

‘THAT THEY MAY BE ONE’ (ECUMENISM): CHRIST’S PRAYER AND HEARTBEAT FOR THE DISINTEGRATED CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

The persistent denominational biases and rivalries among Christian Religious organisations in Nigeria hinder true unity, contradicting the command for oneness articulated in John 17:21. This study investigates the challenges of ecumenism in Nigeria, aiming to evaluate its current status and propose actionable strategies for improvement. Using the qualitative method, findings reveal that despite ongoing dialogue and attempts at collaboration, the church has largely failed to achieve meaningful unity since the ecumenical movement began in 1910. The analysis highlights that conflicts, competition, and fragmentation have stunted communal growth and effective evangelism. To foster genuine Christian unity and communal values, the church must return to the foundational principles of the early Christian community. The study recommends enhancing inter-denominational dialogue, fostering shared missions, and emphasising collaborative ministry efforts, thereby creating an environment conducive to unity and cooperation among diverse Christian factions.

KEYWORDS: Collaboration, Dialogue, Ecumenism, Protestant Church, Roman Catholic Church, and Unity.

INTRODUCTION

Ecumenism is no longer new in Christendom; it began formally about 1900, in Edinburgh, to ensure co-operation and unity among the Christian denominations. The ecumenism dreams came on board because the Church of Jesus Christ, which from time immemorial was founded based on unity and love, has been subjected to persistent schism, proliferation, and disintegration. Onwubiko (1999) observed that it was this phenomenal breakage that apparently led to the agitation for Church unity, a situation whereby Christians from different denominational backgrounds will strive jointly for unity in the essentials of Christianity. Efforts in ecumenism are the possible ways of facilitating the fulfilment of our lord’s prayer for unity, as in Saint John’s gospel (17:21). Moreover, this project of repairing the broken walls of Christian unity led to the conference of 1910, which took place in Edinburgh. Although the move marked the

beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, it was mainly a protestant affair because the Roman Catholic Church stayed away from the movement. From then till the present moment, considerable progress has been made towards the accomplishment of the project “Christian unity”. In the words of Onwubiko (1999), additional leverage came with the merger of these protestant ecumenists with the Roman Catholics immediately after the historic Vatican II council (i.e., the twenty-first ecumenical council) convened by pontiffs subsequently, John XXIII in 1962, and Paul VI from 1963. To this, Ekpunobi (2001) said that back in Nigeria, the initial ecumenical movement began among the protestant missionaries, but because of a lack of ideological insight, the dream was ultimately shattered. However, Achunike (1995) observed that the renewed zeal for ecumenism in Nigeria finally began in earnest from 1970. With this, there was enhanced theological and liturgical dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant theologians, which this renewed move cum “zeal”, affected CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) – an umbrella organization that looks after the Christians in Nigeria, both in concept, context, and nature, and the result was that it became an ecumenical group.

The Roman Catholic Church, which later joined, became at the forefront of this struggle in Nigeria, armed with the Vatican II council’s decree (*unitatis* reintegration), hence she continued to encourage and enhance the move for Christian unity in Nigeria. Although she has been spearheading this ecumenical endeavour in the country, she has not yet recorded much achievement in this area, and this becomes a big puzzle for her to solve. However, with the modern trend of globalisation, education, enlightenment, and interdenominational relationships, the church of Jesus Christ will ultimately rise above these anomalies and emerge as a one body in mind and spirit, which is the unity envisaged, unity in diversity.

Having noted that all is not well with the church of Jesus Christ of the 21st century, and the unity and love of brethren, which has been the remarkable identity of the early church which has been replaced by persistent schisms, divisions and breakages. Of which, the scenario is captured in the words of the Vatican II council fathers, "In so far as Christ founded one church and one church only, the division among the Christian communities scandalize the world and impedes the spread of gospel, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ, all indeed profess to be the followers of the head but they differ in mind and go the in different ways as if Christ himself was divided" (Flannery, 2015, p.4). This indeed is an incurable case, which has almost crippled all the ecumenical moves made in the world and in Nigeria as a country.

