

## **DIVISION AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE EARLY CHURCH AND THEIR IMPLICATION FOR CHRISTIAN ECUMENISM IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*No society is exclusively immune to the phenomenological situations of divisions and diversities. This entails that, the management of diversities wherever it exists is wisdom. When diversities are not properly handled, they often results in parochialism, discrimination, vain boasting –fed by tribal and ethnic sentiments. The efforts of CAN in uniting the many divergent worshippers have not yielded much effort nonetheless. This article, using of phenomenological and observation approach, studies the divisive phenomenon among the ancient Corinthians, which has reappeared among Nigerian Churches, resulting in denominationalism, divergent tenets, and varying articles of faith and practices. The aim of the paper is to point out that, division and ethnicity are a negation of the vocation of Christian Church leadership in the pursuit of building a kingdom of truth, justice and neighbourliness –here on earth. It then concludes that, the Church in Nigeria should take a cue from the oneness in the Trinitarian God. Unity in diversity (of foremost importance) exists in the Trinity, implying exigency of sociality without discrimination.*

**Keywords:** Divisions, Discrimination, Denominations, Ecumenism, Nigeria,

### **Introduction**

Christianity, pedastalled on the earthly career and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ, began in the first century AD with a few people, the apostolic band, in Jerusalem. Since then, the religion has been propagated in many global geo-social spaces through successful Church planting. Christianity’s maxim has been that “God is in Christ, reconciling men to Himself in that Christ’s event has ushered in a “New Order,” “a new aeon” in the universe. However, in the present world order, the history of mankind is replete with incidences of divisions, discrimination and violence against each other (Adebayo, 2023, 96; cf. Familusi, 2019). The early Church was no exception especially as noticeable among the ancient Corinthians, marked by prejudices, rancour and divisions, a situation being

replicated among the contemporary Nigeria's Christian community with its debilitating and hampering consequence on ecumenism and socio-religious and political development in the country. The "religious dissonance has brought about avalanche of disorder manifesting in loss of lives and properties, retardation of development, political gridlock as well as threat to unity." Nigeria's diversified background inspite of religious coherence enforced on it (Ogueche, 62).

This essay delves into the conceptual analysis of employed terms, and discusses the challenge of disunity in the ancient Corinthian Church. It also situates the same scenario in Nigeria's Church situation, analyzing some of the causes. Apparently, the divisive situation should or ought to be mitigated through the establishment of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) some years ago but the Christian umbrella body appears not to have achieved much. The article concludes by highlighting the effects of disunity on Nigeria's Christianity.

### **Conceptual Analysis of Terms**

Some key concepts and terminologies are contextual to the discussion ensued in this paper; these include "division," "ecumenism" as well as "religion" – which are called forth for explanation. They are taken up in turn below.

#### **Division**

"Division" is the noun of the infinitive "to divide," and it denotes the duo of the "act" or "process" of dividing and the state of being divided (Webster's, 2006, 534). The term presupposes a coherent substance shattered into pieces; it is a connotation of disunity. Although it has some positive sense, however, as employed in this essay, the term refers to the phenomenological condition or situation of being divided in opinion or interest in the context of human social relationship. In this way, division breeds, and at the same time fed by, intolerance, racialism, racism, bigotry, narrow-mindedness and separatism, discrimination, sentimental and open conflict, lack of mutual respect and understanding. It breaches the principle of harmonious relationship. The terminology is used to connote a situation of disagreement, disunity and uncooperative attitude polarizing human society to the effect that each party may not be delightfully interested in what the adjacent group(s) undertakes.

