement.

THEOLOGY OF INCULTURATION

It was Dr. Theophilus Okere, a Nigerian theologian and former Rector of Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri, Nigeria, who challenged Nigerian and African theologians to come out with a type of ‘Liberation Theology’, like that of the South Americans, which can give adequate response to African socio-economic and political problems especially as these touch the suffering and oppressed masses of Africa. The main problem is not that of ‘coining’ an expression or a term that expresses the aspirations of the ‘liberationist thinkers and theologians’, but an ideology, a theology or philosophy of life that can bring about a successful implementation of the expressed aspirations. Though South Americans have no monopoly of ‘liberation theology’, there is nothing wrong if Africans devised their own theology which can serve as a framework for the establishment of peace and justice in Africa.

Dr. Emmanuel Idika of the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace, Enugu, Nigeria, suggests **Inculturation Theology**:

“I approve of inculturation theology. If African countries can have this knowledge, that is, re-studying our culture and

seeing how our culture can help us to advance, I think it will help us”.⁵⁰

‘Inculturation Theology’ is not new in the African situation. It is already widely acknowledged especially in Church circles as a phenomenon peculiar to Africa. In our own contribution to this theology we have devoted entirely the second volume of our work to inculturation theology – *The African Church, Today and Tomorrow: Inculturation and the African Church*. We have argued, like many others – Africans and non-Africans, that Christianity has not taken root in Africa because most of its practices and structures are *foreign* to the Africans. Some of these practices are not meaningful and satisfying to the Africans and do not even appeal to their religious sentiments. As a result the African Church, though still young had remained under-developed and the faith is still shallow. In order to bring about progress, the ‘Inculturation Movement’ has sought to discover those elements of the African culture which have maintained their perennial values in the advancement of peoples and self-fulfillment and merge them with the already inherited Christian values to bring about a more meaningful mode of expressing divine realities in the African language and culture. Thus Africans could now adapt some modes of worship in the African traditional religion to enrich what Christianity has already offered in the area of public worship or liturgy. Some African traditional institutions are practices which traditional title-taking institutions and traditional festivities can now be celebrated in the Christian setting and both agree in perfect harmony, traditional and Christian heritage.

It is this type of ‘adaptation’ that we wish should be extended to other areas outside the religious sphere. The ‘inculturation movement’ should therefore extend to African traditional mode of *community life* and *governance- social and political life*, and also to the traditional system of “care for the other brother” embedded in the ‘quasi-economic’ system of the extended family, and ‘live and let live’ ideology. When Africans learn to extend their spirit of commitment to be ‘their brothers’ keepers’, the ugly and selfish system of grabbing and ‘winner-takes-all’ attitude may be suppressed. There may be fewer beggars and handicapped victims of injustice and oppression in our streets and rehabilitation centres. The problems of refugees will disappear because the extended families, even to the tenth generation will be ready to identify with their distant relations

and accommodate them in their one-room shanties and share with them the little food God provides.

Through our envisaged *political theology of inculturation* in Africa, the old African traditional respect for the elders may be restored. The modern West-influenced system of political struggle for power and bickering in the name of “opposition”, political campaigns and their associated and complicated methods of political maneuvering may disappear as “elders” and those among us who are blessed by the gods with the rare virtues of eloquence and leadership are naturally given the mandate to lead the people. In the same way can the traditional system also take care of offenders and those who fail to perform well or do not observe the rules of the game.

We are not assuring, however, that the African traditional system of governance is perfect. It has its deficiencies usually brought about by the poor operators of the system. This is the case in other societies and areas of life. But whatever the case may be we are sure that the traditional system, modified to suit modern Africa, which is naturally not an island, but a member of the world community, will help to lessen tension, restore stability and establish a more lasting peace. The *African Political Theology of Inculturation* is not an utopia. In the restricted area of Christian theology it has already brought about countless blessings on the Church of Christ in Africa. Today African Christians can worship God with full satisfaction using African symbols and modes of expression. If well operated in the area of *politics, economy* and *sociology* there is ever, every hope that it will help to liberate African nations from the political entanglements brought about by colonialism and underdevelopment.

The unnecessary copying of foreign and ambitious systems of government by the African governments has contributed a lot to Africa’s political turmoil. We maintain that African nations can fashion out a political system that can suit only the Africans. It can be a *Monarchy*, a *Diarchy* – shared jointly by the civilians and the military. Why not a *Triarchy*, to accommodate the traditional rulers? Hence the three arms of rulership, operated by the politicians, the military and traditional rulers are represented and nobody would grumble. Is it really necessary that every citizen – literate or illiterate – should cast the ballot at the polls before the assembly men, the governors and the president can be selected? Surely a simpler formula can do in the African situation. Perhaps it is the drive or the tendency to look like others, to adopt the

system in vogue, that has led most of the African nations astray in the search for a political system of government called *democracy*. African leaders should at this point in time be courageous enough to take the bull by the horns, and fashion out a system of governance suitable and more meaningful to the African masses in the jungles as well as those living in the urban cities. Such a bold undertaking, instead of belittling or diminishing the image of the Africans, can in fact enhance African maturity and ability to be masters to themselves in such international and vital issues relating to religion, culture and politics.

CHAPTER SIX

ECUMENISM AND THE AFRICAN CHURCH

Preamble:

Church authorities find support for the present ecumenical movement in the prayer of Our Lord in John 17:11b, “That they may be one, even as we are one”. Naturally, ecumenism, from Greek *Oikumene*, meaning ‘the inhabited world’, implying a world-wide phenomenon or general movement in extent, influence or application, presupposes a state of division and disunity in the Church of Christ and therefore division among Christians. As historians inform us, the first division in the Church was the schism of 1054 between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The next great division in the Church, better known as the **Reformation** in 1517 began with Martin Luther of Germany.

Since these early days of division and disunity in the once indivisible Church of Christ things have never been the same again. From the top of the ladder to the foot, from the universal to the particular, the head quarters to the grassroots, division and disunity have continued to the present times and in the various parts of the Christian world, including Africa. The seeds of division and discord sown by the leaders of the Church, their agents and immediate followers seem to have affected deeply even the younger generation who never know what the initial squabbles were all about. One simply has to join one camp or the other as the battle for supremacy continues to rage.

The modern ecumenical movement has the one great objective, to repair the damage done to the Christian Church and to bring back unity among Christians in order to bring the prayer of the Master to its fulfillment, ‘that they may be one’. In this chapter, we wish to examine the implications of ecumenism for the African Church of **Today and Tomorrow**. Has the movement made any impact on the modern African Church? Are there prospects for the unity of the various Christian Churches and religious movements in Africa? In what sense should the concept of ecumenism be understood in the modern African Church? There are many other issues that arise and which we shall address in this chapter as these relate to the survival of the Christian Church in Africa.

In line with the development of themes and issues, we have chosen to discuss in this book, we shall deal with ecumenical movement between

Catholics and Protestants, and mainly as related to the African Church. Protestant Churches and denominations will include the established protestants Churches, notably *The Church Missionary Society (C.M.S)*, *The Anglican Church*, *The Methodist*, *The Baptist*, *The Presbyterian*, *The Qua Iboe Mission and the Salvation Army*. In this group too, we must include the numerous *New Religious Movements (NRMs)* also referred to as *African Independent Churches (A.I.C)*. In the other Chapters of this book we have dealt with dialogue with Islam and the African Traditional Religion.

The present discussion is very important for the development of the African Church. Closer association or union of the various Christian Churches and Religious Movements will no doubt augur well with the future of the African Church. Division and proliferation of Churches and sects will indeed worsen the already bad situation. Although Africa inherited a divided Church from the missionary bodies, her other institutions, including the political, social and cultural institutions have not enjoyed relative peace and unity. Even in the area of religion, experts still insist on pluralism of the African Traditional Religion (ATR). If there was real **unity**, there would be no need talking about African Traditional Religions (ATRs). In fact the one 'National' Traditional Religion would have operated under one authority, one recognized system of worship, and of course belief. We have not inherited such a unified system of belief and practice. If African traditionalists are serious in the promotion of the traditional religion of their ancestors, there may be need for the formation of an 'ecumenical movement'.

Movements and organizations for the promotion of unity and common interest groups at various levels – international, national and regional have been on the increase in the modern times. Such movements and organizations have the political, economic and social interest of their members in agenda, which include the establishment of structures and programmes which serve the needs of members. Collectively, established organizations and unions help to solve the problems of member states. On international or regional levels we can mention the **European Economic Community (EEC)**, **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, **Organization of North American State (ONAS)**, **Organizations of African Unity (OAU)**, **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**.