“THAT THEY MAY BE ONE” (JOHN 17:20-23): THE PRAYER OF CHRIST

This passage is the conclusion of Jesus’ final prayer before departing for the garden of Gethsemane and the events of the passion. It is not, however, just a prayer that we should read only; it is a prayer that looks to the future. Christ was praying not only for

the people seated around him at the table that evening, but also for his future followers (which includes us). And it is a prayer that focuses on unity, on our all being one. Firstly, Christ's prayer is for the community; hence, our Lord prays in verse 22, 'that they may be one'. To be a follower of Jesus is to be a part of a greater whole. According to Christ, there are to be no solitary Christians or spiritual 'Lone Rangers'. And secondly, within that community, our Lord's Prayer in verse 21 is for unity: 'that they may all be one', which is more of a Spiritual Unity and not Organic as some may misinterpret it.

Jesus wants his disciples to be one; this seems like a rather straightforward request, until we take a closer look. And when we take a closer look, whether it is ourselves or at the Church-at-large, we see evidence of disagreements, resentments, unforgiveness, and division. Yet Christ wants his disciples to be one in a world that is marked by countless divisions of one group of people against another. Hence, Christian's unity is not intended by our Lord to be simply an in-house issue. We may not realise it, but it is actually essential to our witness in the world. As Jesus says in verse 23 of his prayer, 'that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Christ's prayer reminds us that our 'oneness' and our unity are to be a sign to the world of God's love for us. Oneness and unity are about love.

Suffice it to say that when we speak of oneness and unity, and when our Lord speaks about oneness and unity, he is not talking about uniformity. The goal is not to reduce everyone to a dull and flat sameness. Instead, our differences are to be barriers no longer. Diversity is to be welcomed, but it is not to be a cause for antagonism. Rather, it is to be revealed in its best light, that is, a source of enrichment for everyone. This means that when there are conflicts (and conflicts are inevitable, even in the Church), we are to pay close attention to them and resolve them in the right manner. As we all know, unresolved conflict never goes away; it just sinks to a deeper level. And if nothing is done about unresolved conflict, it festers, grows and leads to even worse conflicts in the future.

When we live and work together in the name of Jesus, we present a clear witness of faith to the world around us. Others catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God by the way we love and respect each other, and by how we can confront and forgive each other, speaking the truth in love. As a result, they are drawn closer to the throne of God's grace, and the Church-at-large prospers and grows, but we must not forget that the opposite is also true. When we are divided and at odds with each other, our witness is lost, and the world fails to take our message seriously.

In the words of E. Stanley Jones, the famous Missionary and Theologian, said, 'Talk about what you believe, and you have disunity. Talk about who you believe in, and you have unity.' The truth is that Jesus is the one who brings us together and in whom we find unity. There can be no Ecumenical Movement than the one built on trust—trust in God, who in Christ became human and is present through the Holy Spirit.

Based on this trust, we can risk trusting each other. This makes us vulnerable. But it is the only way to build meaningful relationships. In many instances, however, it is precisely trust that is lacking, even outright competition is reigning, and trust is consciously being destroyed.

The truth is that the Church of God was initially one indivisible even after the ascension of Jesus Christ and during the time of the apostolic fathers, until the breakage of the Eastern Orthodox Church in 1954, papal schisms of (1378 – 1417), the Lutheran, Anglican, and Methodist churches in 1517, 1559, and 1707 respectively. It was these breakages that formed the foundation for the continuous disintegration of modern Christendom. The continuous fragmentation of Christendom contradicts the gospel of unity, love, and oneness in the body of Christ, while the scandal of the fragmentation propelled the desire for ecumenism among Christians. The dream of church unity began initially among the Protestants, who collectively held a series of conferences that culminated in the birth of modern ecumenism.