#### **Ecumenism**

From Hellenistic background, *oikoumenikos*, from which other terms such as "ecumenism" and "ecumenical" are coined, originally denoted the "inhabited world" or what is "general." The Greeks employed the terminology to indicate the total collection of the people under the Roman Empire. Its derivative "ecumenism" itself has had great historical denotations for delineation and description of multiplicity of valences. The Romans employed the concept, derived from the Latinum, *oecumenicus*, in a political context. The early Church used it to describe something that pertains to the entire Church in the terrestrial world (cf. Acts 19:27;

Matt. 24:14) (Osunwokeh, 2014, 91). The employment of the term in this article corresponds with its Pauline usage. In Paul, a great missionary and theologian of the Church, the services and activities performed in the Church's corporate worship should be done to promote general interest in the spirit of *oikodome* (cf. I Cor. 10:33; 12:7; 14:6, 26, 40; etc. cf. Rom. 15:2; I Cor. 14:3, 5, 12; II Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; Eph. 4:29; I Tim. 1:4). For Paul, *oikodome* meant transmission of Christian knowledge towards building up the body life. In a moral and religious sense, ecumenism denoted didacticism meant for progressive improvement of the mind especially in faith's dimensional enlightenment.

Paul's ecumenical maxim to his churches is that, "He that prophesieth, speaketh to men for edification" (I Cor. 14:5, KJV). Ecumenism conveys togetherness and wider participation among social entities; it encourages universal participation in life events and situation. It is a social theory, with its inherent principle and practice, adopted by religious adherent-groups to enhance togetherness among them inspite of their distinct uniqueness divisions, portending the fact that a characterizing hallmark for the practice of religion should be mutuality, togetherness and tolerance.

### **Religion**

Religion lacks a unified definition because it has been approached by psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, etc. albeit a reductionist approach to, and meaning of religion is not farfetched from these scholars from diverse background. Traced to its Greco-Roman etymological root, the word "religion" derives from 3 Latin words – *Ligare*: "to bind"; *Relegare*: "to unite" (or "to link"); and *Religio*: "relationship" (Nsa, 216-217; Nkanta, 3-4), and there it essentially signified making "sacred oath or vow to the gods."

Basically and as employed in this essay, religion denotes a form of binding relationship that occurs between 2 entities: the sacred and the mundane i.e., the deity (or deities) and humans. It consists of certain beliefs and practices, which are derived from a sense of mysterious encounter with the sacred (Webster's, 2006, 1550). As Rudolf Otto cast it, the sacred is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* i.e., "a mystery that causes both trembling and fascination." As employed in this article, religion is held to be synonymous with faith, creed, doctrine, or theology.

### **The Challenge of Disunity in the Ancient Corinthian Church**

The New Testament (NT) Christianity was born into a complex socio-religious and political situation in which the Greco-Roman religions and philosophies were prevalent. Before it enjoyed the *Pax Romana*, Christianity was looked down upon and persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders. But this cogent factor only made for the expansion of the faith to frontier geographical realms in the Roman Empire where vibrant churches were founded (Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19; cf. Matt. 10:23).

The Corinthian Church was founded by Paul's evangelical team about AD 50 (Acts 18:1-18). Corinth, a city, with the exception of Ephesus, was the most important of all that the Apostle visited. The city flourished from the 8th to 5th centuries BC but burned by the Roman consul Lucius Mummius in 146 BC. It was later rebuilt by Julius Caesar (c. 46-44 BC) as a Roman colony and renamed *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*. Due to its large population, the city eventually became the Roman capital of the province of Achaia comprising different classes of people: the freemen and slaves. Aside the social class, the city was multi-religious in nature. It accommodated the worship of several deities: *Poseidon* (ruler of the sea) and *Asklepios* (goddess of healing). Besides, *Apollo* had its own temple there alongside temple to *Aphrodite* (the goddess of love) by which 1,000 sacred virgins dedicated themselves during its festal observances (Padfield, 2005, 2-3).

A critical study of Paul's first letter to them indicates that there were contentions and rancours in the ancient Corinthian Church among other intrinsic socio-theological issues in the community. Commenting on the internal squabbles in the Corinthian assembly, W. F. Cook (2023, 44) names other internal issues in the Corinthian Church, and raises the questions, "How could a church started by the Apostle Paul be fractured by divisions, filled with arrogance, seemingly supportive of immorality, involved in litigation, and struggling over whether sexual relations are appropriate within the husband-wife relationship?"

