

# A Missiological History of Christian Association of Nigeria

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## Abstract

Christianity in Nigeria has a rich history; each denomination savors its beginning and peculiarity. Christianity entered Nigeria as a foreign religion, from the South, and Islam from the North. This pattern has defined the territories, leaving the middle belt as a zone of contest. This article is particularly on how the churches have attempted to form a collective mission front in the beginning, what happened to this effort and why it failed in some instances. The paper includes the development of the ecumenical bodies in Nigeria with indigenous churches. Christian Association of Nigeria receives special attention in the light of its prominence and influence.

**Key words:** ecumenism, history, mission, missiology, churches, African, Nigeria, development.

## 1. Introduction

The origin and development of ecumenism in Nigeria is related to the origin of the implementation of ecumenical missiology (Tai-Wong Lee, 2000). The World council of Churches as a global community of ecumenical bodies includes the Christian Association of Nigeria, the Christian Council of Nigeria, the Organization of African Instituted churches and the Fellowship of the Brethren. Each of these bodies is a community of interdenominational congregations and ministries.

There are many interecclesial bodies in Nigeria, each has a peculiar history built around the founders of the constituent denominations, the differences in these denominations and ministries derive either from the theological positions of its founders or the political structure of its original parents. Expectedly, there is overlap in the membership of the churches and ecclesial bodies with regard to the Christian Association of Nigeria.

There was a deep theological engagement prior to its formation because the foundation of each constituent body was important in determining the nature and function of the emerging union. Prior to this engagement, the Northern States Christian Association founded by Elisha Nwaya Bagaiya in 1964, started as a common front to enforce the right of northern Christians (van Gorder, 2012). This motive colors the character of what later came to be known as the Christian Association of Nigeria. This paper traces the formation of the Christian Council of Nigeria based on archival records and bibliographic data. It examines how faithful the body has been committed to the ethos of true ecumenism.

The magnificent Ecumenical Centre in Abuja is the symbol of Christianity and ecumenism in Nigeria. The history of this centre is itself a story of Christian unity threatened by the politics of leadership. The body that claims the glory for its completion is the Christian Association of Nigeria, itself a highly politicized body. The mystery of how politics and ecumenism go together can be a profitable research question. The words ecumenism and ecumenical movement are used interchangeably in this paper. Suffice it to say that its title derives from an understanding of the two stabilizers of the church, which are unity and mission.

In Nigeria, ecumenism means unity in individuality and diversity, uniformity is visible only in essential doctrines especially the evangelical tradition. Each confession retains its uniqueness, loyalty and solidarity (Ferguson, 1996).

This paper suffers a paucity of literature on ecumenism and its development in Nigeria; therefore, it relies more on internal sources such as the Constitution and websites of the different major ecclesial organizations and oral interviews. Major research resource is Peter Falks' *The Growth of the Church in Africa*.

### 1.1. Definition of key terms

An interdenominational body refers to voluntary cooperation of diverse denominations; a denomination is an ecclesial body legally and politically constituted as an association of local churches, that share the same history,

doctrine and philosophy, that agree to work together according to a common structure for their mutual and corporate advantage.

An ecclesial body is a local visible church or Christian congregation present within a geographical location. An interecclesial organization is body of many ecclesial bodies (denominations) sharing similar or the same theology an example is the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria. An ecclesial union is a pseudo ecumenical body, which retains its membership and aligns with another local ecumenical movement. Christian Council of Nigeria is an ecclesial union of mainline churches in Nigeria.

The specific focus of this paper is on the origin and development of ecumenical bodies in Nigeria whose flagship is the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Some of the members of CAN are also members of the World Council of Churches. Origin of these ecclesial unions would be stated accordingly in no particular order. A major feature is their link to one foreign mission or doctrine, the only exception being the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC's). as the name implies are churches of non western origin.

The paper reviews a history of ecumenical initiative this is followed by the structure and function of CAN and other ecclesial unions, which is inextricably linked to the emergence of local missionary societies. These societies laid the foundation for the birth of the first interdenominational body called the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN). In viewing these developments, the practical steps and theological suppositions would be espoused. The final section of this essay is on the future of CAN and its ecumenical relevance.