On purely religious grounds there are many such organizations, councils, union of associations – **World Council of Churches (WCC)**, **All African Independent Churches (AAIC)**, **Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)**. **Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA)** has under its organization and umbrella all the ‘Churches’ which formerly were under the **Sudan Interior Mission (SIM)**. ECWA, founded in 1893 by a Canadian woman, and now an indigenous Church has about 6 million members in the South Eastern districts.

Such secular and religious organizations have existed in the past. They are many in the present times and present useful forum for fostering unity and progress among members. In dealing with non-members or other world problems, such organizations stand in the most advantaged position for taking a united action or decision. Perhaps the African Church will benefit immensely from such a Church body or council. The Organization of African Unity or the **United Nations Organization** is pointer to such advantages that accrue from such unions.

The Beginning of Ecumenical Movement

The beginning of the modern ecumenical movement goes back to the protestant missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910. As its name stands, the conference set out to discuss the problems facing the Church and how to resolve them. In doctrine and polity, the protestant Churches were of course not united and for this reason, the organizing committee stated clearly in its constitution for the conference that no expression of opinion should be sought from the conference on any matter involving any ecclesiastical or doctrinal question on which those taking part in the conference differed among themselves.¹ On this ground, the Anglican Church and the other high Church men sent delegates to the conference. But the idea of excluding **Matter of Faith and Order** did not please one important delegate to the conference. He was Bishop Brent of the Episcopal Church of America. He set out to see that a conference of **Faith and Order** was organized in 1927 at Lausanne in Switzerland. With this conference began what was later known as the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Its main duty was to discuss matters concerning faith and order with the aim of bringing the Churches together, to arrive at organic unity. Hence they extended their invitation to ‘all Christian bodies throughout the world, which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour’.

Side by side with Faith and Order as ecumenical movement, grew also the **Universal Council for Practical Christianity**, better known as **Life and Work**. It was founded by Archbishop Soderblom, the then primate of the Church of Sweden. Each movement concerned itself with what its name stood for and since both movements came into being there were calls for the formation of a World Council of Churches. Later the two bodies – Faith and Order, Life and Work merged to form the World council of churches and its first assembly took place in Amsterdam on 22 August 1948. About 350 delegates from 135 denominations in 44 countries assembled for the formation of the World Council of Churches. The functions of the council included ‘to carry on the functions of the two world movements of faith and order and life and work. To facilitate common action by the Churches; to promote cooperation in study, to promote the growth of ecumenical consciousness in member Churches.....; to establish the relation with denominational federations of world wide scope and with other ecumenical movements; to call world conferences on specific subjects as occasion may require; to support the Church in the task of evangelism’.²

Ecumenism and the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church was not among the 135 Christian denominations that assembled in Amsterdam for the formation of the World Council of Churches. The conspicuous absence of the Catholic Church was registered in the official report which states: “All confessional families except the Roman Catholics were represented”.³ Even establishing contact with the WCC after the Second Vatican Council and also establishing in 1965 a joint working group between the Vatican and the WCC as the official organ of cooperation, there was still the dragging of foot on the part of the Catholic Church. After the opening of dialogue and the expression of good will on both sides, the situation began to deteriorate and reached a crisis point in 1972 when

SODEPAX, The Geneva Commission in social questions, developments and peace set up in 1968 by the world Council of Churches and the Vatican was re-organized. Rome, reacting against the working paper said “No” or at least “Not yet” to the invitation to enter and take a full part in the World Council of Churches.⁴ Cardinal Willibrands made this reference to the reasons for the decision. *“The confused situation in Catholic Theology, the crisis of authority and certain attitudes to*

*ecclesiastical discipline in individuals and whole groups make our hope for adhesion more difficult.*⁵

Whatever the case may be, we may not forget that it bore the initiative and the dynamism of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council to bring about a change of mentality and attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards ecumenism and thus the activities of the World Council of Churches. When the Catholic Church however joined the modern ecumenical movement, she brought a new life to it and set a new accent in the area of bilateral dialogue. This was in fulfillment of the Council's call on the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church to take active part in ecumenism. This call is seen in the numerous pronouncements of the Council in the decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), which specifies the Catholic Church's manner of approach to the ecumenical movement. The brief introduction of the decree states among other things that one of the chief concerns of the council fathers was the promotion and **restoration of unity among Christians**. It was ready to work with those 'who invoke the triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour.' This requirement was similar to that demanded by the WCC from their member Churches. Thus the Council wished to set forth certain directives and methods for all Catholics by which they can respond to ecumenical movement, which they were so to say late comers.

The decree on ecumenism has three chapters. In the **first Chapter**, what the Church believes is restated and that forms the basis for what she takes with her to the bilateral dialogue, for example. The Council did not equate the one Church of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church, but it said, 'this Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of St. Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor'.⁶ The **second Chapter** outlines how the principles could be put into practice. The **third Chapter** gives guidelines for the dialogue, first with the Eastern Churches and secondly with the Protestant Churches of the West. On the sacred actions of the Christian religion performed by the *separated brethren* the decree said that they 'can truly engender the life of grace, and can be rightly described as capable of providing access to the community of salvation'.⁷ Thus the 'Ecumenical Movement' embraces too, those activities and enterprises which according to various needs of the Church and opportune occasions are started and organized for the fostering of unity among Christians. "It aims at overcoming obstacles to

unity posed by differing doctrines, disciplines and structures, so that all Christians may give common expression to their faith in Jesus Christ and undertake in common the evangelization of human society”.⁸

Ecumenism in the African Church: Prospects and Challenges.

The Catholic Church vis-à-vis other Christian Bodies:

The working paper on the African Synod calls the attention of the Catholic Church in African to the existence of **Orthodox Churches**, the older Churches truly indigenous to Africa, and which have survived through almost 2000 years of historical vicissitudes.⁹ There is need to recognize their existence and to improve links with them, the working paper recommend. As we are told, by the year 2000, there will be more than **10 million Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt and Sudan, 30 million Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and 350,000 Eastern Orthodox Christians.**

Reliable statistics, always emanating from the Roman Church circles states too that by the year 2000, there will be **393 million Christians in African: 118 million or 30% will be Catholic**, and the rest including Orthodox Churches and the Christian communities in Africa will take up **70% of the total African population.**¹⁰ As the Catholic Church in Africa is called to take note of the presence of the established protestant Churches, she may not lose sight of the staggering number of the adherents of the **New Religious Movements**, also referred to as African Independent Churches including the burgeoning **Pentecostal Churches**. It is with these New religious movements that dialogue has really proved difficult if not impossible. There is every reason to believe the suggestion that out of the total population of about **90 million Nigerians, if 40 million are Moslems, 30 million, Christians (Catholics and Christians of the Established Protestant Churches), and 15 million** are members of the various Religious movements and sects. This is a large number to reckon with in the history of the growth of the Christian religion in Nigeria. Their impact and presence cannot be ignored in any discussion concerning the future of Christianity in the Black African continent.

Challenges of Ecumenism

For the African Church, the challenges to ecumenism are many. Perhaps Africa has had a large share of these challenges as a result of her political

history and missionary enterprise in the Black Continent. The seeds of discord and division were already sown by the early missionary bodies. With time these seeds were to germinate and grow and the present generation of Africans – Christians and non-Christians partake of the ugly consequences of the bitter rivalries among the Churches and more so pronounced in the areas of proselytism, education and politics. Hatred, unhealthy rivalries and competitions which characterized interdenominational relations since the beginning of Christianity in Africa are still with us today. These are even more pronounced in the aggressive proliferation of New Church Movements. Instead of unity, the Christian bodies have continued to divide.

The already divided western Church has thus been exported to Africa and the confused situation has affected any movement towards unity, as various Church bodies saw each other as enemies. Local conditions also influenced the acceptance of one denominations or the other and perhaps too the intolerant racial attitude of the missionaries themselves further led to splinter Churches separating from the parent Churches.

Division fostered by colonialism

Although this issue seems to have been over-flogged by writers on African Church and politics, it remains the bedrock and origin of controversies found in Christian religion in Africa today. The establishment of **National Churches** in Africa by the various Christian bodies also embarrassed most of the African converts and ‘Free Thinkers’ among Africans. The indigenous local clergy were consequently to tow the religious line of their masters. The ugly circumstances that brought about the birth or the establishment of the different Churches were in themselves enough scandal. Some were stories of rebellion against constituted authorities, acts of sabotage and intrigues, disobedience and disrespect for leaders. Selfish motives and lust for leadership, also contributed to separation and founding of new Churches: *The Anglican Church, The Lutherans, The Church of the Scotland Mission, The Presbyterians, The Methodist Church, The Baptist, The Salvation Army* and many others. At their own moment too, Africans were to take initiative and found their own Churches. It is not only the white man that had received the divine mandate to establish Churches. Thus today we

have in Africa thousands of Independent Churches and religious movements, founded and run by African prophets and leaders.