The Roman Catholics shunned those ecumenical gatherings despite the invitations they gave to her because of her strained relationship with protestants. She later attended WCC meetings as an observer since the Vatican II council; the impetus she drew from the Vatican II council led her to join the Protestants to champion the cause of ecumenism. The Vatican II council was basically convened to address issues bordering on ecumenism. Thus, they had been working with the World Council of churches since then to promote ecumenism in Christendom. The protestants, who came together to advance their missionary work through collaborative efforts, failed because the majority of their objectives were founded on rivalry and antagonism. Even with their failure, they later metamorphosed into CAN, which is an umbrella body overseeing the activities of the Christians in Nigeria.

The entrance of the Roman Catholic Church in the ecumenical work in Nigeria in the aftermath of the Vatican II council further enhanced the work already done by the protestant group. It observes that ecumenical work in Nigeria is still peripheral, for it has not moved from dialogue to ecumenical praxis (joint social action) as has been the case in the international scene. Though there are few cases of practical ecumenism such as joint translators of the Bible by the Catholics and Protestants, exchange of mutual invitations to social and religious functions by priests and pastors in Nigeria, they cannot be said to be ecumenical dialogue, it also observes that the joint prayer sessions in the weeks of Christian unity, interdenominational services and crusade done under the auspices of CAN cannot be seen as real ecumenical dialogue, and that real ecumenical dialogue is to begin through dialogues, debates, and selfless discussions by experts and theologians of both Catholic and non-Catholic Churches.

ADDRESSING AREAS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

The debates for both convergence and divergence are to be sorted out and addressed if Ecumenism is to be fruitful. Once these debates are fully established, it can then progressively metamorphose into ecumenical diapraxis (joint social action). The reason why this is not operational in Nigeria for now is because of deep denominational biases, antagonism, and rivalry rampant in Nigerian Christianity; these seemingly impossible situations can still be addressed if vigorously pursued by her, if she steers clear of sentiments in her regulatory work in Christendom. Many things have actually led to what is now called the ecumenical movement, which in this sense awakened the conscience of the Christian church towards its universal aspects and its renewed sense of faith, mission, and service. Ecumenism in modern times represents a movement towards Christian unity. It appears that unity and disunity are both inherent in Christianity and that Christians have the ready potency for either side.

Human Influence

Due to human influence, the urge towards disunity is ever high; hence, for a smooth understanding to exist, there must be selfless understanding due to a perceived need for unity and because Christ established one church, to this, Obemeata (1991) said that this “unity has always been one of the church’s principal concerns”. One can wonder if, truly, Unity is actually the principal concern of the Church today, so for a successful understanding of Unity, the body of Christ ought to have zero tolerance for human influence which has contributed to this unsuccessful dialogue.

Splinter But One in Spirit

Many splinter groups have since broken away from the one church founded by Jesus Christ. Although all these groups are followers of Jesus Christ, they differ in many ways including what they believe. Despite the claims of each to be on the best side, a sense of unity and its necessity spring up now and then.

Common Text

As Christians have the Bible as a common text of their religion, talks, efforts striving towards unity have to be closely undertaken in collaboration, reconciliation, reconsideration, and harmonisation of the denomination’s views with these scriptures. The following view of Edward (1994, p.23) has to be noted by all the church denominations and each applying the side of magisterial to its case: “Although the rules of good scholarship are not excluded, it is clear that in the last resort the decisive rules and therefore interpretations are made by the bishops headed by the Pope, to be accepted by scholars along with everyone else”. So, if the search for a serious issue of

Christian unity must be fundamentally pegged in the Bible, a harmonisation and reconciliation of such a view may become necessary.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMON PROBLEM FACED

Augustine (1967) maintains that Christians are to understand the obstacles to the desired church unity, and struggle to address them squarely; perceived lack of unity among the orthodox churches, lack of a common voice among the protestants and Pentecostals as regards the ecumenical movement projects problem of prejudice, misunderstanding, rivalries and distrust among the Christians and this can be resolved by true Christian attitude both by the Roman Catholics and non-Catholics, and having an attitude of charity, mutual love and respect for each other's faith. In a bid to facilitate ecumenical plans, Christians should promote unity in diversity, peace, and missionary work. And critically battle the Problems of irreconcilable denominational doctrines, disunity, rivalry, biases, mistrust, fear of "Roman Catholic monopoly", and fear of syncretism.

