

JOURNAL

Of



**RELIGION
&
AFRICAN
CULTURE
(JORAC)**



VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1 JANUARY, 2005.

JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND AFRRICAN CULTURE
(JORAC)

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1

JANUARY, 2005

JORAC is published twice a year by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State.

© Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, January 2005.

ISBN 978 - 122 - 264 - 6

All rights reserved under International Copyright Law.
Contents may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form without written consent of the Copyright owner.

Printed by:

Daystar Press

Off Polytechnic Road, Samigo,

P.O. Box 1261, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Tel: 02-8102670, 08055220398

E-Mail: day_star_press@yahoo.com

CONTENTS

Notes on Contributors.....	vi
Editorial.....	vii
1. Symbology and Symbolism of Ruach: A Divine Onomatopoeia in the Old Testament: G.O. Abe	9
2. The Christian Theology of Righteousness and the Implication for Nigeria: S.O. Adesina	22
3. Ἀγίος Πνεῦμα: The Active Power in the ministry of Jesus Christ: L.O. Ekundayo	40
4. The Healing Miracle of Paul in the Acts of Apostles: T. Adamolekun	48
5. The Nigerian Church Council in the 21 st Century: A.G. Alamu	63
6. Secret Societies and Cults in the Nigerian Community: A.R. Ogunleye.....	78
7. Socio-Ethical Influence of Leadership in the Society: Nehemiah (Chapters 1-7) as a Case Study: S.A. Awoniyi	90
8. A Critical View of the Influence of Christian Leadership in Nigeria Today: P.O. Abioje	105
9. Application of the Survivalist Ethic: A Critical Reflection on Contemporary Nigerian Society: B.O. Igboin	121
10. A Critical Analysis of Human Nature: B.M. Akinnawonu	135
11. Christianity: A Panacea for Sustaining Democracy in Nigeria: E.A. Akinseye.....	147

THE NIGERIAN CHURCH COUNCIL IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A.G. ALAMU

INTRODUCTION

The undiminished quest for unity, which has characterized the activities of the Nigerian Church Council, is by no means geared towards eliminating discord and schism. Christianity in Nigeria in no distant past was independent and divisive, which slowed down germane progress within the Church Council. However, the Nigerian Church Council at the threshold of the 21st century draws Christians' attention towards fuller co-operations, merger, united action and a synthetic whole. Thus, this effort is seen to be manifested between two historical terminals of unity and mission on the one hand, and how this unity can be restored fully to the churches, so as to have a common front.

To this end, this paper seeks to bring to the fore the historical background of the Nigerian Church Council, bringing into focus various groups that emerged under the Church Council. Likewise, a survey would be carried out to show the programme as well as how it has been appropriated. Finally, the paper will critically appraise the current trend of the Council and suggestion would be made with conclusion.

THE NIGERIAN CHURCH COUNCIL

The true and wholesome unity coupled with the full participation in the life of the church will always involve processes of renewal. The movement towards unity is a movement towards greater inclusiveness; its intention is to bring together, in active participation in the one body,

the framework for co-operation and dialogue about unity. It became noteworthy to assert that it enhanced greatly the peaceful co-existence of the people before Nigeria attained her independence. The issues that bordered on Christian unity, citizenship and fellowship were extensively dealt with in order to make positive impact upon the life of the new nation. At the World Council of Churches, the CCN undertook a critical and crucial study on the issues of Christian citizenship. Following this crucial study recommendations were made:

*... to meet the challenge of our total Christian responsibility throughout Nigeria, the oneness of the church of Christ, must be exhibited as clearly and widely as possible and pursued at all costs... This recommendation strongly enjoined unity among the Christians, as an essential element in nation building such unity would help to build a united nation.*⁹

The study was to protect the church from passionate emotion, ignorance, pride and holier-than-thou attitude which are inimical to the faithful will of Jesus Christ. Thus, ecumenical ethics required reciprocal respect for final and indivisible choice.

Despite these recommendations, theological stance started losing sight of the body. The Catholic faithfuls, for instance blamed and attacked the body for marginalizing them, couple with the personality conflicts between Rev. G.E. Igwe and Prof. E.B. Idowu on the postponement of the inauguration of the church of Nigeria. In short, the causes of its failure had arisen because of the failure of leaders, ministers and the Laity to educate many of the members as to the desirability of, and the necessity for church union¹⁰.