But the issues portrayed above by Cook are just a few of the problems in the setting. Other issues included participation membership participation in food offered to idols, head covering/veil wearing abuse of the Lord's Supper, misunderstanding about spiritual gifts, and misconception about the resurrection (8:1-11:1; 11:2-16, 17-34; 12:1-14:40; chap. 15). The Corinthian assembly was mixed racially and socially; it largely although not exclusively comprised of Gentiles (cf. I Cor. 6:1-6, 10, 11, 16-20; 8:7; 12:2; 8:1-11:1). In the Greco-Roman world, it was normal for the citizens to approach the secular law courts with their grievances, whereas Jews were forbidden to do so – a point which helps explain this practice in Corinth (6:1-6). But then, the contents of chapters 9-11 indicate that the community also had Jewish citizens (Guthrie & Motyer, 1999, 964; Hafemann, 1993, 164). Krentz (1996, 466) avers that the Corinthian Christians were drawn from and rooted in such heterogenous and pluralistic society.

According to him:

The names of Corinthian Christians...show...multi-ethnic background: Chloe...Stephanos and Achaikos...Jason, Sosipater...and Erastus bear Greek names while Fortunatus...Aquila and Priska...Lucius...Tertius, the scribe Paul used to write Romans...Gaius (Paul's host) and Quartus all carry Latin names. They all represented the class divisions present in the Corinthian society (*Emphasis mine*).

There were also the descendants of the colonists sent by Caesar who had nothing in common with the old inhabitants of the Greek city. These resided side by side with the Corinthian elites Pawlak, 2013, 143-144).

Disunity and discrimination raged in the Corinthian Church, taking the whole of chapters 1:10-4:21 of the writer's attention. The Church had embraced the values of its Roman society, divided over ethnicity and social ranks. Hence, their allegiance was polarized around Paul, Apollos, and Cephas; only a few subscribed to the leadership of Christ in the fold. The Apostle was unhappy about the development as noticeable in his apologetic and combative letter to them. The struggle for subscription to credible leadership worthy of command and respect was a contentious source. They were always at loggerhead, seeking to overdo one another in their polarized camps in order to lay claim to more excellent positions. There, many were converts from a permissive pagan background, and they had little to boast of. Nevertheless, they prided themselves in their intellectual prowess: they bandied about such slogans as *Liberty* and *Knowledge*. Leading camps gave themselves over to boasting and in the process became puffed up; they castigated the camps whose teachers and leaders could not display super-wisdom. They pitched the leaders against one another (1:10-12; cf. 4:1-21; 9:1-27; 15:8-11).

That is, their divisive rattles revolved around their various teacher-leaders, perceived from the level of the teachers' *Sophia* while speaking and from the perspective of sharing Christian instruction in the local station. *Sophia* could designate specific types of expertise as well as general sagacity in the conduct of life and the higher kinds of insight associated with seers and poets. The word originally meant "sage," or "expert." Incidentally, Roman culture valued rhetoric and regarded the apostolic kerygma as foolishness. Apollos' corresponding special rhetorical capacity in the Corinthian community may have incited sophist-style factionalism, although it could not be properly situated that Corinth's Apollos was unduly influenced by the sophists, as their presence was felt in Alexandria in the first century AD.

The Corinthian sophistry consisted not just in the possession of wisdom but also noticeable in learning erudition. The situation was complicated by the fact that the worshippers in the community had not allowed the cross to redefine the new entity to which they jointly belonged. Rather, the members perceived the Christian *ekklesia* in accordance with the various contemporaneous social models available in the Roman society then namely the household model, collegial model, political *ekklesia* and Jewish synagogue (cf. 1:10-4:21) (Mihaila, 2019, 27).

