



AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

A FETSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF
REV. PROF. ISAAC DEJI AYEGBOYIN FNAL
PROFESSOR OF CHURCH HISTORY AND AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY



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Chapter Forty Four

African Christianity and the Modern Challenges of Ecumenism: The Nigerian Context

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Abstract

The engagement of the founding fathers of ecumenism in bringing church leaders to the realisation of the need for collaboration towards the achievement of unity especially among Christians in Nigeria is laudable. Even evidences abound that in recent times those who had shown apathy to ecumenical activities in Nigeria in the past are beginning to embrace the ideals it stands for with apparent commitment. However, in contemporary times, some attitudes and practices which nearly frustrated the efforts of ecumenism at inception are rearing their heads again; and this is inimical to the unity of churches in Africa. This paper, therefore, attempts an investigation into such attitudes and practices with a view to ascertaining their effects on the unity of the church and making useful recommendations for the promotion of ecumenism in Nigeria.

Keywords: African Christianity, Challenges of Ecumenism, Nigerian Context.

Introduction

The history of Christianity in Africa which some scholars convincingly traced to the missionary activities of St. Mark in Alexandria around the first century of Christian era in the Roman Empire or the pioneering efforts of Italian Christians in Carthage in later centuries should actually be traced to the events that occurred in the biblical worlds. That is why one finds it convenient to agree with the opinion expressed by erudite scholar like Ayegboyin that African Christianity dates back to the time of Jesus. He substantiated this assertion by making reference to the flight of Joseph and Mary to Egypt for the safety of Jesus Christ; the contact of a Libyan, Simon of Cyrene, with Jesus; the exploits of Appolos, a native of Alexandria who was a missionary to Europe and of course many encounters that African natives had with Christianity during the time of the early Apostles.¹

¹ I. D. Ayegboyin. 2017. "Taxonomy and Revolution in African Christianity: The Nigerian Experience", Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan, November 2017,7.

Having moved from North African regions to Asia and Europe, the presence of Christianity was finally felt in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria, starting from the coming of the Capuchin Monks from Portugal to Benin and Warri axis in the fifteen century to the activities of the Wesleyan Methodists and Anglican missionaries in Badagry in the nineteenth centuries.

Ecumenism finds its origins first in the trans-denominational movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The close cooperation of many Protestant denominations in mission work compelled their members to consider their differences and work toward some kind of unity.² The beginning of the ecumenical movement is normally reckoned with the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. Other aspects of the movement soon followed: in 1921, the International Missionary Council was established, followed by the World Conference on Faith and Order in 1927 (focusing on doctrinal differences). All of these led to the establishment of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948.³

These international developments were paralleled by national movements in many countries, including the United States, where the National Council of Churches of Christ began in 1950. The constituent members of these bodies have met consistently during their existence, and much discussion and dialogue have taken place regarding areas of agreement and disagreement among the various groups. While much of the actions of ecumenism have taken place within the national and international ecumenical organisations, other efforts have been undertaken on the denominational level. Roman Catholics have engaged in dialogue with any branch of Christendom willing to converse with them; Lutherans, Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox, and many other such groups have engaged in much dialogue. In 1997, the Episcopal Church in the United States and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America established full communion with one another, perhaps one of the greater displays of professed unity within the movement. The conversations and joint participation in matters of agreement continue to this day.⁴

Shortly after the inception of Christianity in Nigeria, early traces of ecumenism surfaced. The leading missions in the country started to display inter-denominational cooperation evidenced in the joint Christmas service in 1842 by both Thomas Birch Freeman of the Methodist Mission and Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society at Badagry;⁵ the Hope Waddel's consultation with the Baptist at Fernando Po (now Bioko) before moving to Calabar to establish the Presbyterian Mission in 1846⁶; the commitment of the Baptist Mission to the care of the Methodists⁷ when Rev. R.H. Stone went on furlough in 1869; provision of accommodation by the CMS and Wesleyan missionaries to Rev. Bowen during his eighteen-month stay in Abeokuta between 1850 and 1851.⁸ That afforded him the

² Saayman, Willem, "Unity and Mission", Pretoria: University of South Africa: *Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today*. Preparatory Paper No. 1 for the WCME Conference in Athens, May 2005.

³ A.S. Oyalana, *Christian Witnessing in Nigeria: Common and Divided*, (Ibadan: Daystar Press), 10.