Admittedly, this body saddled with ecumenicity could not totally stitch the seams of the churches together. Archbishop Patterson attributed the failure of CCN to the ecumenicals and he further remarked that the failure was a bad one, and every ecumenical must accept in penitence his share of the blame¹¹.

In sum, Okeke Hillary assesses the main objective of CCN and its failure. He writes:

In spite of the positive assessment of ecumenism and high expectations... to ecumenical co-operation, there is appreciable level of dissatisfaction with the progress of ecumenism in Nigeria. There is perhaps holy impatience about the extent and pace of ecumenism and about the sincere involvement of the churches in the ecumenical movement as well as the attitudes of individual Christians towards other Christians.¹²

Thus the body was given an extinction to wear as a result of its failure to meet the much needed and steady unity in Christendom.

EVOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA

The call for the awareness of creating a national body was ripe again to serve purposely as an instrument, whereby the churches would bear witness together to their common allegiance to Jesus Christ and co-operation in matters requiring united action. This strand was and is still paramount because there speaks within the soul of the church the still small voice of the *ecumene*, the sense that we belong to a single universal body sustained by a mysterious but single divine reality. Even if we are not fully aware of the proper relationship among Christians, the assumption that all Christians share a common status before God and in relation to one another is enough to be acquainted with.¹³

Sequel to the above, the climate was clear enough for ecumenical interactions among the churches at the end of the Civil War in 1970. It was earlier said that the Catholics were not well represented in CCN and this brought suspicion to the whole of the church. After the Civil War, the Christian religion was gaining fame in the North, while the Islamic oligarchies and fundamentalists seriously objected to the continuity of the Christian religion.

Thus, the Christian Association of the North emerged amidst Sardauna's phenomenon in the area. As a matter of fact, Sardauna

and his co-travelers almost fully entrenched Islam as a way of life because of the very encouraging upsurge in the population of Christians in the North. Virtually all avenues were forcefully used to propagate Islam. This necessitated the northern Christians to meet in 1975 to establish a pragmatic body to represent the northern Christians, and also to resist the Islamic oligarchies and fundamentalists' assignment. Supporting this claim, D.D. Dodo writes:

To a large extent, what is known today as CAN was started in the North by Christians who saw what the Sardauna was doing. He wanted to Islamize the North and the non-Christians in the North came together as a group to resist the Sardauna's Mission.¹⁴

The Christian Association of the North was born in 1975. By that time, the churches were psychologically ready for ecumenism in order to fight against the kind of move to forcefully and coercively make people Muslims. Peter Jatau posits that the Association was successful as it helped many people to stand firmly by their religious professions and not give up simply because the North decided to continue to meet from time to time¹⁵. Around 1975 – 1976, during the Murtala Muhammed regime, for instance, the voice of Christians was not fully represented especially with the implementations of the official policy of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation after the Civil War of 1967 – 1970. The policy implementation was biased in not meeting overwhelmingly Christian expectations. Hence Christians thought it would be a good thing for them as a body to have an organization that would bring them together to discuss and see in what way to ensure that their rights were respected.¹⁶

So during such meeting, people began to suggest names to give this kind of Association. In fact, those who went from the North to represent the Northern States had an association already; hence the former nomenclature was the Christian Association of the North.¹⁷ So the Northern delegates suggested that Nigeria should be substituted for the North to embrace the nation. Therefore, after long deliberations in Lagos, it was accepted that the name suggested by the Northern

representatives be adopted; thus Christian Association of Nigeria or CAN was born. Technically speaking, CAN was born on the 27th August 1976, at the meeting held at the Catholic Secretariat by Christian leaders. Suffice it to say that Rt. Rev. P. J. Akinola of the Anglican Communion is the current National President of CAN.