## 2. Ecumenism In Global Perspective

Paul, an apostle in the early church indicated the discursive theme of unity, writing to the Ephesians. He said

4 [There is] one body and one Spirit—just as there is also one hope [that belongs] to the calling you received—

5 [There is] one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of [us] all, who is above all [Sovereign over all], pervading all and [living] in [us] all (Ephesians 4:4-6, The Amplified Bible).

This follows the aspiration of the Lord and Bishop of the Church in John chapter 17; he said amongst many things, “they may be one”. The oneness of the disciples is a prelude to the oneness of their followers in the faith. From this point on, the church has been in search of unity, both theologically and physically. The idea of religious harmony as a form of unity is a later accretion borne out of historical exigency, Neither Jesus nor Paul would have thought of interfaith unity in their statements.

the word *oikonumene* signifies the goals of ecumenism to include ecclesial unity and missions. This refers to “the multidimensional movement of the churches and the Christians whose goal is both the visible unity of the church and an integration of mission, service and renewal” (Rusch 2001).The goal of ecumenism depended on the perspectives of participating bodies.

The 1910 Edinburgh conference has “unity of Christians for the sake of the mission of the church to the world” as its goal (Rusch 2001). This is consistent with the foundation of the World council of Churches’ *Nature and Mission of the Church*. The Free Church finds glorifying Christ as the goal for unity, the Orthodox Church believes that unity must be visible. This unity in the church of the Reformation depends on the proclamation of the Gospel and the freedom of the church to sustain its order and actions. The goal of ecumenism can be mimicked by the idea of a common ecclesiology. The interecclesial unity of the church demands a critique of the doctrines of the different religious traditions, this method of comparison is the basis for comparative ecclesiology.

Ecumenism may be understood as the practical and visible convergence of both secular and spiritual ecumenism. Secular ecumenism is the participation of the Christian community for the reconciliation and renewal of humanity, interreligious ecumenism generally includes other religions theology, spiritual ecumenism is the unity of the church in worship, prayer and association. (Rusch 2001). Scholars and ecumenists alike have defined ecumenism from various points of view. A historical view of the ecumenical movement has led to new definitions consistent with different Christian traditions. Some of these are mentioned as working definitions in this paper. Ecumenism as the unity of the church derives from the unity of Christ with the Father.

1910 was the beginning of modern ecumenical movement, its goal as a mission-oriented movement established on the objectives of global evangelization. The creation of the World council of Churches in 1948 softened the

Evangelicals position as many traditions and confessions joined the movement (van Beek). The Roman Catholic Church did not join until 1965, after the second Vatican council.

Many evangelical groups and interdenominational bodies have continued with the movement in specific ways, an example is the Evangelical World Alliance formed in 1951, which was instrumental to the development of the Lausanne Covenant.

### **3. Christian Mission in Nigeria**

Christianity came to the western region in 1841, and proceeded to the northern region in 1885. The pattern of entry of each Mission characterized its dominance and coverage area, this development had a ripple effect on the formation of a united representative body. The challenge was not of doctrine but feelings of animosity, prejudice and political influence of the British Government of the time.

When Lord Lugard's British government occupied Northern Nigeria in 1900, Christianity was prohibited from Muslim areas, this stopped the advance of the Southern Missions like Methodist Church Missionary Society (1846), the Baptists mission (1850), and so on. It was in 1917 through the effort of Roland Bingham of SIM and his associates that indigenous churches were planted in Northern Nigeria, these Churches and the mission agencies formed the CECNN.

The Dutch reformed church mission of South Africa came to the central belt in 1911, ministered among the Tiv people group around Mkar. The limited number of churches founded minimized their influence and role on both regional and national ecclesial community. The churches of this mission are still localized around the Benue basin of Nigeria and are referred to as the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria. It is a member of the World Association of Reformed Churches and the Christian Association of Nigeria.