⁴ E. R. Longhenry, "A Study of Denominations", <http://deward.com/product>. Retrieved in May 2018.

⁵ M. Oduyoye, *The Planting of Christianity in Yorubaland 1841-1888*, (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1969), 25.

⁶ G.E. Igwe., *Church Union in Nigeria*, (Enugu: Ark Publication, 2000), 3.

⁷ L.M. Dural, *Baptist Mission in Nigeria*, 97.

⁸ S.M. Mepaiyeda, "Ecumenism in Mission Churches as a Typology for Unity among the Contemporary Nigerian Christians", in *Ecumenism: The Nigerian Experience*, eds. Fatokun S.A. et al (Ibadan: End-Time Publishing House Ltd, 2010), 79.

favourable atmosphere needed to study the Yoruba language that was to help him when he began his full evangelical assignment in Ijaye and Ogbomoso.

Another evidence of the ecumenical nature of the missions was the relationship that existed between the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Missionaries. Crowther was said to have extended the bond of friendship and brotherhood to the missionaries of other denominations in his days. Typical of such gesture was his offering of free accommodation to the Catholic missionaries who arrived at Lokoja in 1884.⁹ They were housed at the Holy Trinity Anglican Church as a take-off point for their mission work. Crowther was said to have been driven by the conviction that working together will speed up the work of mission, since no single denomination can evangelise the entire nation. This action fostered unity between the Anglicans and the Catholics in Nigeria, a factor that was responsible for Christian unity in later years in the establishment of the Bible Society. The most spectacular of inter-denomination cooperation, understanding and assistance occurred when, in 1885, Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, an Anglican, willingly gave the Roman Catholics under the leadership of Father Joseph Lutz a parcel of land given to him by the Obi of Onitsha.¹⁰

The Beginning of Ecumenism in Nigeria

The turn of the 20th century is highly remarkable in the history of practical ecumenism in Nigeria because the foundation of what resembled ecumenism in Nigeria was laid in 1911 when the Presbyterians initiated a missionary conference on more practical issues. The outcome of the conference was to secure uniformity of discipline within the native churches founded by the different missionary societies, discuss such matters as the relation of the church to marriage under native law, the baptism of Christian women but who were married to polygamous husbands and the definition of spheres of influence in the untouched fields.

Besides, the conference was attended by the Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists. One of the main reasons for convoking the conference was to fight denominational competitions, that is, it was convened in order to break the Roman Catholic monopoly of the mission fields in Nigeria. During the conference, the issue of organic unity was ultimately discussed, the type that will erase denominationalism. Hence A.W. Wilkie, a participant of the conference declared:

We are not here primarily to establish in Africa, Presbyterianism or Methodism or any other-ism, but to preach Christ and take a lowly place under the guidance of the Spirit of God in the foundation of a church which shall not be foreign to the Africans.¹¹

The missionaries also felt that there was an urgent need for ecumenism in the land because the denominational gospel they brought to the Africans had created rivalry, division and enmity among the Christians instead of unity and love. The conference solemnly declared

⁹ Duke Akamisoko, *Samuel Ajayi Crowther in the Lokoja Area*, (Ibadan: Sefer Books Ltd, 2002), 84.

¹⁰ G.E. Igwe., *Church Union in Nigeria*, (Enugu: Ark Publication, 2000), 4.

¹¹ E. Ekpunobi, *We Are Closer Than We Think: An Analysis of Contemporary Issues In Ecumenism*, (Enugu: Rabboni Publisher International, 2001), 70.

the aim of missionary effort to be the establishment of one church of Christ. The conference resolved that, to attain this unity, there should be mutual and full recognition of the discipline of the churches of southern Nigeria. That an effort be made to obtain corporate unity of native churches. The argument here is that it is only by agreement that the desired Christian unity would be realised. In order to achieve the unification dream, the union was named “Evangelical Union of Southern Nigeria” by 1923. Moreover, by 1947, another missionary conference was held at Onitsha, with Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Qua Iboes, and Sudan United Mission in attendance. But the Sudan United Mission (the missionary body working in northern Nigeria, by then) was forced to withdraw from the conference because the colonial policy then could not favour her.¹²