Prayers

The potency of prayer within the ecumenical movement cannot be overstated. Theologian Cardinal Walter Kasper emphasizes that prayer is the foundation of ecumenism, as it is a means to invite the Holy Spirit into the process of reconciliation among churches (Kasper, 2004). Kasper suggests that fervent prayer, characterized by humility, is crucial in removing the barriers of misunderstanding and suspicion that often exist between different Christian groups.

In support of this idea, Dr. Miroslav Volf, a prominent theologian and author of "Exclusion and Embrace," articulates the transformative power of prayer in fostering relationships between divided communities. Volf asserts that through prayer, Christians can cultivate a spirit of love and openness, which paves the way for genuine dialogue and understanding (Volf, 1996). As congregations across the globe embrace their shared heritage in Christ, prayer becomes a unifying force that emboldens them to seek reconciliation. For prayer to be effective in achieving unity among Christian churches, it must be offered with humility and faith. Renowned scholar Dr. Hans Küng, in his book "The Catholic Church: A Short History," highlights the significance of humility in ecumenical dialogue. Küng argues that acknowledging differences without pride enables churches to come to the table with an open heart and mind, fostering an environment conducive to honest discussion and collaboration (Küng, 1991).

Moreover, the emphasis on faith underscores the belief that God actively works within us as we seek unity. Protestant theologian and author Lesslie Newbigin asserts in "The Way Ahead?" that unity is ultimately a gift from God and that faithful prayer is a

means through which this divine gift is realized among the churches (Newbiggin, 1994). His perspective reinforces the notion that congregations must prioritize prayer as a communal endeavour, engaging in intercessory practices that appeal for God's guidance in the ecumenical journey. The call to prayer for unity should resonate throughout all congregations. It is not merely a task to be undertaken by church leaders but a collective responsibility of all believers. The World Council of Churches emphasizes the need for a unified approach to prayer in ecumenism, citing it as essential to building understanding and reconciliation among the various Christian communities ("World Council of Churches," 2020). When members of different churches gather to pray fervently, it acts as a testament to their commitment to unity. Such gatherings can foster relationships that transcend denominational lines, allowing believers to experience the spirit of love and peace that Christ embodies.

Scholarships

Promoting ecumenical dialogues through academic research and debates between the theological experts of both sides will enhance ecumenical dialogue, and once this obstacle is tackled through these seeming solutions, dreams of rebuilding the shattered wall of Christianity will become a reality (Augustine 1963). In agreement with this, Bea and Visser's Hooft (1967) stated that Christians should work hard to embrace the peace moves in Christendom, ecumenical debates and discussions between Catholic and non-Catholics theologians, joint prayer activities and social actions, and interdenominational visits to the Vatican 11 council's document on ecumenism. However, if the ecumenical initiatives as mentioned above are vigorously pursued and promoted, those problems are to be tackled as well as the prospects. The two writers want to prove that the present levels of advancement in the ecumenical fields today are the brainchild of the Vatican 11 council's decree on ecumenism. And this is to prove that the document is a workable one. Therefore, churches have to jointly fight these ecumenical forces both from within and without to ensure their continuous workability.

United We Stand Divided We Fall

Anih (1990) in *Christian ecumenism and Church in Nigeria*, calls for a united effort of both Catholics and Protestants in facilitating the oneness in the country since both contributed to the present division that exist within Christendom, to ensure its workability, he stated that, they are to have a common understanding, which will encourage them to vigorously pursue joint prayer sessions and visits, joint social actions leading to social justice and peace, ecumenical debates, discussions and dialogues among the theological experts from both sides. Just as Anih said, if the Christians are to put aside both denominational pride and biases, and focus on these joint spiritual and social actions, the result will be different in the Nigerian ecumenical field.