### **Divisive Situation in the Nigerian Church**

There is no geo-social space throughout the world perfectly characterized by homogeneity, and where unity in all spheres of life is absolutely a hallmark. There

is diversity in politics, religion, culture, colour, nationality and social caste. From the religious perspective, the world is polarized around Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Eastern philosophies aside the several henotheistic religions and beliefs in Latin America and Africa among others. The face of Christianity itself has not remained the same since the famous 16th century Protestant Reformation led by Martin Luther (1483-1546) took place. Unfortunately, the Protestants have been broken into other smaller numerous denominations in the contemporary time than envisaged by Luther and other reformers during their reformation tasks.

The Church in Nigeria was founded in the context of multiple diversities. Being a leading global Black nation notwithstanding, the country is sharply marked by political, socio-cultural, ethnic and geographical differences. It has about 400 ethnic groups, whose representatives, contest and/or lobby for the political and resource control of the country – a situation which gave rise to the 1967 to 1970 Civil War. The fact that Nigeria's 2023's February and March General Elections were precipitated on ethno-religious sentimental biases indicate that Nigeria's post-independence socio-political life has not been ridden of political, ethnocentric and religious bigotry.

Unfortunately, the sentimental ethnic, tribal, and political biases have been unwarily midwived into the Christian religion, affecting its outlook. Although each Church-denomination possesses internal administrative mechanism, ethnic sentiments cannot be altogether ruled out in their existential life nevertheless, affecting the portrait and spread of the denominations. Some denominational groups e.g., Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) are looked upon as being more Northerner by the Southerners; hence the low patronage of the latter because they have more or prevailing Hausa-speaking congregations. Again, the Church, *Nongo u Kristu u i Ser u Sha Tar* (NKST) (Universal Reformed Christian Church) is somewhat synonymous with and regarded as the “tribal Church” of the Tivs and other related tribes in Benue State. The Qua Iboe Church is situated mostly in the Middle Belt while the Apostolic Church Nigeria (TACN), Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) Worldwide, Cherubim & Seraphim (C & S), Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) are seen as importation from the Southern part of the country by people of other regions.

There are more native Igbo Reverend Fathers, Sisters, and Priests in the Catholic Church fold just as there are more Southwestern figures in the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) than from elsewhere in the setup. These developments are aside some inherent internal denominational crises some of which have resulted in court cases, abrasive behaviours and armed conflicts. Moreover, the larger and most prevalent tribal worshippers in some denominations tend to assume authoritative positions in the denominational scheme of things. Some of the responsible factors for these divisive developments include the following:

**Biblical Interpretation**

Polarization takes place in the body of Christ in Nigeria following jaundiced, unbalanced and parochial biblical interpretation. As expected, wrong biblical interpretation breeds heretical beliefs and practices, which will eventually result in separatists and splinter groups as expressly noticeable in the history of the Christian Church to date. The Bible is a coherent divine revelation but it is nonetheless marked by difficult passages which require sound interpretive skills to decode alongside the illumination by God's Spirit. Some Church leaders and their followers ridicule formal training for Christian ministry. As a result of their anti-intellectual stance, they veer off from interpretive orthodoxy and propound illicit teachings detrimental to the spiritual health of their members. This group of clerics derides those who cherish clerical training for ministry, who laboriously deduce their preaching labours from astute exegetical efforts.

**Founders "Agenda"**

In Nigeria, Church-denomination founders often start out their ministries with certain agendas, which they hand down to their followers as practical and ministerial norms. Different Church founders have always come up with revelations supposedly gotten from God, resulting in untamable proliferation of churches because of the need to preserve the "agendas" of the founders. There is ministerial pride cum ostracization of "non-members" of this group. Obiefuna, Nwadiolor & Umeanolue (2023, 19), followed by C. I. Osunwokeh (2014, 90), aver that proliferation has entailed multiplicity of Christian denominations and ministries as each founder claims credibility to asserting the divinity of his (or her) call to the Christian ministry and of his (or her) ministerial activities. The "founders syndrome" has unfortunately planted some seeds of discord among Christians in the country.