The Association embraced and incorporated all the different bodies and organizations into committees and sub-committees of the body so as to avoid alienation which was the pitfall of CCN. The ecumenical initiatives provided opportunities for the churches to interact and co-operate in various fields and to lessen the old medieval togas among them. The Association was descriptively seen as a fellowship of churches, working together to promote the glory of God by encouraging vigorously the growth and unity of the churches, and by helping to guide salvation to its fullness; and dismissing disparity among members. CAN's objectives are, among others:

To serve as the basis of response to the unity of the church and to promote mutual understanding, peace and unity among Nigerians through the propagation of the gospel, to act as clearing Houses for common statement by Christians and to act as watch-dog of the spiritual and moral welfare of Nigeria. CAN is the apex of ecumenical body in Nigeria and as such its development and activities are important for the promotion of ecumenism in Nigeria.¹⁸

In fact, the groundwork for the new Association was concluded and the national officers were mandated to direct its affairs.¹⁹

However, some inordinations were observed in the discharge of the day-to-day affairs of the association. S. Salifu, CAN's fiery secretary for the eleven northern states observed that Christian operation in the North was different from that in the South because the South was just mainly for church unionism. He felt that any time the church had to deal with government the Christians of all denominations must present a common front. It must be stressed that circumstances are different and therefore call for different responses and approaches. It is generally believed that CAN has come to stay having incorporated the

former CCN and the Northern Christians. It is expected that CAN will prevent any possible intrusion of the virus of ethnic politics or rivalry that may exist among members, and which, in past had been known to have filtered into the affairs of some churches. Therefore, CAN stands for unity in diversity which forms and informs the *modus operandi*.

THE EMERGENCE OF PENTECOSTAL FELLOWSHIP OF NIGERIAN (PFN)

At the centre of CAN's authority there ignited threats from other denominations as a result of uneven representation. It became clear that many church ministers began to scheme for positions instead of thinking about the overall benefit that unity would bring to the churches and their members. The question of positions plagued the work of the Union Committee.¹⁹ Many people lost their bearing with CAN because CAN have reneged from aggregating the unity which it formerly held on to. The consciousness of ecclesiastical unity was sacrificed at the altar of political expediency, hence CAN was tagged a child who initially "emerged as an unwanted pregnancy and, once born, demanded the same rights and privileges as other children in the household."²⁰ These and others necessitated the emergence of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria.

Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria was established in 1987 to solely gather Bible-believing Christians in order to share deep knowledge of the Pentecostal panache. The late Archbishop B.A. Idahosa was until his death the first national president. Bishop Mike Okonkwo became the president after the death of Idahosa. Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor is the current president of the Fellowship. However, in an interview with Bishop Osagie, the P.F.N. (Lagos Chapter) leader, on what informed the emergence of the Association, he stoutly averred that;

The Catholics also have their group, that is why their Bishops meet regularly and issue communiqué of their meetings; the Anglicans have their own. The

*Pentecostals have their ways of worship.*²¹

Flowing from the foregoing, it shows that there are different groups that evolved under the auspices of CAN. The top-of-the-line style depicted by the Pentecostals made Osagie to posit, "Accord does not mean we do things exactly the same way. People who are friends do not necessarily do things in the same way. Even people who are born of the same parents are not necessarily the same."²² Therefore, the Pentecostals and other bodies still identify themselves as operating under CAN. Meanwhile, they still believe that they are united in the body of Christ in spite of the fact that they do things differently.

Succinctly, the Nigerian Church Council is one of the signs if not the only sign of the times that will restore unity in Christendom. There is no gain saying the fact that:

*We humbly acknowledge that our divisions are contrary to the will of Christ and we pray in his mercy to shorten the days of our separation and to guide us by His spirit into fullness of unity. We are thankful that during recent years we have been drawn together; prejudices have been overcome, misunderstanding removed and real, if limited, progress has been made towards our goal of a common mind.*²³

AN APPRAISAL OF THE NIGERIAN CHURCH COUNCIL

Nigerian Church Council tackles a somewhat various paradoxes from that which we know. This fact undermines the theological agenda which fails woefully to protect its corresponding unity, and advocates an inviolate whole. These observable differences and divisions seem so strong and pronounced.

The diversity of religious traditions constitutes one of the most potent challenges to Christian faith in our time. The challenge is more acute now than before.²⁴ Not only are these alternatives all round us; they exist within us as well. We have begun to internalize schism, blight, and factionalism, so that the confrontation between the various real-

ity-defining agencies takes precedent around us as we wrestle with the truth.