Social Political Convergence

Yurikryanev (1983) in *Christian ecumenism* discusses the socio-political, philosophical, and theological implications of ecumenism. He maintains that the ecumenists hoped to find a common philosophical source for all Christianity. Ecumenism should create a basis for co-operation in practical activity and, consequently, for the formation of a single religious community. This is because they believed that Christian integration would lead to the integration of mankind. The Ecumenical movement came up to create a single Christian ideology that can help in solving the problems affecting the world, such as class struggles, exploitation of the poor, poverty, hunger, economic, socio-scientific, technological, ideological, political, and religious crises in the bourgeois society. Ecumenical movements came up not just to solve the problem of Christian disunity, but that societal problem too.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY FOR A DISINTEGRATED CHURCH

The 1910 Edinburgh missionary conference that led to the formation of the World Council of churches had seen ecumenism as that of unity in diversity of all Christian denominations, a kind of association where each denomination still retained its distinct identity. This has been the position of the Roman Catholic Church from the Vatican II council days, therefore, by pointing to both the 1910 Edinburgh missionary conference and the 1964 Vatican II council.

Pope John Paul II, in an apostolic letter, "*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*," discusses the urgent need for Christian unity, states that Christians are to be more united by the year 2000, and should be more willing to cause, which our lord prayed about especially now (Okeke, 1996). In assessing this, Hillary Achunike (1995) summarizes the efforts made so far in actualizing the ecumenical dreams in Christendom when he avers that although ecumenism began initially among the protestant missionaries, the Roman Catholic Church later joined them after much hesitation, the joining of the Roman Catholic Church with the World Council of churches further promoted ecumenical moves in Christendom. Continuing, from 1970 onwards, informal meetings, conversations, theological debates, and discussions have gradually been gaining ground among catholic priests and protestant pastors. Mutual invitations to social and religious celebrations, joint prayer sessions, and joint Bible translation into many Nigerian languages, under the banner of the Bible society of Nigeria, have been progressing in Nigeria. He concludes by saying that ecumenical dialogue is seriously needed among theologians of both sides on intermarriage and the Eucharist, and without deeper conversion, ecumenism is useless (Achunike 1995).

Discussing the Journey so far, Okeke (1996) discusses the journey made so far by the Roman Catholic Church in translating the Vatican II message of ecumenism into reality. Thus, the different rules adopted by the church, such as dropping the negative

attitudes consciously acquired during the era of polemics and apologetics, the abolition of attitudes of prejudice and bigotry against non-Catholics, and the abolition of attitudes of methodological representation and oversimplification of the position of others to refute them. Also, the positive rules, such as the one that empowers the Catholics to positively cultivate a new spirit of self-criticism, will create a better atmosphere and climate of mutual understanding between Christians. Dialogues were also to be instituted as against initial monologues; the rules concerning sacramental sharing among denominations were also modified. These rules have been adopted by the Catholic Church to actualise their ecumenical work. In fact, from Okeke's work, one stands to understand the time it took for each of these rules to replace the old ones, thereby leading to the enthronement of spirit of peace between the Catholics and non-Catholics, however, Pope John Paul II, in his recent apostolic exhortation, "The Church in Africa" maintains that the Roman Catholic Church should develop ecumenical dialogue with their baptized brethren of other Christian Churches to fulfill our lord's prayer for unity (Okeke 1965,p45). Indeed, having a developing spirit of dialogue, each group will still be biased, and that may mean a great obstacle to the ecumenical message, which they all propagate. Ecumenical dialogue, as he mentioned, is an inevitable role they are to play, for it is through it that their consciences are examined, disagreements are resolved, brotherhood is rediscovered, solidarity in the service of humanity is enhanced, and endowments in other churches are known and appreciated.