There are other underlying causes of segregation in Nigeria's Church, which spatial limitation will not allow this essay to bring up for discussion. Making the matter worse, some members are subjected to disciplinary measure for some improper, unethical behaviour in one denomination only to be made a viable officer in another, therefore thereby heighten the tensed situation of division in the fold.

**Denominationalism**

In some geographical places of the world, the ferment of Christianity has been characterized by the scenario of denominationalism. Church-denominationalism can be viewed as an artificial human creation of Christian religious groups, who share common beliefs and practices, which converge for personal interest, identity and/or recognition. Incidentally, Africans inherited the "legacy" from the European and American missionary movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. Major missionary movements from Europe and America gave birth to major denominations (i.e., mission churches) in Africa in general and Nigeria

specifically. The mission churches owe it a duty to constantly report their activities back to their “founding fathers,” at the exclusion of other heterogeneous groups.

The Catholics are reporting to Rome, the Anglicans to England, the Methodists to Wales, the Lutherans to Germany, the Baptists to USA and so on. According to Dayo Emmanuel (2023), like the scramble for Africa by the European world powers at the Berlin Conference of 1878, early mainline Christian denominations perhaps consciously or otherwise done a similar partitioning, each one pitching its tent in places so conducive and where they were accepted. While the denominations help to serve God’s purpose in the propagation of the Gospel, denominationalism has dealt a deadly blow to the universal Church because it revolves around power play and power tussle on both local and international contexts.

In the first place, the presence of many mission churches indicates variegated Articles of Faith and Practices. Informed by the quality or otherwise, the members of each denomination often boast as being superior to others. The situation is further complicated by the presence of several Christian sectarian groups e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Scientists, etc. who do not have any viable link with the established or mission churches. These are besides individuals who pull out of their mother-churches to begin their personally-owned ministries. Some denominations and/or ministries build their spirituality mainly on prayer, some on Bible Study and some on singing.

Denominational emphasis also differs. In recent time, some Church leaders claim and preach that they are called to raise materially – rich members, who would control the “Millionaires Club” of the nation. Such churches view their averagely-rich and poor congregants as second-class Christians. Yet, some delve into what they describe as Deliverance Ministry, by which those who are “Possessed of the Devil” would roll and roll in the full view of all worshippers, and subsequently fall down on the floor in what is regarded as “falling under the anointing.” From the Orthodox churches, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Anglican, the Catholic Church, the white garment and to the Pentecostal churches, different thoughts are served from the very many Pastors and General Overseers, to the expectant members.

Some teach that God is so holy that He cannot behold sin, and as such that members should continually examine themselves as to whether they are still in Him in order to avoid His anger and judgment. Others say that the grace of God is sufficient, and, therefore, it is not for man to be conscious of sin all the time, but to stand firm in the liberty and righteousness of Christ. Christian preachers also argue as to whether it is right for a woman to put on trousers, ear rings and make-ups. Another thorny issue is the question of tithe payment, and who receives it. All these are conspicuous proofs that divisions exist among Christian community in Nigeria (Akintunde, 2019).



### **The Effort of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) at Ecumenism**

In the face of Nigeria's Christian heterogeneous religious expression, CAN was established to act as unifying political and spiritual factor for all in spite of divergent doctrinal and practical differences. It was founded during Nigeria's military government on August 27, 1976 through the self-consciousness of Nigeria's Christian leaders then; the idea dawned on them that the ugly reality of disunity among Christians was a challenging one. CAN's maxim is, "That they all may be one" (cf. Jn. 17:21). Originally at inception, CAN was comprised of the Catholic Church and some mainline Protestant and Zionist denominations. It assumed more prominence in the 1980s when the debate of Nigeria's membership of Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) was a significant debate in the land. The major goals before this Christian body are as follows:

- (i) To unify the Church, so that they may all be one;
- (ii) To link Christians to proffer solutions to impending issues;
- (iii) To enable Churches consult together, and when necessary to help Churches make common statements and take common action;
- (iv) To cater for the spiritual and moral welfare of Christians, and the nation; and
- (v) To propagate the Gospel, to promote understanding among the various people and strata of society in Nigeria.