In the Eastern part of Nigeria, the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland worked through Calabar. At Uyo, the Qua Iboe mission and the Presbyterian enclosed the Methodists in a triangle. It was in Calabar, in 1919 that the first call for a united church in Nigeria was made by Dr. J.T. Dean; a Presbyterian minister. This was not accommodated by the Lagos ministers, so in 1923, an Evangelical union was formed, which metamorphosed to the Eastern branch of CCN in 1932. In a meeting of this union in Onitsha in 1947, the Qua Iboe and Sudan United Mission withdrew because the aim of the union was organic only.

### **4. The Origin And Development Of Ecumenical Initiative**

The origin of ecumenical initiative in Nigeria reflects the ecclesiological and missiological development of the Nigerian church, It began with the formation of mission societies, Western oriented and affiliated unions. If the Edinburgh 1910 meeting is regarded as the beginning of modern ecumenism, its ripples gave birth to ecumenism in Nigeria. If that conference precedes the birth of the global ecumenical body –the World Council of Churches, then ecumenical initiative began before the birth of the largest ecumenical body in Nigeria – the Christian Association of Nigeria. With a vision for organic and organizational unity, each confession retains its particularities.

### **5. Christian Council of Nigeria**

The Christian Council of Nigeria was founded in 1929 as “fellowship of churches in Nigeria working together to promote the glory of God”.<sup>1</sup> It officially adopted an ecumenical posture as a body that promotes harmony, justice, peace, love and unity in Nigeria. It has an autonomous non- hierarchical structure in affiliation to CAN.

The Christian Council of Nigeria took form in 1930 through the vision of the mainline Protestant churches, the Christian Association of Nigeria in 1976 by Protestants and Roman Catholics, the Nigerian Association of the Aladura Churches in 1960. The Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria was formed in 1955, it comprised churches free from the control of the West but distinct from for the Instituted or Independent Churches.

CAN is “the [a]ssociation of Christian Churches with distinct identities, recognizable church structure and a system of worship of one God in the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” . This body is aware that “trinitarianism as a missiological issue has dominated ecumenical discourse since 1952” (Tai Wong Lee,143),

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of the Christian Council of Nigeria as approved revised in 2011, approved by the Council's 27<sup>th</sup> Assembly.

and has assumed a basic formula in order to avoid a repeat of the 1952 Willengen Conference. From the foregoing, must be given to this sequence of events that gave rise to CAN.

According to Peter Falk, creation of missionary societies in Nigeria was a response to the Edinburgh 1910 recommendation. Though each foreign mission agency sought to protect its territory and congregation, the CCN, was formed in 1928 to represent missionary society and churches of the Central part of Nigeria. The Evangelical Union of Missions represented Christian agencies serving in the East of the Nigeria. The Miango conference represented the Christian communities in the Northern provinces. These bodies merged in 1928 to form the United Conference of Protestant Missionary Society of Nigeria. This means that the initial alliance of 1928, was between mission agencies and churches in the North, central, Eastern and western parts of Nigeria irrespective of their originating territory. Another observation is the regional nature of their establishment, which later gave ethnic, tribal, and regional outlook to their activities and structure.

## **6. Ecclesial And Interecclesial Bodies In Nigeria**

Ecumenical movement in Africa exists among African theologians under the aegis of Ecumenical Association of African Theologians, and churches as All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), which was founded in 1963 (Fahlbusch and Bromiley, 1996).

While CAN has a part of its official responsibility, a symbol of Christian apologetic in Nigeria, it has not from available, record been involved in any serious apologetic in spite of the series of verbal and media blasphemies. The CCN in its functions includes evangelism, as an ecumenical organ for member bodies and for social responsibility. The OAIC is for contextualization of Christian belief and the decolonization of texts and polity. The PFN is for promoting the ideals of the early Christians in any context, especially to for revival and pragmatism. All this work severally and collectively within the CAN.

The Miango (Jos) conference of 1926 was the first inter-mission consultation for a united church for Africa, it dissolved without a consensus, in 1929, there was the formation of the Federation of Missions of the Northern Nigeria, which later became the Council of Evangelical Churches of the Northern Nigeria (CECNN), it is an interecclesial body in CAN. The CECNN has transformed into EYN, which is a Hausa rendition of the Church in Nigeria.

Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) is the umbrella body of all Pentecostal Christians in Nigeria. PFN, is divided into six zones with each zone been led by a Vice President. The body started in 1985 after the "Greater Lagos for Christ" crusade. This fellowship was inaugurated on the 14th day of November 1986 in Lagos by eleven different churches; they were the Assemblies of God church, Foursquare Gospel Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Gospel Faith Mission. Others are The Church of God International, Deeper Christian Life Ministry and 5 other national organizations. It held its first conference in Lagos in 1991. Going by their name, they share a common Pentecostal belief, unlike the CECNN that united from a missionary foundation along regional lines, the PFN formed out of a desire for a common body to unite all churches with Pentecostal leanings and a forum for fellowship

### **6.1. Christian Association of Nigeria**

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has five blocs made up the Christian Council of Nigeria, the Organization of African Instituted Churches, the Roman Catholic, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, and its youth and women wings. Evangelical Fellowship of West Africa, Therefore, a denomination must be a member of any and only one of these blocs to become a member of CAN.

### **6.2. Organization of African Independent Churches**

These mainline churches form the CCN, the OAIC did not have any connection with Western Missionaries, and they largely have strong contextual theologies and peculiar historical development.

Some minor groups exist as part of the major councils and yet part of the World Council of Churches; an example is the Association of Aladura Churches, which functions within the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC). The middle term "instituted" was later adopted in place of "independent" used to designate only churches of African origin, it does not suggest that some of the mainline churches are dependent in any way. Politically, the mainline churches represented by the Baptist, Anglican, Catholic and Methodist have become independent also. They may retain a form of identity in name and doctrine, and relate on ecclesiastical platforms, they are self-sustaining and self-governing. The birth of OAIC began with the Aladura movement in

cooperation with some mainline churches that broke off with Western Missions due to leadership and moral issues. The United Methodist Church from the Methodist Mission, the African Baptist church from the American Baptist Mission, Christ Apostolic from the Faith Tabernacle are a few of those the breakout form foreign mission (Oshitelu, 1997).

### **7. The Theological foundation of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria**

The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria binds together all Christian churches, organizations and believers who believe; experience, practice and cherish the Pentecostal experience, as found and described in Acts 2:4. These believers accepted as valid for today the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the physical initial evidence of speaking in other tongues as it was spoken of those who experienced it in the Bible days. (Acts 10:45-47). In addition, they are those who accepted the evangelical truth of 'justification by faith' as propounded by Martin Luther, the experience of holiness as preached by John Wesley and the heat of evangelistic zeal of fire and blood trailed by William Booth of the Salvation Army. In essentials, there shall be unity, liberty in non-essentials of true Pentecostal believers. The PFN is not a union of churches brought together for a certain administration and control; rather it is a body of believers having identical unity of purpose and co-operation in agreed programmes<sup>2</sup>. To provide representation for the Pentecostal movement to Governments, Ecumenical bodies and serves as defender of the faith for the Pentecostal believers.

### **8. WCC MEMBER CHURCHES IN NIGERIA**

Churches in Nigeria function severally and collectively within the World Council of Churches, the opinion is that ecumenism is more than membership of WCC. The historical condition precedent to the formation of each confession contributes to the choice of fellowship. Within the WCC, CAN members are as listed<sup>3</sup>

Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)  
Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN)  
Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide  
Methodist Church Nigeria  
Nigerian Baptist Convention  
Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria  
The African Church

### **9. Factors that Favoured the Birth of CAN.**

Until the creation of CAN neither Catholic nor Protestant came together for any form of cooperation, from 1850 to 1975, there was no fellowship between the Protestant churches and the Catholic ones.

The creation of the World Council of Churches, The devolution of power on the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria and Vatican II are factors that forged a new relationship with non-Catholics in Nigeria. The All-African Council of churches and the Christian Council of Nigeria also prepared the ground for practical ecumenism. On regional level, the northern Christian Association and the fellowship of Northern churches (EYN<sup>4</sup>) prepared the ground for Protestants to break the barrier against other Christian bodies in the north. These bodies also came together to withstand the threat and terror of Islam.