Onwubiko (1999), in *Building Unity Together in the Mission of the church: A Theology of Ecumenism*, discusses the unity envisaged, which must be built together by different denominations. Having analysed the "ecumenism of return" the initial model of church unity proposed by the Roman Catholic Church, which claims that separated churches must return to the one, holy, apostolic, and catholic church for the ecumenism to be effective, he maintain that it may not hold again, the latest stand of both the Vatican II council and the world council of churches nullifies it thereby bringing out diversity, an association where each denomination agrees with other while still retaining their individual identities. He maintains that with the continued ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and non-Catholic, this peripheral unity will gradually improve to something better. The type of ecumenism to be pursued is the one that is to be collectively done not that of a return to the Roman Catholic Church.

THE KIND OF UNITY WE SEEK

Morris and Sagovsky (2003) discuss the type of unity in the mind of the ecumenists. Having analysed different proposed models of unity, they stated that Unity in diversity may be the right option; this is because uniformity of expression and formulations at all levels and in all situations may not be able to solve the problem, but will indicate a Catholic diversity within a unity of communion. Here the denominational

distinctness will be preserved as recognizable traditions like the holy orders in the Roman Catholic Church, the ecumenical dialogue should be pursued as a means to an end but not the end itself, if should be done so that through it, parties involved will have better understanding of both their individual identities, creeds practices, which will prepare them for real journey towards Christian unity, they suggest that individual churches should enhance their ecumenical work better by dealing with those un-ecumenical practices and dogmas in their midst, they finally want the church to focus on those issues that divide than unite them and work towards resolving them. The ecumenical dialogue should not be pursued as a formality, but for each party to know more about the other, and once this is established, it will pave the way for real ecumenism to begin.

Kasper (2004) examines how the church battles with the work of translating the Vatican II council's decree into reality, he observed that, ecumenism is aimed at promoting unity among the different Christian denominations in fulfilment of the lord's injunction that they may all be one, regardless of how the Vatican ii council's work on ecumenism may be criticized, it is still widely accepted by all, ecumenism is never against the church but in favour of her foundational truths and mission, the current breakthroughs she has recorded in her ecumenical relationships with the separated traditions of the east (orthodox) and the west (protestants). Again, with clear philosophical, theological and ecclesiological bases, he maintain that with the ecumenical dialogue in vogue, it will remove misunderstanding, rivalries and biases enhance greater understanding among Christians, deepen what they already have; enhance mutual sharing, and the growth of the already established relationships, such ecumenical dialogue ought to be embarked upon with the guiding principles such as love, tolerance, respect for each other's creeds, sincerity of purpose, attitude of openness and with no move to intimidate, or monopolize the other parties but with a move to know them more, spiritual ecumenism the type where Christians in their differences share their spiritual activities like praying together that may enhance divine intervention in the whole ecumenical work.

Pope John Paul II (2008), in his *encyclical "RedemptorisMissio,"* states that it is only by becoming real missionaries that Christians will be able to fight their division and antagonism that have continued to weaken the gospel message. The Pontiff rightly observed that some of the gospel preached within Christendom nowadays is coloured with denominational sentiments. Therefore, if any ecumenical work will succeed in the land, Christians should jettison their biases and focus on the real things, which are joining hands together to promote unity in Christendom.

Ibebuikwe (2006) analyses the ecumenical work as is seen in Christendom today, states that, the idea of ecumenism came up as the Christians saw the need for unity as against division, ecumenical conferences were subsequently held by diverse Christian

societies, which finally merged into a large body known as the world council of churches in 1948, the breakage and subsequent split of Christendom into fragments occurred because of doctrinal, theological, institutional and political mistakes, again, though the roman catholic church never partook in the initial ecumenical conferences, her entrance into the scene enhanced many things such as both bilateral and ecumenical dialogue and discussion between roman Catholics and Orthodox Lutheran, Anglican and Reformed churches.