Its member-denominations are grouped as follows: (i) The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); (ii) Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN); (iii) The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN); (iv) The Evangelical Church Winning All/ Terayar Ekklesiyar A Nigeria (ECWA/TEKAN); and (v) Organization of Africa Instituted Churches (OAICs). The leadership offices of the body, e.g., the President, general Secretary, etc., usually emerge from among the subset member-groups. The body has been forthright in her fight against injustice and corrupt political system and practices in the country, condemning religious extremism, fundamentalism, violence and other related vices taking place in various centres in Nigeria. For 2023 General Elections, it is reported from CAN website (<https://christianassociationofnigeria.org>) that the body deployed no less than 1, 200 Observers. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) recognized CAN as an accredited Election Observer Group.

In spite of her laudable efforts at promoting a smooth front for Christianity in Nigeria to thrive, the Churches still lack harmonious relationship among themselves. Pastor Samuel Sanusi, the current General Secretary and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Bible Society of Nigeria (BSN) (March 31, 2003; cf. Omonokhua, 2016), makes the following statements while he was interviewed by Chinyere Abiazem of the New Telegraph Newspaper: "My concern is that we are not united. Lack of unity among the churches is affecting us as a nation..." Pathetically, many churches exist with all kinds of different doctrines, beliefs and manners of approaching one common and the same God up to date.

### **The Effect of Division and Discrimination in the Nigerian Church**

The challenge of division and discrimination has daunting consequences on the Church and the nation at large. In the first place, the scenario has brought about injustice, inequity, and has been employed to perpetrate political fraud in Christ's fold and in secular politics in Nigeria. As Kolawole & Nnaemeka (92) put it, "There is no doubt that the proliferation of churches contributed (sic) to the unspeakable sectionalism and competition which have brought lack of common understanding among Christians let alone adherents of other faith" (sic). The intra-conflict cases involving Churches in Nigerian law courts of different levels are alarming and worrisome, thereby indicating unhealthy relationship among the members and clergy. It is a sort of religious cacophony and is suggestive of maladministration.

Furthermore, the situation has resulted in the failure to develop robust Christian brotherhood in Christian camps. For example, as a result of hatred for his Christian colleague(s) devoid of critical and constructive thinking, the Christian public servant is the first to compromise his own religion, values and principles. He lacks strategic thinking, bringing with him (or her) what the future holds for his religious beliefs. He sacrifices his religious ideals on the altar of political expediency and nationality.

The situation has suggested disorder engendered by distrust, suspicion and other aberrant behaviours. Idowu (63) laments that a typical "Christian public servant does not first and foremost think of the implications of a policy decision on his religion, a situation not so among other religious counterparts." In the process, they offer themselves up for temporary gains and promise of gain or personal benefits.

According to Idowu (62), the children of ancient apostles, successors of prophets whose forbears defied lions and stood up to demagogues and tyrants, invented the press, spread literacy and universal education, developed newspapers, encouraged cognition, birthed nationalism, abolished slavery, built schools. But conversely, the very offspring of thinkers and Reformers, Puritans, do little or no critical thinking that would further the cause of Christianity particularly in Nigeria's geo-political and socio-economic space.