The singular act of division or disagreements in matters of creed has also led to division in some other areas or sectors, including social establishments like schools and medical institutions. Simple social services like aids to victims of wars and natural disasters were also run on Church denominational lines. In most cases, foreign Church bodies preferred serving the interest of their own members. Relief materials were channeled to their own particular Churches and ministers who took time to see that only members of their own Churches received such humanitarian services. Non members, no matter how needy were usually excluded or ignored.

The battle line seemed to have been drawn too as each Church body took 'positions' in their own areas of influence. The protestant bodies knew no unity either. They too had their own conflicts and may have been moved to greater activity by the presence of other competing groups. This was the situation between the Methodist, Quakers and the Society of Friends in the Gambia; and also between the primitive Methodist, Qua Iboe, and Presbyterians in the Cross River basin of Nigeria. The Baptists expelled from Fernando Po, instead of settling in Calabar, a Presbyterian zone, moved to Victoria in the Cameroon.¹¹

Between Catholics and protestants daggers were drawn and offensive campaigns were often carried out to undermine the missionary activities of the other. In Eastern Nigeria, for example, there were bitter memories of strife and rivalry between Catholic mission on the one hand and all protestant Churches on the other. The memories of hate, hostilities, mistrust and suspicions are still so fresh. The statement by the Methodists, who in 1907 were seeking a united front with the Presbyterians and the Qua Iboes, sums up the protestant feelings: *"Our problems are similar. Within professed Christianity we have the same enemy, namely Roman Catholicism"*.¹² And as far as the Anglicans were concerned, their sworn enemy was Roman Catholicism. It constituted a threat to the survival of the protestant denomination. How to **fight** Roman Catholics, **compete** with them, **stop** their aggressive proselytism was in fact, the subject of a lecture titled **"What Are We Anglicans Doing?"** presented at the Teachers' Weeks at Awka, Nigeria in 1950 by one arch Anglican principal of Diobu E.T.C. in Port Harcourt, Mr. E.O. Enemo. Published 'for private circulation', the booklet had for long fallen into the

hands of Catholics who quote profusely from it to support their contention that Anglicans were no friends of the Catholics. Many well informed Catholics dismiss any ecumenical movement in which Anglicans particularly are involved as useless. They see such attempt as cosmetic. Where such movements ever exist, Catholics accuse promoters of ecumenism of paying lip-service to a moribund movement. Mr. Enemo's lecture throws light on the topic we are discussing.

“Roman Catholicism is the challenge”

As far as Enemo was concerned, the real challenge is Roman Catholicism, “the troubler of Israel” (I King, 18:17)”:

Perhaps there are people like myself who are enough alarmed to regard the activities of Roman Catholics in Eastern Nigeria as a challenge. I think one has the right to regard as a challenge anything that effectually threatens his very existence. I trust that no clear thinking person will honestly say I exaggerate or cry ‘wolf, if I say that the rate at which Roman Catholics are sweeping through the East threatens effectually the survival of the protestant Churches

...¹³

Although Enemo denied that his paper was meant to condemn Roman Catholicism as a Church or to minimize the work it was doing, he claimed that “Its object is to arouse ourselves who are protestants to **action** so that we may **fight** for our survival”.¹⁴ Surely this ‘fighting for survival’ was a grandiose movement with a double edged sword. The results of the ‘war of survival’ could be disastrous. The Anglican lecturer uncovered the grievances of the Anglicans against Catholics and mapped out strategies for the religious war. The lecture can be summarized as we highlight those areas that touch our discussion in this chapter:

- i. The majority of the Easterners are becoming Roman Catholics and the difficulty about it is that once a Roman Catholic, always a Roman catholic. This trend should stop;
- ii. Anglicans should not build on an assumption that one day these institutions which form the foundation and future of

Catholicism in Nigeria will collapse and Anglicans would take the lead. That is only a wishful thinking.

- iii. The Roman Catholic threat is colossal. The Igbos take religion serious and that why the Roman Catholic Church decided to direct its attack on the East. “The west is now enjoying a protestant ascendancy. But who knows for how long?”
- iv. The effort of the Roman Catholic Church is formidable: The effort does not appear to be spontaneous or unplanned reaction to a sudden obstruction. It was calculated, carefully planned and lengthily prepared offensive, directed by an expert strategist and an overwhelming powerful personality.¹⁵

Although Enemo did not name this ‘expert strategist’ and powerful personality, surely he must be referring to Bishop Shanahan. The Anglican lecturer went on to identify the areas of success registered by the Catholics and their strategies too:

- i. The Roman Catholics have made **Education** an evangelistic tool and they are succeeding. They built seminaries and convents to foster evangelism. “Another reason for the Roman Catholic success is the fact that every Roman Catholic is an evangelist”.
- ii. The Anglicans were called open to learn from the ‘secrets’ of the Catholic successes. These included their loyalty to Roman authority and leaders; they believe in the sanctity of the mission of the Church. As for **personal touch** Catholic priest dwarf their counterparts in the protestant Churches:

Their priests are very approachable. They play with children in the streets and visit the poorest houses in order to make converts. They associate with the high and the low. Their school children bring their fellow school children. Mothers bring their children. Children bring their brothers and sisters in their beloved Church. Members go about baptizing children thus laying claim on them for the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁶

Enemo ended the X-ray of protestant deficiencies and the Catholics' secrets of success by sounding a note of warning before proposing solutions to the 'protestant dilemma': "But it is clear that as compared with the Roman Catholics, we are not advancing as we ought to do. Every person in the country knows it and all classes of Anglicans are alarmed."¹⁷ Among the solutions he proposed included a strong awareness of what he continued throughout his lecture to refer to as "***The Roman Catholic Challenge***". In the first place, it involved the use of all available means, fair and foul to counteract Catholic expansion and proselytism. All Anglicans were called upon to be evangelists and employ all sorts of propaganda to attract children and adults to protestant schools and Churches. As far as protestants of all denominations were concerned Catholics had successfully used the school for the promotion of Catholic faith and practice. If the non-Catholic Churches were ever to survive the onslaught there was an urgent need to build more schools, expand the existing ones and staff them with the best qualified teachers that could be found anywhere.

It has thus dawned on the Anglicans that the school was the most potent recruiting ground for future Christians and the mission's most important agency. The Anglican clergy were particularly alerted and made to realize the danger which their Church authority claimed were being posed by the efficient educational strategy employed by the Catholic Church to maintain stronghold in Eastern Nigeria and particularly in Igbo land. Military terms employed by Anglican authorities to send the message of war across the region were in fact reminiscent of the circumstances of actual battle. Urging the Anglican soldiers of fortune to get prepared, Enemo said: "***Let us all realizing our danger, regard the battle as our personal affair, and go out into the field believing that all depends upon us.***"¹⁸

Archdeacon Henry Johnson of the Church Missionary Society was once in a similar mood, reacting with aggression when Catholic missionaries made efforts in 1882 to come into Eastern Nigeria. He did not hide his feelings and hatred for the Catholic Church, and his preference for military and medical terms in expressing his feelings showed clearly what must have been fed into the consciousness of his flock:

I would prepare before hand for the inevitable invasion. I would occupy the chief points at once with a competent number of able men. I am instructing the agents to fill the minds of the converts with the important passages of scripture of which there is no better antidote against the insidious teachings of Romanism.¹⁹

The seeds of discord sown through such utterances and writings no doubt yielded bitter fruits, clearly seen in the various denominational rivalries which have continued up to the present times. The protestant call for battle was actually heeded as Africans, Nigerians and Igbos from the same families, kindreds, villages and towns, but who by one reason or the other found themselves in opposing Church camps pitches battle against one another. The battle line had thus been drawn and committed Anglican lecturer and evangelist, E.O. Enemo had in fact blown the whistle. The enemy had clearly been identified:

If from the highest executive of our Church to the enquirer we wake up from our slumber, appreciate the magnitude and possible consequences of the Roman Catholic challenge, modify our policy after careful re-examination and equip ourselves like men and go out to fight for existence and survival, all will be well. Let us not find solace to our conscience in the belief that there are other protestant bodies. The Anglicans outnumbered the Roman Catholics before and we must work hard to maintain our own position.²⁰

ECUMENISM AND THE AFRICAN CHURCH: The Nigerian Perspective

If what we have discussed so far can be regarded as a 'preamble' to the topic on *Ecumenism* and the *African Church*, it is not a wasted exercise. It has been an effort to discover ecumenical movement as Vatican II proposes it and to see if it has any future in the African Church. Are there signs to show that various Churches in Africa are moving towards unity or at least dismantling the garb of hatred, distrust and rivalry? Are these Churches moving towards closer cooperation and friendship or are they moving farther apart? Are there areas where these Christian Churches can

at least have a common stand? These may be issues affecting the political, economic and social life of the African nations and peoples. Some of these issues include democratic principles in politics, matters affecting human rights and freedom of expression, political instability in most African nations, normally brought about by the incessant changes of governments in military coups. Have the Christian Churches any common ground on moral and social issues like abortion, birth control, unemployment, bribery and corruption, oppression of the poor, management of schools and hospitals?