From the political angle, there was the call for patriotism and solidarity after the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. Further to this was the take-over of schools by the government, this also coincided with the denial of visa to foreign missionaries and the tax placed on foreign aids for mission in Nigeria. The disunity of the Nigerian church took a dramatic turn when the church was asked to be represented before the Federal Military Government in February 1976 (Rengshwat, 2012) Events during and after this meeting culminated in the invitation by the Catholics to the Protestants for a meeting at their secretariat in Lagos August 1976. That meeting formed the Christian Association of Nigeria primarily as mouthpiece and safeguard for Christians' interest in Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup> [www.Pfnkd.org](http://www.Pfnkd.org). accessed on 21/05/2012 @17:14GMT

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/africa/nigeria/can.html>. Accessed on 21/05/2012@17:44 GMT.

<sup>4</sup> TEKAN/HEKAN/EYN Cluster. Commonly bracketed in Hausa as Tarrar Ekklisiyoyin Kristi a Sudan meaning the Church of Christ in the Sudan.

## 10. The Project From Ecumenical Perspective

Ecumenical movements in their various shades are underdeveloped in Nigeria, theological or practical ecumenism seems conjoined in purpose and operational. Doctrinal positions are at best derived by collective responsibility from the WCC. Commenting on ecumenism in the Nigerian context can only be in the light of WCC; therefore, the methodology applied here begins with an examination of the ecumenical blocks that exist, instead of denominations as present in the West. Strictly speaking, participant observation reveals that each of these bodies under mentioned promote cooperation rather than unity. Another snag in the development of ecumenism in Nigeria is the lack or paucity of intellectual dialogue, this failure may be due to the lacuna between the academic and the church, due primarily to identity issues.

According to Falk, there was no continent based council in Africa but for inter fellowship consultation with International Missionary Council and meetings of missionary conferences in Europe. The mission agencies did not have ecumenical agenda for their congregations such that when they withdrew, there was no platform for such dialogue. Each country's council assisted its churches by facilitating the formulation of strategy, methods to help create a sense of unity of purpose. They also presented the concern of the Christian bodies to government, thereby facilitating their ministry.

The independent churches formed the African independent churches; later coined as Organization of African Independent Churches, some have become members of WCC. Until Vatican II, the Catholic Church has not taken interest in ecumenical relation as the Protestants commissions have. In Africa and Asia the catholic has lagged behind from the ecumenical viewpoint, the Anglican have made efforts in the past to bring unity among African Christians in East Africa.

In Nigeria before the creation of CAN, the Catholic secretariat in Nigeria had no relationship with Protestants; similarly, there was no healthy relationship among the Protestants. This was due to the discrimination and segregation instituted by their foreign missions. The coming of Pentecostalism worsened the rivalry and broadened the gulf.

Another challenge to the ecumenical project was the regional nature of denominations, also a natural consequence of the impact of the respective mission agencies that planted the churches. Reception of missionaries determined the general development social and religious development of an area, so also the religious orientation of the churches to unity and communion.

Among the Protestants, polarization and polemics subsisted beyond the colonial era, churches with political protection from the colonial powers felt superior to others, and avoided any call for unity. The mentality greeted the advent of Pentecostalism, most pioneers of the Pentecostal movement were treated as deviants and some excommunicated from the mainline churches. Such maltreatment did close the door for rapport and opened up that of accusation, rivalry and name-calling. Into this hostility, the charismatic movement was borne. Thus between 1842 and 1975, there were many councils, unions and cooperatives of denominations and traditions, but no singular ecumenical project was on ground for the Nigerian church (Rengswat).