Ogbu Kalu correctly identifies what the church council ought to have been which it refused and still refuses to be. Hear him:

*The original Church (Council) began as a body of believers whose axle of life was the Lord Jesus Christ around whom everything else in the universe revolved. But the modern church (council) has evolved to outgrow her from redemptive body to a protective organization. She has spawned a rich, mosaic, cocoon of ecclesiastical powers, laws, doctrinal, hierarchical bureaucracy and denominations around herself, as well as, innumerable and ingenious survival tactics and rationalizations. Her original nature is now hidden, like harping in a haystack. The paradox of this conservation is that it is attached to forms, not creeds.*²⁵

Conscious observation reveals that disunity has not been tackled headlong in Christendom. Thus, the factors that necessitated the emergence of this Council were politics, leadership position, grassroots unawareness, and others. These horrendous odds normally spark off stringent, irruptive, spiteful and divisive measure, which estrange oneness or "one house". These tendencies should be done away with, because they do not form the essentials of unity in the Nigerian Church. It is pellucidly apparent from the characteristics of the Christian community that the cause of disunity and schism is sin, as Luther prayed:

*Thou art the God of peace and of love and of unity, not of division. Yet since the people of thy church have abandoned thee and turned away from the truth, thou have allowed them to be divided and separated, in order that, failing in their pretended wisdom into the shame of disunity, they might return to thee who does cherish unity.*²⁶

The shame of disunity is the great scandal of our contemporary church council. A.S. Oyalama discovers that all the above factors which

blocked church union in Nigeria are still with the body today. Even the traumatic experience of disunity that necessitated churches to convene till now has not abated; rather the differences between these churches are widening daily.²⁷

Despite the fact that there have been calmness, reconciliation and rehabilitation, among others, unity is still being threatened in different ways. Unity is gravely compromised, as the principle of personal options gains the upper hand over the principle of institution in the public behavior of those who, in the community, functionally represent Christ as a head, convoking, building with their selfish end²⁸. Obviously the unity of the church body cannot be achieved as a result of the principle of personal options which has been difficult to overcome.

It is interesting, if not appalling, to note that there exists personality clashes, politicking, self-centeredness, the desire of some denominations to dominate others and the lust for power in the ecumenical movement in Nigeria. All these are sins of arrogance, insensitiveness, self-satisfaction and complacency. Thus, it has been recognized within the ecumenical movement that church unity should not simply be matters of ecclesiastical carpentry – that is dovetailing and gluing together of existing ecclesiastical structures. To this end, lack of vision and domineering traits remain a problem in the body.

It is no longer thought of as something exceptional to be ecumenical, but rather regarded as the norm. The questions before ecumenical council at the helm of affairs are originally not the ones to do with denominational differences but rather the ones to do with discovering appropriate style of misappropriation and manipulation. However, this aspect in Nigeria ecumenical movement thwarts its mission.

Moreover, Nigerian Church Council with non-commitments is an empty and porous unity, a unity of the lowest common denominator, a façade. To unite people while forgetting their motives and emotions is to unite them through what they are not, it is to unite phantoms. Put differently, if we take human commitment in isolation, we are bound to wonder about the worth of this sham unity.²⁹

However, it is still believed that it is more important to be united than to be divided, because to clamour for dividedness is to expand the alienation of people as strangers in the united and undiminished body of Christ as anticipated by Nigerian Church Council at the threshold of 21st century. Thus, Nigerian Church Council ought to facilitate the process of unity and disown any authority operating in the direction of instigating disruption. Sunday Mbang affirms that the men of the church court wholly fight against injustice that affects the society and the nation at large. In answering reporters, he said among others that:

There were a lot of things amiss within the Christian community in Nigeria and that until these were corrected it could not have major impact on the leadership of the country. The prelate however praise Christian for coming under one umbrella, CAN, without which he said Christianity would have been nowhere in the country. He applauded tolerance within the different denominations with Methodist minister being allowed to preach in other denominations, including the Pentecostal churches.³⁰

SUGGESTIONS

As much as we have been able to appraise critically the efforts and travails of the Nigerian Church Council at the turn of the 21st century, we shall suggest that CAN should be able to repair its "one house" in order to sustain its rule within different denominations and promote cross-pollination of ideas in various Christian communities. Again, the ecumenical integrity in the promotion of coalitions of Christian people should be concerned with questions of justice, peace among others. In that, the authenticity of all efforts at unity would be a challenge for the divided world in which we live.