Answers to these questions will definitely help in the assessment of the situation. Have we sincere dialogue or confrontation, mutual trust or suspicion and skepticism? Have we healthy competition or rivalries? In short one has to put the first question first, thus whether the Ecumenical Movement has ever taken off in Africa? If yes, how successful has the movement been?

Rivalries, unhealthy competitions, mutual distrust and skepticism

It is self deception to claim successes where there are not. And if we are telling ourselves the bitter truth, we may have to accept the fact that ecumenism in the African Church is not an exciting topic. One does not need to travel a long distance in Nigeria or elsewhere in Africa, or read volumes of books to arrive at a disappointing conclusion that the African Church is ripped with rivalries, unhealthy competitions, marked with mutual distrust and skepticism. As far as **Ikenga Ozigbo** is concerned, it is all “lip service ecumenism and largely cosmetic.” The thorny and intriguing issue of Christian disunity has become an African problem, as the virus which spread from Europe, found a congenial home in the black continent, having thoroughly infected millions of Africans.²¹ There is no doubt that every Christian denomination and sect, from the extreme Orthodox to the protestant fringe types, have found a safe haven in black Africa. As inter-denominational rivalries and fragmentation of already splinter Churches continue to deepen, the newly founded ones devise clever means of separating from parent bodies while assuming autonomy. The word **New** is added to distinguish the ‘old’ from the ‘new’. It is a sure sign of **disunity** and struggle for leadership; **New** Church of Christ, **New** Church of God mission, **New** assemblies of God mission, **New** End of time gospel mission. Perhaps it is only the Catholic Church which has not been affected by this **New** trend in fragmentation. Catholics who

however abandon the Catholic Church and found **New Churches** do not claim to have founded **New Catholic Churches**. The real battle as we have already seen has been between the two main Christian Churches:

The two main Christian Churches in Igbo land (The Roman Catholic and Anglican) are today matched in a bitter struggle with the above named brands of the Christian religion for the souls of the Igbo men. In truth, too many Churches have been spoiling the Christian broth for the Igbo people. The Church seems to have gone berserk and is, apparently, enjoying the masochistic drama of its self immolation.²²

The type of relationship existing between Catholics and other protestant denominations cannot be said to be cordial. And a cursory look at both the global and the Nigerian scenes will help to highlight the disturbing inadequacies of the ecumenical endeavour in Nigeria. To illustrate our stand we examine the following issues as far ecumenism is concerned: (i) **Politics** (ii) **Educational and other establishments** (iii) **Leadership struggle** (iv) **The Clergy** (v) **Intrigues**

Politics

Catholics and Protestants are usually divided on political issues. Like Islamic religion and politics, the protestant Churches are more closely linked with politics and political institutions world wide. While Catholics have been told to shun politics and the Catholic clergy banned from active participation in politics, protestants are generally well groomed in politics and always out manoeuvre Catholics in political matters. **The Anglican Synod**, for example is well organized and sophisticated politico-religious forum in which the Anglican regional Church authorities take far-reaching decisions – ranging from minor religious question to political, social and economic issues of both national and international interest. During elections for example, the Anglican synod decides on the common stand of all Anglicans on important issues like *candidates and party or parties to be voted for*. Generally in the area of politics, protestants are better informed than Catholics. While Catholics are more open and flexible in the pattern of voting, Anglicans by ‘law’ may not vote for a catholic candidate, no matter the candidate’s suitability and acceptability among the people. The poorly uninformed Catholics only grumble when they discover, of course very late that they have been out-manoeuvred. Division, disunity and distrust naturally continue to widen.

The ugly implication of this situation is that the Christian Churches together are never in the position to assume a common stand on issues of political interest which have moral implications for the Christian masses. A common stand of the Churches could influence government policies. It is a lamentable situation indeed. The situation can be described as confused. Here, of course Moslems cash in the disunity of the Christian bodies to push in their views which normally reflect the Islamic interests. A political position in which a Christian is a favoured candidate can be lost to a Moslem as a result of disunity among Christian bodies.

But whatever the case may be our observations above go to expose the deep-rooted divisions that exist among Christians in Africa. As mutual distrust and hatred exist, the gap of disunity continues to widen. The birth of more Christian sects complicates the matter the more. These try to maintain their autonomy and are never in the mood for ecumenical dialogue or undertaking any common project with the other Christian bodies.

Educational and other establishments: Unhealthy competitions and rivalries

Motives behind the establishment of certain institutions (**Schools, Seminaries, Convents, Social Centres and Hospitals**) by some protestant Churches in Nigeria and other rival bodies in Africa do not call for emulation. Similar motives, inspired by the spirit of competition and rivalry lie behind the formation of some sodalities and associations by protestant groups. The idea is principally to **copy, compete and counter** the influence of Catholics in such areas or sphere. Some of these institutions and sodalities which protestants establish to compete and counter the influence of Catholics include of course **Schools and colleges, seminaries and convents, hospitals and health centres**. Others are the **Order of the knighthood, Boys' brigade, Christian Mothers and Fathers' organizations etc**. Some critics see such spirit of competition as 'un-healthy' as it breeds distrust and envy while others think that such competition should be encouraged as it fosters progress and development in both Church and society. As far as we are concerned, no one may easily dismiss the suggestion that protestants are only motivated by jealousy to counter the growing influence of Catholicism in Nigeria and if possible, even to stop the Catholic influence or blur the

noble vision and goals of these institutions and sodalities. Informed Catholics are often amused by tremendous efforts made by the protestants to **fight** Catholic initiatives and successes in various fields of human endeavour. It has ever been so in the past.

It is easy to see that generally the motive behind the establishment of **Protestant seminaries and convents** by the protestant denominations is jealousy and that of countering the long established tradition and influence of the Catholic Church in these domains. Anybody can explain the reason behind the establishment of **two seminaries – Catholic and Anglican** in the same small towns in dioceses East of the Niger. In one outstanding case, a Catholic community of a town had built a minor seminary and handed it over to the bishop of the diocese. As the seminary grew in fame and strength, the Anglican community got worried. Arrangements were also made to build a seminary which was completed in no distant time and also handed over to the Anglican bishop of the diocese. What a healthy competition! In another town, Catholics had completed a new secondary school for girls and called in the Catholic Church authorities to take up the management of the school. After a few months the Bishop of the Diocese handed over the managements of the school to Rev. Sisters of one of the congregations in the area. A flourishing girls' secondary school has sprung up in a once sleeping remote village, East of the great Niger river. Protestants in the area were not so happy. Without wasting time, they secured a large piece of land opposite the new Catholic secondary school for girls for the building a **rival** boarding school for their own girls – Anglican secondary school!

At present in Nigeria are scattered over 100 catholic congregations of African nuns and sisters. These sisters are heavily engaged in various types of lay apostolate work, including medical services and management of schools. Some run domestic centres and schools for the handicapped, leprosy clinics, maternity and old people's homes. These congregations of nuns have made tremendous impact in Nigeria and overseas in both religious and social life of the people. Their work, like that of the priests has continued to grow and their secondary schools for girls, or **Juniorates**, like the **Minor Seminaries** for boys, meant for easy formation of their candidates or aspirants have continued to popularize this institutions of women religious.

Like the Anglican seminary for boys, '**convents or juniorates**' for Anglican girls are springing up here and there in Nigeria. In the usual

spirit of **unhealthy competition**, motivated by jealousy, Anglicans are setting up their schools for ‘women religious’ to compete with the Catholic ones.