### 10.1. Theological Aspect

Theological ecumenism as a paradigm has yet to take form in the quest for spiritual and visible unity of the churches of Nigeria. The non-dialogical pattern of the CAN internal relationship is an intellectual deficit that exempts it from being a dynamic body of theological ecumenicists. When theological dialogue is absent, it may assume a simple cooperation and uniformity is achieved, but on the contrary, it is that there is fear and sentiment in engaging on what should be the binding theological position collectively discussed, albeit, what should be conceded to the other ecclesial entities.

In representative capacity, CAN cannot advance any joint theological declaration except as is common knowledge to any superficial Christian understanding. Perhaps, the political focus of CAN as a pressure group is sufficient for its wellness, while it retains its identity with WCC, as its purely Ecumenical partner.

Pentecostal mission in Nigeria can be traced to 1930 when Igbo Christians invited the Assemblies of God.(Falk ). By 1950, Catholic mission established its full hierarchy in Nigeria, in the same year the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian proceeded to propose the formation of a church union in Nigeria after the 'South India scheme', the Anglican Diocese of Northern Nigeria was the first to withdraw because of the difficulty it faced in presenting the gospel to the Muslims.

“Both catholic-protestant missionaries ...were extremely doubtful as to whether the other side could be said to be preaching Christ at all.” (Rengswat citing Hasting, 1967). Issues such as this dominated the theological thought of early Christian leaders who were to move for practical and visible unity of the body. This suspicion was rife in the East of Nigeria that had a majority of both Catholics and Pentecostals. Many Christians of this period sought the theological differences in the belief of their denominations. While Christianity was growing at the expense of African Traditional religion, questions were asked as to what are the theological positions of each tradition on issues like marriage, baptism and the church. Accepting the OAIC members was fraught with theological exclusivism, bothering on soteriology, ordination, hermeneutics and syncretism. The deficiency is that ecumenical dialogue to harmonize or adopt, examine or understand each other’s theological position has yet to take place. The theologians often meet with a focus on theological education rather than at the level of ecclesiastical discourse.

### 10.2. Practical Aspect

It is not peculiar that CAN was a child of practical not theological unity, the 1967 dialogue of the Roman Catholic Pentecostal dialogue did not have unity as its goal, that of the WARC-RC was vague as well. Yet the fact that consultation took place was a pointer to a fruitful future (Creemers, 327).

Several practical consultations held between 1950 and 1965 towards the formation of united Nigerian church, the Lagos churches asked for postponements, the Northern churches withdrew and this crippled that initiative (Falk, 345).

### 10.3. Merger and Integration

Steps to integrate the international missionary society with the world council of churches began in Evanston, 1958. It was not unanimously accepted. In 1961, at New Delhi India it was ratified. No respective society was present at the assembly of the WCC. It later moved to enlarge its cooperation with African churches, Roman Catholic and other independent churches.

The merger of the international missionary society caused a strain in the WCC relationship with the Christian council in some countries. This gave rise to the formation of other continental bodies like all Africa conference of churches, and the association of evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, most of the Protestants churches are members of any one of these two (Falk).

The first all-African Christian conference was held in Ibadan in 1958, it provided for fellowship, and understanding for African churches (Falk). All- African council of churches seeks to give guidance to all aspects of the life and ministry of the church, the Association of Evangelicals for Africa and Madagascar was formed in Limuru in 1966 by delegates representing evangelical churches and mission societies in 23 African nations. It met in 1969 and 1973, as a cooperation of churches not inclined to the merger with WCC (Falk). Its concern was the development of theological education, seminars on church growth and mission. Both seek intimate cooperation in the task of the Great Commission (Falk). In summary, the cooperative efforts by churches gave rise to educational development and appointment of educational counselor (Falk).

## 11. Future And Ecumenical Relevance

Inspite of proliferation of churches as independent churches, the mainline churches have expressed Christian love and recognized the vitality and the contribution of these churches to the integration of Christian faith in African culture by the indigenous churches (Falk). The differences in theological positions on some long-standing issues should be brought up for robust discussion. Relevance of CAN covers its contribution to secular ecumenism in promoting peace and reconciliation in the Country, to spiritual ecumenism by encouraging (spiritual ecumenism); CAN rally and crusade, and interreligious ecumenism on a national scale.