CONCLUSION

Although the ecumenical dream of the Church in Nigeria has not been fully realised, she still looks forward to a future where Nigerian Christians will be more open and receptive to ecumenism and dialogue. This study is imperative as the need for unity as against the rivalries, divisions and proliferations of churches, especially when the likes of Abbes Georges de Nantes, in his article, "*critique of Pope Paul 'unitatis reintegration,'*" declines acceptance of separated churches as "separated brethren"; when he states that, the whole decree is a play of the devil to destabilize the church and enthrone heresy and syncretism. According to him the unity we envisage must be that of repentance and return of the protestants to the Roman Catholic Church, that the Roman Catholic Church should not discard her initial stand of being the only pure church; for is she falls to do that, it means she is digging the foundation for syncretism and heresies. He concludes that the separated churches also have means of salvation in them. It is to this kind of and like statement that this study bases its argument, because in this study, you will see that the argument of Abbes and, of course, some others is counterproductive and may hinder, to a large extent, Ecumenism.

Difficult as Ecumenism may seem, the continuous prayers and enlightenment going on in CAN, may progressively enhance the possibility of this dream. Again, she looks forward to a future where the present charismatic wind blowing across the mainline churches and other denominations will ultimately pave the way for spiritual ecumenism, for we all drank from the same spirit and one baptism. She also anticipates a future where those denominational dogmas that hinder ecumenical work in Nigeria are removed, although more work has been done in ecumenism, judging by the level of bilateral ecumenical discussions going on in the international scene. According to Ibebuike (2006, p.110), "Though it is yet to be seen in Nigeria, but hopefully in the nearest future, valid ministers from different Christian denominations will gradually begin to concelebrate with each other at the same altar, exchange pulpits or visits". To this, Eze (2023) observed that this is already taking place among many protestant churches in Nigeria, especially in the northern parts, but much effort is still needed if such will be realised between them and the Roman Catholic Church. She again hopes

that a validly baptised Christian may no longer need another baptism or proselytisation in case they want to change churches.

Looking forward to a future where clergymen from different Christian communions may celebrate at the same Eucharistic table, while the Eucharist is shared with all irrespective of their denominational backgrounds in Nigeria. This is currently taking place in Europe between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. But it has not taken shape in Nigeria, and even if it occurs here, its spread to all denominations seems like a mirage. In the words of Lacoste (2005, p.473), “those barriers and rules applicable in mixed marriages will gradually be retouched, modified and removed for real Christian marriage devoid of sentiments to take shape. Though it may not be easily feasible because the present dogmatic and pastoral rules still make the Roman Catholics shun such marriages. However, the church believes that gradually, the real ecumenical debates and discussions may work in Nigeria the type that will alternately usher in joint social action and spiritual ecumenism, and will tear down the denominational wall mounted centuries ago, which will ultimately give way to unity in Christendom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In the first place, there should be the avoidance of negative trait which often leads to antagonism. According to Ikalama, Isaac (1995), for religion to be ecumenically focused, it must avoid arrogance, fanaticism, discrimination, etc and emphasise the idea of God, one people, one culture and religion. And this means that, “regardless of suspicion, scepticism and prejudice among the churches, each group should jettison her personal biases, selfishness and pride and focus more on ways of having a common understanding of the meaning of ecumenism” (Vanderwilt, 1998, p.2).
2. In the second places the interior change of life and conversion is needed in the lives of the Christian if ecumenism will work, minds should first be renewed, while attitudes are to be developed before the desire for unity can materialize, there should be self-denial, humility, and gentility in the life of the Christians, who promote Christian unity. In fact, “the deeper they are with the word, the father and the holy spirit, the more they grow in brotherly love” (Ogbodo, 2008, p.112).
3. In addition to this, ecumenism should be accepted not as a catholic or protestant affair but as a collective affair”
4. “The church should partake completely in the activities of CAN, as one of her founding members from where her contributions will help in making CAN more ecumenically minded.

5. She should set the pace as the mother-church in restoring order, sanity, and unity in Nigerian Christendom.

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