In addition, the Nigerian Church Council as the apex of ecumenical movement in the country should educate various Christian churches to see all Christians as belonging to the single household of faith; a whole creation as God's house, and that all of us are guests of equal stature in the divine living room. Corresponding to God's oneness is

a oneness of humanity.³¹

Moreso, the council should nurture its members in the scripture and keep them abreast so as to grow in faith, hope and love. This will manifest the human and shared *ecumene* in a bid to provide workable decision-making processes for its body, with the obligation of seeing beyond their churches the larger *Oikoumene* – the church of Christ and to work for its realization. The end product of these is to remove sins of division, prejudices, bias, rivalry unhealthy competition, discrimination and denominationalism.³²

Although, history is replete with the discord in Christendom and how several attempts had been made to sow an accorn from which the oak of national unity was to grow. However, there is the dire need for unity to be restored more than anything else. As a matter of fact, any development void of unity in Christendom will be unrewarding and meaningless.

To this end, the Nigerian Church Council should include the marginalized among the people of God. The Church will discover its wholeness and be able to function unbiasedly as a sign, instrument and foretaste of God's intention of reconciliation for a desperately divided human race. Hence, the struggle for Christian unity cannot be detached from the recovery of the *ecclesia tou thou* – the Assembly to which God summons all people and in which no other sovereignty is recognized but His.³³

CONCLUSION

Our efforts so far has revealed the emergence of the Nigerian Church Council and its hopes in the 21st century. We have also seen the many challenges that the council has faced in its attempts to restore all-round unity. The Nigerian Church Council at the threshold of the 21st century should embrace all sections of the body of Christ and should be able to unite all Christian forces in order to present a common front.

The ideal of the body in Nigeria must not be seen as an end in itself but

as a first stage in the quest for a religious change in the whole *Oikoumene*. This will reveal a oneness in the Christian race, oneness that may purge men of their old denominational securities towards the realization of "eschatopraxis" – doing the future ahead of time; and reharmonising the disharmonies of the past into the synthetic unity³¹.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. T.F. Best, (ed) Living Today Toward Visible Unity (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988) p. 67.
2. A.S. Oyalana, "Attempt at Church Ecumenism in Nigeria: 1909 – 1965", Orita Vol. 28, No 1-2 (June – December, 1996) p.38.
3. B.L. Shelley, Church History in Plain Language: (Texas: Word Books Publishers, 1982) p.319.
4. T.F. Best, (ed), Living Today Toward Visible Unity: p. 75
5. A.S. Oyalana, *op. cit.*, p. 39
6. Ibid
7. J.A. Atanda, *et al*, Nigeria Since Independence: The First 25 Years: "Religion" Vol. IX, (Ibadan: HEB Ltd, 1989) p.102.
8. T.C. Onuora and Emma Ekpunobi, (eds), Contemporary Religious Issues (Awka: GTCKPC, 1991), p. 48.
9. Ibid p. 102.
10. T.C. Onuora and Emma Ekpunobi (Eds) *op. cit.* p. 55.
11. For details, see A.S. Oyalana, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
12. Okeke O. Hillary, Milestones in Ecumenism (Enugu: Think Ltd, 1996), p. 220
13. Ted Peters, God - The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era, (2nd ed.), (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) p.349.
14. Iheanyi Enwerem, A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria (Ibadan: IFRA, 1995), p. 79.
15. Ibid
16. Ibid p. 78.
17. Ibid p. 82.
18. Ibid p. 86
19. A.S. Oyalana, *op. cit.*, p.42.

20. Iheanyi Enweren, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
21. The Guardian, January 3rd, 1998. p.23.
22. Ibid p. 24
23. Barry Till, The Churches Search for Unity (England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972)p.207.
24. Ted Peters, God - The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era p.351.
25. Ogbu., U. Kalu, Divided People of God: Church Union Movement in Nigeria, 1875- 1966. (New York: Book Publishers, 1978), p. 41.
26. Ibid p. 42.
27. A.S. Oyalana, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
28. Ibid.
29. Yves Congar, The Church Peaceful, (Dublin: Veritas Publishers, 1977), p. 41.
30. The Guardian, Vol. 13, September 30, 1996, p. 5.
31. Ted Peters, *op. cit.*, and p. 350.
32. Edward Fashole-Luke, *et. al.*, (eds)., Christianity In Independent Africa (Ibadan: University Press, 1978) p. 175.
33. Thomas F. Best, (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 37
34. Ted Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 375 – 379.