Some claim to be so pious or heavenly-conscious, to think of the Christian interest in the nation or to intercede for it. For lack of coherent active and strategic behaviour, Nigeria's Church has resulted to the production of new millennium (i.e. 21st century) self-acclaimed Pastors, Prophets and other "Church leaders" who are ignorant of History, devoid of Logic and Philosophy and even Systematic Theology, and who in their ignorance consistently raise others in their own image rather than God's, thereby producing weak, unorthodox and doctrinally-deficient "Christians" who cannot withstand the test of time.

On a positive note, the Church is the foundation and facilitator of whatever positive development Nigeria has achieved thus far. Democracy, civilization, education, human rights, women's rights, technology and rule of law are results of Judeo-Christian ideology. Presently, that all these social values are compromised and shaky is the first indication that something serious has gone wrong with the Nigerian Church. One can infer that terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria signal lack of peace and unity in the Church while poverty indicates lack of brotherly kindness in the Body of Christ (Emmanuel, 52-53).

Christians ought to be at the vanguard of defending democracy in Nigeria, but the existential divisions among Christ's Body in Nigeria threatens that and do not seem to guarantee the thriving of democracy in the country. Bosun Emmanuel laments saying, "The Church is the bastion of democracy" however, "a divided CAN cannot defend democracy and promote justice, equity and fairness." The situation is getting complicated that Christian political office holders or Christians who desire to contest for elective posts in general elections are discriminated against based on his (or her) denominational background as to whether such candidate is a Catholic, ECWA, UMCA, Anglican, COCIN, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Zionist (Aladura), etc.

Hence, in some regions where Christians form the majority of the population, united voice is lacking in presenting popular, viable and credible candidates. Again, in such places, there is no viable interaction between active Christian politicians and CAN leaders or their denominational leaders. The dichotomy in Nigeria's Christianity has degenerated to a level that Christians oppose fellow Christians on issues that will enhance common interest such as ordination and occupation of Church officers.

Unsolved intra-conflicts have often led to the formation of novel Churches or ministries, as pointed out earlier. Other qualities but turned divisive issues among Christians include job employment, corporate worship under CAN, number of candidates from each denomination for Jerusalem pilgrimage, etc. To make matter worse, Christian Seminaries are not also aligning with each other properly in idea sharing and development.

These complexities are contextually appalling. Citing a research conducted by Arne Mulder, Bosun Emmanuel (54; cf. Odunsi, 17; Jonathan, 43) claimed that over 13,000 Church buildings have been destroyed in Northern Nigeria as at December 2014 yet with little or sympathy shown by the brethren in the Southern region of the country. This, no doubt, includes the Churches in Benue State, Southern Kaduna among others. This is aside internal issues such as rejection of Bishops, Pastors and Reverends by some locales because the functionaries are not local natives there.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

This paper agrees with F. Nwaigbo (2004, 85) that “ethnicity,” and by implication, discrimination, “is an affront on the human person.” Incidentally, division and ethnicity have infested Nigeria’s political and religious space with mixed scene of gain and pain. Nigeria has long been dragged backward on the path of regional politics and identity cropping up in civil war, religious fundamentalism and militancy. Christianity should not unnecessarily complicate issues any more. Division and ethnicity are a negation of the vocation of Christian Church leadership to build a kingdom of truth, justice and neighborliness here on earth.

The Church in Nigeria should take a cue from the oneness in the Trinitarian God; unity in diversity first and foremost exists in the Trinity, implying sociality without discrimination. The harmonious relationship in the Christian camp should be a testimony to the oneness of the Godhead. This paper recommends that a Conference of Christian Leaders in Nigeria should be arranged for, and such Conference should incorporate both the clergy and laity leaders to discuss vital issues that promote Christian cooperation. Apart from calling on CAN leaders at all levels alone, this paper also beckons on the Church-denominational leaders to preach and teach about Christian ecumenism in their domains.

Finally, social virtues and attributes that enhance unity and ecumenism such as transparency, accountability, truthfulness, forthrightness, partnership, equity and egalitarianism should form the norm for behaviour in every parish, denomination and in CAN at large.

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