Sodalities and Church Groups

Spirit of rivalry and competition **not** solidarity and unity guides the protestants in their endeavours to build schools or found certain sodalities. In the same style of competition and rivalry, various protestant sodalities and religious groups, hitherto unknown in the history of development of protestant establishments, have continued to spring up within the protestant communities and Churches. These sodalities or groups take names, organizational structure and ethos resembling those of the Catholics. These include the knighthood and lay apostolate organizations. Sometimes to avoid confusion in nomenclature, Catholic groups and sodalities have learnt to add “**Catholic**” to their designations. This is true of the **CBCN – Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria**; to differentiate it from the **Anglican BCN. Catholic Women Organization** is normally written in full to avoid confusion with the **Christian Women Organization**, which is **Protestant. C.F.O. is Catholic Fathers’ Organization**, and **C.B.O. is equally Catholic Boys’ Organization**. For the counterparts of the **Catholic Block Rosary Crusade**, Anglicans opt for an entirely new designation, namely **Holy Cross Crusade**, (since Anglicans will have nothing to do with Mary and the Rosary).

The Knighthood and the Anglican Church

In Nigeria, Catholics have for long identified with the knighthood, an order which has nothing in common with Freemasonry and secret societies. There are various orders of Catholic knighthood in Nigeria. They include the Knights of Mulumba, St. John and Knighthood of St. Sylvester. Papal knighthood is bestowed on Catholic fathers as a token of meritorious service in the Catholic Church. Some critics claim that Catholic authorities established the knighthood for its lay faithful to counter the influence of secret societies in Nigeria and to deter Catholics from joining these unapproved sodalities. The Catholic knighthood has however grown in influence in Nigeria and the commitments of their members to Catholic faith and practice has won the admiration of ecclesiastical authorities, both within and outside Nigeria.

Of late Anglicans have to recognize the impact of the Catholic knighthood on the Nigerian Church, hence the need to found the **Anglican order of the knighthood of St. Christopher** which ‘competes’ with the catholic knighthood. In the Catholic Church, while aspirants to the order of knighthood would apply directly for membership, it seems that the membership of the knighthood of St. Christopher is based on the recommendation and approval of the Anglican synod.

Whatever differences one may discover in their recruitment techniques methods of organization and polity, one point is outstanding; the motive of the Anglican Church authorities in the establishment of the order is the same as we have seen in the discussion. Anglican counterparts are sought out and promoted to the ranks of the order to compete with Catholics whose members form the top cadre in the civil service, politics, law and in other professions. Today in Nigeria, most business tycoons and top government officials belong to Catholic and Anglican knighthoods of the Christian Church. It is an enviable honour to belong to any of these sodalities as ‘**Brothers**’ help their ‘**Brothers**’ in need, share secrets and pass-words.

It seems that Anglicans in Nigeria had admired the prestigious position of the Catholic knights in both Church and society. Like **Scribes and Pharisees**, they together with traditional rulers, titled men and chiefs are given front seats at social gatherings. The status symbol which the order carries has helped most of its members to climb the social and economic ladder of success and prosperity. A little secret sign, attire or car sticker reveals a member and contact once established with a highly placed brother knight, the brother in need is sure of God’s favours and such a contact can bring about fortunes and improvement in life.

It is therefore not surprising that this hitherto unknown order of brotherhood should attract the attention and interest of Catholics and Protestants. Although the knighthood has continued to grow in popularity in Nigeria, it has nonetheless become also controversial. In the eyes of some of the ordinary Christians, some members of the order are not thought to be worthy of the title. But besides this contention, one other point stands out clearly; the proliferation of the order of the knighthood in the Nigerian Church is creating more division and disunity in the Church. Rivalry and denominational interests continue to ravage the Church of Christ as leaders of the Church relegate the Christian virtues of love, brotherhood and unity to the background. Once again **Ecumenism** is in

jeopardy and this does not enhance the bright future of the African Church.

The Clergy and Ecumenism

There is also no doubt that the leaders of all Christian Churches including Catholics have a key role to play in any ecumenical movement worthy of the name. But unfortunately the attitude of the clergy towards ecumenism does not offer any reasonable cause for optimism. In most cases the clergy are even more divided than the laity. Unhealthy atmosphere of suspicion, skepticism and distrust beclouds the entire effort towards unity and tolerance. It is a common place to find a Catholic priest and a Protestant pastor living and working in the same town who have not known or visited each other. Often it is only at public gathering that they exchange greetings, in a hypocritically brotherly embrace and kiss of peace! Even in such public and social occasions where the clergy sit together, Catholic and Protestant ministers stare at each other like enemies who have little or nothing in common, other than perhaps the white cassock or the Roman clergyman or other clerical attire. The atmosphere of distrust that normally pervades leads to struggle for recognition, superiority or inferiority complex. Who should lead the mixed gathering in prayer? Who will bless the kola nuts; the Catholic priest or the Anglican pastor?

The Catholic clergy are more 'out-going', friendly and open than their protestant counterparts. While the Catholic priest may be prepared to pay friendly visit to his protestant counterpart in the same parish, the protestant colleague may not reciprocate the friendly gesture. Catholic priests on their part generally refuse invitations to protestant celebrations, while in most cases protestants ministers attend Catholic celebrations. Many critics, however are ready to point out that protestants are always ready to attend Catholic celebrations to show that Catholics and protestants stand on equal footing before God and man. But as far as Catholics are concerned, their own ministers are 'superior' to their protestant counterparts. The average protestant minister in the established Churches as well as in the Independent Churches is, no doubt, less well educated than the Catholic priest – native or foreign. A lower level of education makes for an inferiority complex, fear and compensating aggressiveness and fanaticism, the enemies of all ecumenism.²³

Enemies of Ecumenism:

Leadership struggle; superiority/inferiority complex

Most Catholics, if not all regard Catholic beliefs and practices as the ones that must be accepted by all and sundry. And if ecumenism involves dialogue for all Christian unity in which certain Catholic beliefs and practices should be suppressed in preference to the protestant ones, many Catholics would regard any such compromise as abomination. As far as these Catholics are concerned it is the protestants who should **abandon** their Church and return to the Catholic fold from which they separated. While Catholics, if they wish could attend protestant services during thanksgiving occasions and take the protestant communion; protestants may not venture to approach the altar rails at Catholic celebrations. They are of course reminded that the Holy Communion shared at the Catholic liturgical celebration or mass is for Catholics only, and of course those who were duly prepared for it. The story of a young Anglican couple that stood up to receive communion at mass is still told in one of the parishes in a Nigerian Catholic diocese. They received a strong reprobation from the Church wardens, who thought that the heavens would have fallen if by any accident, the priest had given the Anglican couple holy communion. In another incident an Anglican woman who attended a thanksgiving service at a Catholic Church was nearly beaten up by an angry Church warden and was immediately sent out of the Church. The woman thought that the holy communion at a Catholic celebration was a free-for-all meal!

But in the Anglican Church service, Catholic visitors who cared could take communion without qualms or opposition from any quarters. In some cases, however any Catholic who attends an Anglican services and partakes of their communion may face some sanctions or punishments from the Catholic quarters, what a paradox! As far as most Catholics are concerned, such close association and sharing at the spiritual banquets with the protestants is too premature. Ecumenism has not reached such a stage, if ever such a movement will bring about such union in the future.

Generally Catholics look down on protestant pastors whom they regard as inferior to the Catholic priests. Many even detest close association between their priests and protestant pastors. While protestants might rejoice and feel highly honoured when a Catholic priest or bishop accepts and honours their invitation to a protestant celebration, Catholics

are often never impressed by the presence of protestant clergy and prelates at Catholic ceremonies. While some catholic priests may show enthusiasm at ecumenical movements, lay Catholics show apathy to any type of closer union with non-Catholics.

“All Churches are not the same”

As far as many Catholics are concerned, including the clergy the Lord’s prayer “that they may be one”, does not mean that all Churches should be the same. There is a strong fear expressed by Catholics that protestants might construe any closer union with the protestant Churches to mean that the Catholic Church is no more ‘the mother Church’, from which the rest broke away as rebels. If protestants want any type of unity, they should simply in a solemn declaration renounce ‘Protestantism’ and return completely to the Catholic fold. For many Catholics, that is the simple interpretation of ecumenism.

Most Catholics alarmed by the proliferation of Christian sects and Churches in Africa, strongly insist that ‘all Churches are not the same’ and thus see any compromise with these non-Catholics, in matters of faith and practice as ‘watering down of the Catholic doctrine and practice’. They detest any arrangement within any ecumenical movements which will give Catholics and protestants equal status. For most that is an abomination!