Though these missions seriously worked for unification, they did not succeed. Nevertheless, the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 and its mandate on the unity of churches gave them the impetus for the struggle. A date for the inauguration of the church union (United Church of Nigeria) was fixed for 11th December, 1965 but it was aborted. Ekpunobi depicted the scenario by averring that despite all the noise about the proposed Church Union, it however failed for lack of clear ideology, inadequate mass education, personality conflict, ethnic sentiments etc. The failure of the church union initiative was because of interdenominational antagonism.¹³ Kalu opined that the missionaries came together to champion the cause of church unity but failed to fight the forces of rivalry. Therefore, they ended up fighting or pursuing their denominational interests, which finally killed the vision of the church union.¹⁴

The initiative was not a total failure because it gave rise to proactive ecumenical activities of member churches of the Christian Council of Nigeria. The council, established in 1929¹⁵ and made up of various Protestant churches, notably Church Missionary Society (CMS), now Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterian, Qua Iboe, and Salvation Army, provided a forum for member churches to co-operate on various projects relating to pastoral education, joint ownership of schools, and health institutions. And their aims were to foster and express the fellowship and unity of the Christian church in Nigeria, which will further enhance the realisation of its oneness with the church throughout the world. Finally, it aims to keep in touch with the International Missionary Council and the WCC (Article)¹⁶.

From the submission of Baur, it seems two major factors might be responsible for the abortive vision towards the realisation of church union in Nigeria as well as Catholic apathy to ecumenism. One was the fact that the effort was orchestrated only by Protestant missionaries championed by the Church Missionary Society. Two, rather than seeing ecumenism as a strengthening bond among all denominations in Nigeria, the Protestants saw it as a

¹² Osmond E. Nnebedum, “Ecumenism in Nigeria: The Roman Catholic Contribution”, M. A. Project Report Submitted to the Department of Religion, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, February 2009, 48.

¹³ E. Ekpunobi, *We Are Closer Than We Think: An Analysis of Contemporary Issues In Ecumenism*, 70.

¹⁴ O.U. Kalu, *Divided People of God*, (Lagos: NOK Publishers, 1978), 3.

¹⁵ Deji Ayegboyan & Ademola Ishola, *Rediscovering and Fostering Unity in the Body of Christ: The Nigerian Experience*, (Lagos: Wellspring Publication, 2000), 22.

¹⁶ Osmond E. Nnebedum, “Ecumenism in Nigeria: The Roman Catholic Contribution”, 2009, 58.

collaboration against the so called “Roman danger”. The Catholics thereby stayed away in order to discourage any participation with heretics- all Protestants.¹⁷

It was after the Vatican II declaration that African Catholics began to realise that what unites is greater than what divides them and began to see ecumenism as a common agenda. Hence, in Nigeria, there was a positive response from the Catholics who put in what could be described as minimal efforts to ecumenism. But from 1970 onward, records show that there was increased participation in ecumenical activities. Nnebedum claimed that formal and informal conversations, meetings and theological discussions began in earnest among the Catholic and Protestant ministers with the aim to facilitate the desired Christian unity in Nigeria.¹⁸ All these dovetailed into the establishment of the Christian Association of Nigeria, an adaptation of Christian Association of the North, on August 27 1976¹⁹ with the aim of defending the general interest of Christians in the nation as it serves as the watchdog of the spiritual and moral welfare of Nigeria.

The Strength of the Ecumenical Movements in Nigeria

The Christian Association of Nigeria for example has been active in sensitising the nation’s Christian churches of the need to desire and seek unity among various denominations. This, it did by breaking old bridges and boundaries between different Christian denominations that used to create enmity, rancor and disharmony. A typical example among others is the establishment of the National Anglican/ Roman Catholic Commission to engage in theological reflections on themes that have been discussed at international forums for consultation between the two churches.

In addition, CAN had continued to speak vehemently against injustice and discrimination against churches in Nigeria. In the late eighties, nine churches of TEKAN, a constituent part of CAN protested the imbalances in both religious issues and political appointments that favoured the Muslims during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. In year 2000, the CAN protested the adoption of Sharia law in northern states. Similarly, in February 2006, the CAN president, Primate Akinola, issued a statement in response to Muslims’ violent acts against the Christians, telling the former that they did not have a monopoly on violence.²⁰ Since then, CAN has always been actively involved in denouncing every action of government that undermined the survival of Christianity in Nigeria.