Mimicking the WCC will not be a bad idea for the CAN especially that it has a multireligious milieu that needs intellectual engagement. The Women and Youth wings of CAN would be help foster equality, opportunity and unity among themselves thereby opening up a forum for dialogue with each represented denomination or body on topical issues of unity.

The CAN as a mouthpiece of Christians on the council for interfaith matter must consider a consensual position on enigmatic religious issues in Nigeria. Issues like the doctrine of the church, witness and service.

Within the framework of ecumenical reality, CAN can get the Pentecostal, the Catholic and the OAIC to make a common statement through organs similar to the F&O of the WCC. It can deliberately adopt as her agenda, a

vision for visible unity in terms of its nature and goal. This vision can then be the expression of its constituent members.

Ecclesiological issues hindering unity in CAN include ordination of priests, hierarchy of offices and differences in polity. For example, the standard of theological education for each denomination is different from the other; this often creates a social complex at meetings, and affects respect accorded each other.

The CAN is in a position to facilitate unity-oriented philosophy. This is best done by setting ecumenical objectives that chart the course for their unity. Evangelization of the Muslims could be an ideal objective for unity, rather than territorial defence that has not reduced the onslaught on the church especially in the North of Nigeria.

Though each leader talks about unity of the Nigerian church, the will to redirect the CAN from the political pressure group and watch dog to a more dynamic ecumenical movement is absent. This can be achieved if leadership emergence is depoliticized, and government recognition is played down.

So far CAN has achieved a lot for Christians in Nigeria, its vibrancy depended largely on the charisma of its presidents. Presidency has been rotated principally between the CCN and the PFN; it was only in 2005 that it achieved a location in Abuja. Undoubtedly, it enjoys more loyalty now than before, thus, it can become more ecumenically relevant by confronting primordial missiological issues that divide the Nigerian church. The same could become a basis for unity, in other words, mission could become the goal of the unity of the church in Nigeria. Evangelization of Nigeria cannot be achieved by a divided church neither can a politicized confront the terrorism and radicalization of Islam that has engulfed the North.

The Bible presupposes a church united in diversity, it is one body with many parts, universal yet territorial, eternal yet temporal. The church is one, and the Lord prayed for that unity as recorded by John the Apostle. The mandate to the church is in recognition of its unity, the Great Commission is not to a local assembly or just a union of congregations. The different denominations in Nigeria and the world over are implicated in the great command to love, and implied in the great commission to disciple all nations.

With this mandate, the Pentecostal must appreciate its place as been naturally located within an ecumenical world. The protestant needs to embrace the *solas*<sup>5</sup> in every other tradition. The Catholic has witnessed the result of early missionaries and ought to learn from history. The OAIC can become a strong promoter of ecumenism by stepping out of sectional interest and appreciating the impact of theological hermeneutics on the future of the church as a whole. This wholistic view of ecumenical agenda could help to achieve the “two cardinal objectives for unity stated by WCC, CAN is fit for promoting a Nigerian round table on this issue and representing same to the global body. Apart from the WCC agenda of 1. The need for a common creed, and 2. A common position of Eucharist, ministry and baptism” (Robeck, 1990, 349), is the need for a definite apologetic statement rigorously arrived at by comparative ecclesiology. This must respond to many questions asked by non-Christians that see the many bodies as a sign of fragmentation.

It can facilitate is a consensus contextual theology that gives a biblical foundation to many practices of the OAIC's. An ecumenical body must develop theological and philosophical frameworks for the training of ministers and accreditation of theological institutions.

## CONCLUSION

The Christian Association of Nigeria holds a great future for ecumenism in the world; first as a national body, it has the privilege of promoting robust interfaith and intrafaith dialogue on theological and service issues. It can serve as a rallying point for the West African sub region and sub Saharan Africa for ecumenical movement that furthers the discourse at the global level. This vision will put CAN in a broader ecumenical relevance.

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<sup>5</sup> The *solas* embrace the theology of the Reformers captured by the concept of *sola fidei*, *sola scriptura* and *sola gratia*.



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