If in the eyes of Catholics, the proliferation of sects constitutes a stumbling block to ecumenism, the growing diversity in belief and practice on the other hand is a scandal in itself. On the interpretation of the scriptures, for example, a type of tradition and uniformity have existed in the Catholic Church for long. Most Catholics today in Africa cannot tolerate the confusion that has set in the interpretation of certain texts of the bible by some of the protestant sects and the New Religious Movements. With the ‘new Pentecost’, the out-pouring of the spirit on individuals and groups, it seems the freedom to interpret as one wills has indeed exceeded its boundary. There are so many teachers, prophets and evangelists, teaching and interpreting the biblical text. Most of the itinerant evangelists have not even received the basic education and therefore command no teaching qualification and authority. The birth of new Churches and increasing number of evangelists are in fact closing any room for dialogue among the Christian Churches in Africa. Catholics are the least to consider such dialogue useful or meaningful. Any

impression, therefore created in any ecumenical movements that calls on all Christian Churches including Catholics for a round table conference in which 'all Churches are the same' will be abhorred by Catholics. What a blow to ecumenism!

Ecumenism and inter-denominational services

For many Catholics in Africa, as well as non-Catholics, ecumenism in all practical purposes simply refers to 'inter-denominational services'. In this case, during national and cultural celebrations, in which prayers are requested from Church bodies, Catholics and protestants could come together and conduct religious service that would take from the liturgies of the various Christians denominations involved. Perhaps the Catholic priest could be the 'chief celebrant', the archdeacon or the canon of the Anglican communion could preach the homily, the Methodist minister may be appointed to lead in the 'common prayer', while the evangelist of the Wesleyan Church could conduct a bible service. In order not to leave any of the other represented denominations idle, the Baptist Church choir could lead in the hymn singing. At the end of the 'ecumenical service' there may be few exchanges of cold greetings by concelebrants and all disperse.

This represents a typical ecumenical service in Nigeria, during big occasions like independent anniversaries, children's day celebrations, birthday anniversaries of some popular political or traditional leaders. Often confusion may arise over the venue of the ecumenical services. Naturally, Catholics presume it must be in the Catholic Church. But will the protestants pastors and prophets be allowed to sit together with their Catholic counterparts in the Catholic Church sanctuary? Perhaps protestants may be provided with seats outside the sanctuary; In most cases Catholics rejects the protestant Church premises for such joint celebration. They prefer a town hall or a public square. In extreme cases and for fear of adulteration or possible misconceptions, Catholic ministers try to monopolize the celebration, rejecting the 'protestant rituals'.

This is generally the type of situation in which the African Church, the Nigerian Church finds herself in ecumenical movement. About 30 years after the first green light was given by the Vatican II, directing and encouraging dialogue towards Christian unity, it does not seem that any significant progress has been made in Africa. Although the situation may

not be much different from elsewhere, in the western or eastern Churches, the African Church has indeed a long way to go in this movement.

Ecumenism: The African dilemma

In the first part of this chapter we concentrated on the situation and causes of disunity among the various Christian Churches in Africa. While we do not intend to sound too pessimistic, we however, strongly believe that the situation will not be better even in the very foreseeable future. In order not to build our theories on shaky and deceptive grounds and utopias, it is necessary to dive more into the causes of the deepening crisis facing ecumenism in the African Church, in what we refer to as **'The African Dilemma'**.

The first phenomenon that offers causes for concern is the sensitive nature of religion and religious practices. Religion, one can claim has divided peoples and nations, brothers and friends more than any other institution on earth. In Africa, religious institution is mostly responsible for African woes. If the conflict is not between Christians and Moslems on a large scale, on a relatively local situations, conflicts exists between Catholics and protestant Churches. Inter-denominational conflicts and struggle for leadership have dragged many Church and religious sects to court. Most Churches and their leaders have not known peace as abuses and scandals erupt here and there to put the Church of Christ to ridicule! Many concerned individuals, Christians and non-Christians have also asked the same questions which worry many leaders of the African Church. In Nigeria for example, community development projects are freely undertaken by various communities. In Igbo land 'launching' is synonymous with 'development and civilization'. Communities at various levels undertake development projects which include road projects, water, light, building of schools, health centres, markets, banks and industries. These communities start and execute various projects costing millions of dollars without government assistance. Nigerian communities at various levels organize cultural festivals together. In fact at present, in Igbo land, efforts have been made to unify certain cultural festivals and traditions. Annual New Yam Festivals, for example, are not new in this part of the world. They occupy a central place in Igbo cultural tradition and have been observed in one form or the other in thousands of communities, towns, villages, and hamlets over historical time. Today

National New Yam Festival is organized by Igbo Cultural Association of Nigeria. This is a right movement towards unity. Town Unions and various clubs come together under one umbrella to execute development projects and organize cultural festivities. In these unions and organizations Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers and even atheists and non-conformists vie for offices. A prophet of the Cherubim and Seraphim Order could hold the office of president of a town union, while a Catholic may serve as his secretary.

Generally good working relationship exists in these social and cultural organizations. Up to that area peace and harmony prevail. But alas! When a religious issue, a matter of beliefs and practices, creed and denominational leanings erupts in such gatherings and organizations, come and see how brothers and friends fall apart as they draw their daggers to defend their various religious convictions and practices. What a piteous spectacle! Enemies are made immediately and divisions are created as hatred, distrust and suspicion set in to disorganize a formerly united front. Why does “ecumenism” fail to work in the domain of religion, faith and practice? What a dilemma!

Polarization of Interest: Catholic-Protestant dichotomy

Another type of dilemma facing the Nigerian Church is what we refer to as “Catholic-Protestant dichotomy” in which the confrontational attitude of Catholics and Protestants towards each other is further sharpened by the polarization of the interests of both Christian bodies by state governments and their agencies. This does not create any conducive atmosphere for ecumenism. The impression always created by this dichotomy is that of enmity, disunity and rivalry. A few examples may make our contention here clearer.

The news media

In news coverage of religious and Church activities in Nigeria, great care is taken by government owned news media – radio, television and print media – to give “equal” attention to all the religious and Church denominations. While a religious news item may begin with what a Catholic bishop or clergyman said or did, it may not end without an information also about the activities or utterances of Anglican bishop or pastor, an Archbishop of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, a Prophet of the Healing Sabbath Mission or an Elder of the Presbyterian or Celestial

Church of Christ. And in order to accommodate many other Churches, references to the previous Church functions of the Episcopal Zion Church of Nigeria or the Church of God Mission may be included in the news item. In the national news media, the same trend is often followed, when the ‘dichotomy’ is between Muslims and Christians. In state owned radio and television where a Church service or religious programme is not publicly sponsored, equal time and attention are usually given to each religious denomination in the struggle to disseminate religious teaching to members.

In itself this phenomenon which looks like “a fair play policy” on the part of government owned media agencies in Church related matters may after all not produce the desired effects on the various religious denominations. It most often generates rivalries and unhealthy competition where each of the over one million “Churches”, “religious movements” and even lay apostolate organizations and religious sodalities seek recognition and representation in media coverage. The primary intention of these religious bodies is not evangelization or dissemination of Christian message, but that of recognition and finding an avenue for outwitting the others. Some of these religiously sponsored programmes are organized to ridicule the teachings and religious beliefs and practices of the other bodies. Most of the burgeoning Pentecostal biblical movements organize hours of sponsored religious programmes which are disgracefully aimed at dishing out distorted and misguided interpretation of the Bible meant to provoke the religious feelings of others or attack their practices. Naturally enmity and not friendly atmosphere pervades in such communities where these religious organizations operate. Where ecumenical spirit exists among Christian Churches, such opportunities offered in the media for evangelization could be gainfully used by the Christian Church to address itself to the social and moral evils in society.

Often the already bad situation in which the Christian Churches have been divided for long can be worsened by the attitude of influential members of these religious sects who occupy top positions in government parastatals. They use their positions to project the image, beliefs and practices of their own religious sects at the detriment of others. As a result of rivalries and distrust and unhealthy competitions which characterize the religious attitude of the Christian Churches, government had often intervened to ban all religious programmes in government

owned media houses. As individual religious groups and Churches cannot establish their own media houses, some resort to street and market place evangelism. While Moslems find it easy to take a common stand on issues of national and religious interest, Christian bodies are ever divided and separated apart by rivalries and competition. The proliferation of Christian sects points directly to the magnitude of disunity among Christian Churches in Africa. As for ecumenism the future really looks bleak. All the above factors of conflict which we have so far examined really go back to parent Christian Churches that brought Christian religions to Africa and also to the socio-political and religious climate of the receiving regions of Africa. They pose monumental challenges to ecumenism in Africa.