The aforementioned achievements notwithstanding, critics opine that CAN is better known for its role of defending Christianity than for its ability to unite Christians to a level of spiritual interaction and fellowship. This is evident in Gaiya’s submission thus;

¹⁷ J. Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, (Kenya: Paulines Publications, 1994), 108.

¹⁸ Osmond E. Nnebedum, “Ecumenism in Nigeria: The Roman Catholic Contribution”, 2009, 48.

¹⁹ J. Atuluku, *An Introduction to Ecumenism and Religious Dialogue*, (Abuja: Dolie Prints, 2014), 42.

²⁰ G.A. Robinson, “The Strength and Weakness of some of the Ecumenical Movements in Nigeria and the Role of the Anglican Communion”, Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of Directors of Ecumenism in the Anglican Communion, Nigeria at Agbarha-Otor, Delta State, 23-26 May, 2018,7.

The greatest achievement of CAN is the political unity it has provided for Christians in Nigeria. Furthermore, CAN has influenced Christian politicians to fight against the inclusion of Sharia courts in the constitution since 1978. The opposition to Nigeria's membership in the Organisation of the Islamic Countries (OIC) has been waged by CAN since 1987. As a result of the Kafanchan religious riot of 1987 in which churches, lives and property were destroyed, concerted efforts have been made by CAN to ensure the protection of the rights and safety of Christians in Nigeria.²¹

Challenges of Ecumenism in the Contemporary Nigerian Church

At the moment, despite the efforts of the unity-conscious custodians, it may be difficult for CAN to move beyond its current status of 'co-operation for defense' into the realm of genuine spiritual or Christian ecumenism. This is because key obstacles, traces of pre-CAN tension and quest for control are still present in the polity. Currently, some Protestants are still suspecting the Catholics, while some Catholics also see some Protestants clergymen as half-baked. The quest for power is another obstacle in the way of genuine Christian ecumenism. There are actually many problems faced by CAN that have made her work incomplete and weak.

Another problem is **fear of syncretism**. Many Catholics see ecumenism as a step to syncretism. In fact, a renowned Catholic such as Abbe-George De Nante condemned the Vatican II Council's document on ecumenism "Unitatis Redintegratio". According to him, bringing both Catholics and non-Catholics together for the purpose of unification means joining both real and quasi-church together which is real syncretism.²² This often makes the whole effort null and void. Sequel to this is the fact that some Catholics also see ecumenism as false-pan-Christian unity. There is a school of thought, especially the traditionalist Roman Catholics, which believed that any form of unity that is against a "return to the Catholic faith" is ungodly or a contradiction to the church's interpretation of the Bible.

Besides this, **superiority complex** especially among the clergy of some mainline churches also impedes the ecumenical progress in the country. For example, despite the efforts of Vatican II experts in convincing the Roman Catholic Church of the need to accept others as brethren, many of the catholic clergy still rate them as inferior or mushroom churches. This, as a matter of fact, intimidates some of the Protestant churches that they feel that accepting to be with Roman Catholic means losing their identity. Therefore, they perceive Catholics as intimidators, and partnering or dialoguing with them cannot bring about ecumenism.

Conservatism and intransigence on doctrinal matters by the Roman Catholic hierarchy also hinders the ecumenical action in Nigeria. Nnebedum recalled an unpleasant incidence that

²¹ M.A.B. Gaiya, "Further Reflections on Christianity in Northern Nigeria 1975-2000", in *Christianity in Northern Nigeria*, ed. E.P.T. Crampton, (Bukuru: ACTS, 2004), 260-261.

²² Abbes De Nantes, "He is Risen", *The Catholic Counter – Reformation in The 21st Century*. An Article Produced At Our Lady of Fatima Camp, 2007, <http://www.crc-internet.org/HIR 2008/March 66-3 htm>, 15/07/2008

occurred during the Reinhard Bonnke Healing Crusade at Nsukka. He claimed that the coordinators of the crusade visited the Catholic Bishop of Nsukka to ask for his support for the crusade, but he rejected and chased them out.²³ So, continuous denominational prejudice and rivalry has also made the message of ecumenism to be peripheral.

In addition, the retention of **bitter memories of strife and rivalry** in eastern Nigeria between the Catholic Mission and the Protestant churches starting from 1890's right up to the 1960's is still a challenge. In a similar way, N. Ndiokwere maintained that rivalries, unhealthy competition, mutual distrust and skepticism are bane of ecumenism in Nigeria. H. O. Okeke in fact concluded that the denominational rivalry is worst between Catholics and Anglicans at least in eastern Nigeria, where each targets the other in their relentless criticism and attacks.²⁴

The recent misunderstanding between the Anglican and Catholic churches in Anambra State over denominational boundary lends credence to the issue of mistrust, strife and rivalry, and this has dented the image of ecumenism in Nigeria. Integrity should be demonstrated by Christians who claim to be light of the society.

Furthermore, **proliferation of churches** in Nigeria has continued to hinder the dream of Christian unity. This is characteristic of Pentecostal churches which rather than team up with their parent churches and utilise their spiritual gifts, decide to mushroom Christianity in the name of church planting. But regardless of their claim, the church has continued to disintegrate, thereby making the dream for unity unrealisable. The leadership of ecumenical bodies especially CAN as well as the three tiers of government in Nigeria should devise a regulatory mechanism to control establishment of churches in the country. This will check the activities of those who leverage freedom of worship as enshrined in our constitution to blindly support the continuous proliferation which is against the spirit of ecumenism.

Moreover, another challenge militating against ecumenism in Nigeria is **politics and corruption**. The combination of politics with the roles of ecumenical bodies has made these roles to be polarised and seen as tools in the hands of any sitting government for the purpose of currying some political and economic gains and favour. The allegation of the political involvement of the immediate past president of CAN, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor in the botched arms purchase deals during the administration of President Jonathan amounted to loss of integrity by the leadership of CAN. Further still, it was an eye sore to see some CAN leaders tussling for money when the German televangelist Reinhard Bonnke came to Nigeria. Apart from this, many copies of the Bible and other instructional materials which Christ for All Nation (CFAN) brought in to be given for free were later seen in the bookstores and market places, courtesy of CAN leaders who had access to them.

To many observers, the political involvement of CAN is a misplaced priority because the motivation behind ecumenism originally was unity driven by mission. Closely related to the point stated above is government interference. The interference of government in ecumenism in the nation has constituted a major problem both at the grassroots and at the national level. It diverts the leadership of ecumenical bodies from its primary assignment just as it happened during the Middle Ages when such allegiance between the church and the state

²³ Osmond E. Nnebedum, "Ecumenism in Nigeria: The Roman Catholic Contribution", 2009, 67.

²⁴ O.U. Kalu, *Divided People of God*, 4.

nearly spelt doom for the evangelization agenda of the church.²⁵ Hence, many Christians in Nigeria have been warning the leadership of CAN to be wary of its rapport with the secular government, not because such synergy is not beneficial to the church but because of great consequences it has on the sanctity of Christian message.

Finally, **doctrinal differences** have posed a great challenge to ecumenical movement in attempting to unify all churches in Nigeria. Often, doctrines are formulated through theological convictions and the mode of biblical interpretations. But unfortunately, some Christian leaders claim to rely on inspiration for interpreting the Bible. This can only lead to chaos and misunderstanding of the Bible which invariably will lead to wrong doctrines, since such inspiration could be eroded by human manipulation. The response of such leaders to ecumenism is cold because of the belief that since their doctrinal beliefs differ from other denominations, it would be difficult to collaborate or understand Christianity the same way. Therefore, despite vigorous attempts being made by stakeholders in ecumenism in Nigeria, doctrinal differences based on the different Christian traditions upheld by several denominations have remained a cog in the wheel of church unity.

It would be recalled that this issue came up strongly in the early church when the Judaizers proposed that Gentile converts should be circumcised as a condition for their acceptance into the Christian fold. If not for the wisdom of the leaders then in resolving the issue, it would have led to a split in the fold. Doctrinal or theological controversies should not be allowed to affect Christian unity, but we need to remind ourselves that the Protestant reformation which recently marked its five hundred years anniversary centered on several important doctrinal disputes that the Roman Catholic Church refused to correct.

Recommendation and Conclusion

Having discussed the challenges facing ecumenism in African Christianity as exemplified by the Nigerian church, the following recommendations are hereby made. Firstly, the concept of the existence of “other sheep” justifies the diversified nature of Christianity today and should be enough reason for denominations to support efforts geared towards the realisation of church unity. When churches synergize, it leads to the development of closer relationships and better understanding of one another. Such demonstration of the visible unity of different denominations is the proof that the world needs to validate Christians’ claim to be the disciples of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the diversity that exists in ecumenism is to seek the glory of God, not a criterion for self-sufficiency in denominational enclosures.