AFRICAN CHURCH AND ECUMENISM: WHICH WAY FORWARD?

With Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, ecumenical dialogue have made significant impact on relationship between Catholic and Protestant Churches. Dialogue with other bodies has equally been extended to include Islam and Traditional Religion. Certain agreements have been reached between Roman Catholics and Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Lutherans on issues of marriage, the Eucharist and Ministry. Rev. Fr. Polycarp Chuma Ibebuike of the Diocese of Orlu, Nigeria, a Nigerian Theologian and German trained scholar has carried out a detailed research on Ecumenism and the Eucharist. His gigantic work is published in the book *“The Eucharist”: The Discussion by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (Lausanne 1927 – Lima 1982)*. The book traces the origin and development of the fifty-five years discussion, pointing out the controversial issues that beset the Eucharist, analyzes the solutions preferred and evaluates the response of some major Christian Churches.²⁵ In some major Western Church circles reports indicate that a major break-through has been made in some areas among various Christian Churches and the Roman Church. The hitherto tense atmosphere which has characterized the attitude of Christian Churches towards one another seems to be easing.

The Second Vatican Council came to a solemn end since twenty-eight years ago. What has the Church in Nigeria done so far to implement

the Council's demands as has been highlighted in the Council's documents? Perhaps one can readily point to the ecumenical body known as the *Christian Association of Nigeria (C.A.N.)*. CAN has so far served as a platform from which Christians speak with one voice in the present religious politics in our land. The body has always drawn the attention of the public and the government to the fact that freedom of worship is enshrined in our constitution and that our country is a secular state. So far such common stand by the Christian Churches has helped to avert religiously motivated riots. Although the Association, more or less organized on the national and the regional levels, has not permeated the grassroots level, and this, certainly is one of its defects. The efforts of CAN should however be commended, but these efforts can still be complimented by other ecumenical organizations when formed and set in motion. The CAN has a social wing for health-care services which is called Christian Health Association of Nigeria (CHAN). This body helps to purchase and distribute drugs to the Christian hospitals and health centres of the members Churches for their health-care services. Besides these two bodies and what they stand for, there has been only sporadic ecumenical services without continuity. It is obvious that we have a lot to do towards Christian unity in our country and in the entire African Church.

Towards a more meaningful ecumenism

The decree on Ecumenism emphasizes one important point, namely that any meaningful dialogue requires mass participation of all Christians in any region in question. There is need to create the awareness of the ecumenical movement on the grassroots level. And one of the ways of doing this is the formation of ecumenical groups on the parish and station levels. The justice and peace commissions are already working on such grassroots levels thus lending weight to the serious issues which such commissions have to deal with. Having been well equipped with the correct *concept* and *goals* of ecumenism, positive results and improved relationships can be expected from the movement, also on the global level.

Ecumenism: A new concept, a new type of relationship

For ecumenism to succeed in Africa there is need to establish a clear concept of the movement and even so its goals. Having inherited a

divided church in Africa and also having made our own contributions towards the growing conflict and rivalries, it is time to re-define the type of relationship between the Christian Churches which can lead to the traditional ideology of 'Live and let live' embedded in the African culture: The "New" concept of ecumenism and relationship we are proposing is not really *new*, in the sense that it has been implied in the definitions of the movement in the past pronouncements by the Catholic Church. As for Vatican II, for example, "Ecumenical Movement means those activities and enterprises which, according to various needs of the fostering of unity among Christians" [**Decree of Ecumenism, no. 4**]. The opening words of Papal Encyclicals are commonly used as their titles and this conciliar document referred to as "*Unitatis Redintegratio*" (Restoration of Unity), (Officially too called Decree on Ecumenism), simply indicates that unity among Christian Churches does not exist. Something was needed to be done about it.

In a broader outlook, the working paper on the African Synod outlines the aims and objectives of ecumenical movements in the modern times.

"It aims at overcoming obstacles to unity posed by differing doctrines, disciplines and structures so that all Christians may give common expression to their faith in Jesus Christ and undertake in common the evangelization of human society [**Instrumentum Laboris, p. 62**].

Evangelization of human society today in the pluralistic world of man has more open tasks and is more sophisticated in approach. It **cannot** be limited to the simple message of salvaging the **soul** from eternal damnation. It embraces the totality of the human person and society here and now. To a large extent such an assignment can bear big fruit if it is undertaken by **all** and in common.

There is therefore need to show maturity and tolerance in new relationship and escape from the memories of unnecessary and bitter conflicts. The memories of the narrow concepts of ecumenism should not be allowed to becloud the new relationships:

Maturity should rather be understood as the Church in Africa taking its historic destiny and the future of Christianity in the

continent into its own hands. This must mean an ecumenism which refuses sterile and useless controversies but humbly and kindly searches for the meaning of the Christian message for our people.²⁶

So many factors dictate the urgent need for peace and unity in Africa today. Ethnic and religious violence has contributed much to the woes of Africa today. Why the destruction of lives and property in religious riots in Nigeria and in many other African states? Why the bitter religious struggles between the Christian south of Sudan and the Moslem north? Such conflicts have kept many Africans in perpetual bondage of poverty and hopelessness. Such religious dichotomies and conflicts exist in many parts of the world and naturally remain scandalous moments in human history and development. Should they be allowed to continue anywhere in the world? A greater maturity and sense of mission should be exercised today in Africa in the search for harmony and co-existence between brothers and nations:

It would mean an exploration into the memory of our various traditions, not only to secure our identity but also to take up to the inter-dependence of the various Church communities. It would mean a rejection of exclusive or controversial theology which sees the other Churches as adversaries: a theology interested in asserting the difference between one community and the other. Our ecumenism must distance itself from the linear tendencies of the western thought patterns and pay close attention to the African traditional, cultural perception of the universe.²⁷

Africa without the imported Christian religion, Africa unconquered by Moslem jihadists, would have known and enjoyed peace and development, and of course unity than Africa with thousands of Christian religious sects and Moslems communities. The reaction of the traditional religionists and neo-cultural revivalists points unmistakably to this dilemma. Obierika in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was referring too to this very dilemma when he lamented, questioning the purpose of the whole venture:

How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together as we have fallen apart.²⁸

As the elders of Umuofia, representing the primitive tribes of the lower Niger confessed it was too late to stop the spread of the white man's religion and its divisive elements. *"Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they helped to uphold his government"*.²⁹

The Way Out

Some concerned writers and religious leaders have suggested some ways by which Africans as well as protagonists of ecumenism can come out of the dilemma. Already the Catholic Church, led by the Vatican II has helped to great extent to diffuse the tension, part of which it originally created. There is **dialogue** and no more **monologue**. And happily enough the new theology of salvation has completely destroyed the myth of *'extra ecclesia nulla salus'* (outside the Church no salvation), thus breaking the barrier at least partially which had kept Christians and non-Christians, Catholics and protestants, believers and non-believers into camps. From their camps, and each assuming full authority to 'loose and bind', excommunications and eternal damnation in hell fire were freely pronounced on the non compromising 'sects'. In most case, it has taken so many years of reflection, dialogue and theologizing to reconsider previous postures, in order to accommodate one another once again in the 'Noah's Ark'. At least the number of requirements and qualifications has been drastically been reduced to a minimum; ***"If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and if you believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved"*** (Rom. 10:9). At least this suffices for a Christian. It is by believing with the heart that you are justified, and by making the declaration with your lips that you are saved, and not necessarily by belonging to a particular Church or holding fast to certain creeds and traditions. And even for non-Christians and non-believers, the road to salvation was no more thorny as in the past. They,

too can be saved. Through dialogue and collaboration with these adherents of other religions, and in witnessing to Christian faith and life, 'the Church acknowledges, preserves, and promotes the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture' (Nostra aetate, nr. 2)

Today there are common grounds on which Christian bodies can operate. And there are not a few who hold the view that the old points of controversy have lost their relevance. As for Karl Rahner; "The most urgent need is to develop among all the Churches a 'theology of the future' which will have something to say to the world of **Today and Tomorrow** on actual condition of modern living".³⁰ Doctrinal differences may continue to exist, but these should no more constitute obstacles to peace and development. Christians of all sects can come together and undertake projects that can inspire believers and non-believers to greater ideals and commitment to peace and justice. As for Uzukwu African Churches, especially the mainline Churches, originating from missionary preaching must get beyond controversy and move towards the healing of memories, in order to face challenges of the Church in Africa today.³¹

"That they may be one: A new concept

We do not hesitate to propose that ecumenism in Africa, as well as in other parts of the world should no more be taken in a narrow sense of establishing 'communion'. "*That they may be one*" should not be taken in the sense that all other religions, Christian and non-Christian should abandon all their religious doctrines and convictions and dismantle all their external structures to subsume under one single (Catholic) Church, under one leadership. This may be an incredibly difficult task to accomplish today and even in the utopic year **2000**. The notion of the Catholic evangelization which saw paganism, Islam and Protestantism as evils which must be up-rooted is no more tenable. Today the Catholic sees non traditional religion, Islam and Protestantism as partners in dialogue, in the promotion of world peace and general welfare of mankind. These other religious are no more regarded as bitter enemies that must be destroyed. Less efforts are geared more today towards their accommodation than elimination. The need to confer with them in resolving certain issues and problems – religious and non-religious has occupied the attention of various religious bodies.