Secondly, the theological, liturgical and pastoral vistas for ecumenism should be recognised. Apart from the glory of God as being foundational to ecumenical well-being, the other vistas or principles that would be needed for an effective ecumenism are theological, pastoral and liturgical. These three aspects have been areas of church divisions. There is much brokenness around the world that needs the pastoral antidote through the application of God’s word to the whole person for renewal and hope. It is from this point that our worship can truly flow with love from the heart towards the living God and fellow neighbour. When churches meet at the ecumenical level, they should share in their experiences and deliberate on how to tackle the problems facing humanity using the theological, pastoral and liturgical resources.

²⁵ John Foster, *The Setback and Recovery: Church History 2, AD 500-1500*, (London: SPCK, 1974), 125.

The churches in Nigeria should not only be active when there is a threat to their survival but also emulate the World Council of Churches which has been proactive in healing the brokenness in many regions of the world.

Furthermore, premium should be placed on spirituality and morality by churches in Nigeria. These have played unquantifiable roles in the current controversies in many churches. Spirituality is a person's disposition towards the precepts of God which controls his/her commitment and overall attitude. The spirituality of a person has direct impact on the person's moral life. The aspect of morality is not necessarily moralism but it is the self-controlling factor that makes one to imbibe the principles of conduct. Ecumenism has to emphasise the importance of spirituality and morality for its members because morality has become a big problem. The issue of homosexuality is fast becoming a normative reality which is considered a taboo in many cultures. Scriptures also condemn the practice of sexual immorality. As such, believers who believe that the Scripture is the word of God must refrain from such practices (Rom. 1:24, 26-27; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3, 5).

Moral chastity strengthens the church in its message. But the lukewarm attitude of the church in condemning the sin of gay marriage can weaken the Christian message to the fallen world whose morality is debased. Christians can only be effective in their message when there is no condemnation in their consciences. Spirituality and morality are the hallmark of a new person who emerges from the spiritual and moral decadence of the sickening world. This concurs with Paul's exhortation to believers (Eph. 4:17-24; Col. 3:7). Ecumenical movement should strongly emphasise spirituality and morality. This is important because the church can only stand strong when its spiritual and moral life consists together. This is the case because many national leaders are the product of the church. When the church stands strong in terms of its morality and spiritual commitment, it produces men and women of credible character that can be entrusted with national responsibilities.

In many cultures, especially African, homosexuality is considered a taboo. Scripture also condemns it. When this is taken on these horizons, the church and state can produce men and women of moral integrity for the good of the society. The good of the society can only be truly achieved if family values and integrity are also maintained. Abhorring gay practice protects the integrity of marriage and family values. A church and a good society cannot do without good family backgrounds that have moral integrity. There seems to be a compromise here and there in many ecumenical gatherings because of the fear of losing the membership of some churches and denominations even when such people are watering down or deemphasising scriptural principles.

It is argued in this section that when the church stands strong in terms of its morality and spiritual commitment, it produces men and women of credible character that can be entrusted with national responsibilities. But the reality on ground shows that most of ecumenical gatherings today are very much like political party rally where men and women who have no right standing with God jostle for positions in such ecumenical gatherings. Sometimes, some of the blocks of CAN hardly come together except when invited by a politician to unveil his or her manifesto. Such avenue should ordinarily be a good ground and opportunity for church leaders to draw the ears of Christian brothers and sisters who are aspiring for one political office or the other, reminding them of the fact that they are ambassadors of heaven and the church who must behave themselves when they are voted into

any of the offices. In several cases, the church leaders ended up singing the praises of such politicians because of financial gains.

In conclusion, it should be reiterated that ecumenism within the context of this discussion is the promotion of unity or cooperation among distinct denominations of Christianity rather than its understanding from the broad sense which is called religious pluralism. It promotes toleration, mutual respect and cooperation among Christian denominations. The realisation of this fact will definitely lead the body of Christ to dispense its rightful roles as the harbinger of peace in the society. It is a contradiction for the church which is bedeviled by internal crisis to attempt addressing any societal problem.

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