If Ecumenism in Africa is seen in a new lime-light, the tendency to exaggerate problems and areas of difference among the various Churches and institutions will be minimized. With time dialogue will centre on **common areas of interest** than on **doctrines**, on the recognition of the values found in each religious group than on the emphasis on the superiority of one group over the other. There is ample evidence that doctrinal differences do not constitute a stumbling block any more to peace and co-existence among the Christian Churches. With the 'revolution' in biblical studies and interpretation in Africa, Christian Churches including the Catholic Church are beginning to discover certain 'truths' contained in the living word of God which many Africans claim had been hidden from them by the Christian missionaries and mother Churches. With the upsurge of liberal interpretation of the biblical texts, Africans who can even now read the bible in their local languages have come to appreciate the 'simplicity' of the biblical texts. The doctrines propounded by the Christian leaders and their theologians, are in most cases not found in the bible. The itinerant evangelists of the Living Word Mission, Orlu Chapter claimed in an open bible lecture that Catholics were 'adding' a lot to the written word of God. Catholics were also accused of 'cutting off' some materials from the bible to suit their selfish ends, when for example according to Revelation 22.18, God said, 'this is my solemn declaration to all who hear the prophecies of this book. If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him every plague mentioned in the book. If anyone cuts off anything out of the prophecies in this book, God will cut off his share of the tree of life and of the holy city which are described in the book.' As for the evangelists of many protestant and Pentecostal groups this 'breach' of the biblical injunction constitutes the parting of ways with the Catholics. In their ignorance of the modern biblical criticism, they fail to grasp the meaning of the text of Rev. 22.18. What a pity! Their interpretation of some of the Catholic Church's teachings, e.g. on the Sacraments and Sunday/Sabbath obligations is equally based on ignorance of the historical and textual criticism of the bible. But whatever the case may be, for many years since the advent of Christianity in Africa, these Christian sects have continued to cling fanatically to some views and interpretations of some biblical texts. It is unlikely that ecumenical dialogue would help in the shifting of positions. This is a big blow to any type of ecumenical movement!

A new type of relationship: 'live and let live'

At least in Africa we are sure it is a new type of relationship among all Christian Churches that can pave the way for any meaningful dialogue and ecumenism. This new type of relationship based on the African tradition of 'live and let live', will certainly form the basis for 'unity' among all Christian Churches. It presumes the establishment of common areas of interest which will benefit the Christian Churches as a group, as well as the entire nations of Africa and the peoples of Africa. Such a movement should of course require mass education and mass participation of all Christians at all levels – from the stations, parish, diocesan, regional, national to international levels. By creating a correct awareness of the objectives and goals of such an ecumenical movement right at the local levels, it is likely that the impact of ecumenism will be felt at the other higher levels.

Some of the common projects and areas of cooperation are many and have also been pointed out by the other writers and Church promoters of ecumenism. They include **education, social, and cultural services, medical services**', joint ventures in **relief services**. Inculturation, e.g. should no more be the monopoly of Catholics. Other Christian Churches should show interest and commitment in the search for modern and most effective ways of making Christianity more meaningful to the Africans. All Christian bodies in a particular region should unite and take a common stand on the participation of Christians in some of the traditional institutions like title taking and festivities. It is not right that Christian bodies should hold divergent views on such issues concerning the African traditional heritage.

Another important issue in the **New Ecumenism** is that of the translation of the bible into African languages. The notion of 'protestant and Catholic' versions of the bible should disappear. Experts from the various bodies should be able to produce vernacular bibles in African languages. These of course should receive the joint approval of all the Church bodies and leaders. At various levels, experts and ordinary Christians should undertake common studies and assemblies for the dissemination of Christian message.

Common **liturgical services** during big occasion of national or regional interest should be undertaken by the Christian bodies, including Catholics. Such has for long constituted the most common ecumenical forum for various Church denominations. Other non-Christian bodies,

including Moslems usually envy such coming together of Christians in matters concerning regional or national welfare.

Another important area which imperatively demands greater solidarity among Christian bodies is in the thorny issue of the **Moslem-Christian** confrontation. Dialogue with Islam has not been an easy one, right from the local to the international level. Moslem domination in religion and politics has for long constituted a big threat to peace and co-existence among all religious bodies in the modern world. The matter has worsened today with the growing wave of Moslem fundamentalism and what looks like organized terrorism against peoples and institutions who do not support Islam or observe and apply the Islamic law to the minutest detail. Non-Moslems, particularly Christians in Moslem dominated nations live in fear. "This is the dark side of Islam, which show its face in violence and terrorism intended to overthrow the modernizing movement of secular regimes and harm the western nations that support them. Its influence far out-weighs its numbers".³²

Christians have therefore every reason to **unite** and defend themselves against the Moslem onslaught and fundamentalism. If there is no other area where Christians can claim success in ecumenism they can do so in their vanguard to oppose the expansionist Moslem programme and domination in politics. The aftermath of Moslems attacks on Christians and their Churches has recently become a source of strength and unity for Christians. As Christians bemoan their sad fate in the hands of Moslem fundamentalists, they naturally come close to one another, at least to take common stand on future dealing with Moslems. Thus ecumenism is being recognized by the various Christian Churches as a useful movement, at least in times of need.

Conclusion

Dialogue among Christian Churches and non Christians bodies cannot be said to have yielded any wonderful results. There are still differences, mutual distrust of one another as well as rivalries in the African Churches. But nobody can deny that some type of ecumenical movement geared towards achieving common grounds in some areas outside creed is taking place in Africa as in the parts of the Christian world. In Nigeria today CAN, (Christian Association of Nigeria), a parent body of the various Christian bodies including the Catholic Church is formidable body to reckon with in the Nigerian religious-politics. In the past

Christian Churches had spoken with discordant voices and each had pursued its own policies and programmes, often in the bid to outwit the other.

Today **CAN**, speaks with one voice in matters of government policies on religious matters. During the turbulent **OIC** (Organization of Islamic Conference) controversy in Nigeria, **CAN** was vehement in its condemnation of government policies and was out even for an all out war against any government move to mix religion and politics and particularly any government support or strategy for the islamization of the country. **CAN**, has also, unlike in the past spoken with one voice on the issue of Church participation in the running of schools. **CAN** has insisted that schools which were formally being managed by Church bodies, but were taken over by government at the end of the Nigerian civil war should be handed over to their former proprietors.

Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians, like **CAN**, tries to foster unity among various Christian bodies in Nigeria through its *Bulletin on Ecumenical theology*. It has established contact with **CAN**, but in its News Letter of June 28 1993, **EANT**, it reported that it appeared that **CAN** was more concerned with social issues than with problems of a divided Christianity. But **EANT** states clearly its objectives when it writes:

We may therefore stress that our Bulletin aims at critical dialogue between Christian theology and our social, political and economic realities; dialogue with other religions is also our concern because of the impact of inter-religions relationships on society. But our vision has to go beyond Nigeria to include Africa and even the third world.

There is every reason to believe that in the parts of Africa, Christian Churches are 'united' more than in the past. At least Moslem fundamentalism or fear of domination of Islam has made the Christian bodies to come closer to one another, and various associations are being formed. Most of these movements or associations have registered with the **AACC** (**All African Council of Churches**) and **WCC** (**World Council of Churches**). However, since they are splinter groups, they constitute part of the problem of keeping the peace in the one Church of

Christ. On the other hand, they may indicate some of the parts to be taken by the Church in Africa which searches unity in diversity. While no idea of 'total unity' of all the Churches in Africa is envisaged in the near future, African Church leaders may rest content with the progress made so far. The 'African solution' to the problem of ecumenism may still be found in the principle of **'live and let live'**. It is still possible to achieve some type of **'unity in diversity'** which does not contradict or ignore the motive of the prayer of the Lord, "that they may be one".

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