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CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION
Towards Jubilee 2000

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Conflict and Reconciliation - Towards Jubilee 2000

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NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS:

Each contributor is requested to send to the Editor two copies of his/her article and a disk copy saved preferably in Rich Text Format.
Today at the end of the 2nd millennium, at the threshold of the 21st century, conflicts abound worldwide. The spectre is so generalised to all corners of the globe that with the end of the Cold War and the Fall of the Berlin Wall many institutes and organisations for conflict resolution have emerged. Former US president Jimmy Carter, the late Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, former US Senator George Mitchell, have become household names in conflict resolution. They emerge from retirement to join the palaver, in Northern Ireland, in the Balkans, and in Burundi and the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Africa has had its share of the conflicts. Less than a decade to the end of the 2nd millennium Africa shocked the world with genocide, perhaps unparalleled in the history of humanity - the Rwandan genocide. Rwanda may be the first popular genocide of such proportions in the history of humanity. Rwanda proves that violent conflicts solve no problems! Since the 1994 ethnic Hutu vs. ethnic Tutsi conflict, a war has been raging in the central African region - the first world war fought on African soil. Practically all the countries of the Great Lakes region are involved in the conflict that now engulfs the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The history of the Rwanda-Burundi conflict reveals the socio-economic structures hardened into ethnic-racial structures thanks to colonialism. Other conflicts in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere in Africa show the negative influence of the [diamond] mining companies and multi-national corporations, the determination of the barons of arms trade, the greed and blurred vision of African dictators. All the above inflict even more scars on the African psyche which in turn fuel the conflicts. Memories and emotions have to be healed and re-educated to move the world towards true resolution of conflicts so that men and women may experience real reconciliation. If action is not taken to address the emotions and the psyche of Africans and humans elsewhere in the world, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, the Niger Delta
[Nigeria], Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi will not only persist but will keep on spawning their kind.

The articles assembled in this end of the millennium issue of the *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* narrate the reality of conflict from Biblical times to our experiences in recent times in West Africa (especially Biafra) and the central African region (especially Rwanda). The papers try to plumb the causes of these conflicts, rooted ultimately in the evil inside and outside humans. The papers challenge the Christian church to bear credible and prophetic witness in order to reach the target of reconciliation through the unremitting efforts of conflict resolution.

Elochukwu Eugene Uzukwu, c.s.sp.
The Nigerian Civil War: Outstanding and Unspoken Taboos

By

Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka

Introduction

The admission of guilt is the most difficult thing after any major armed conflict. This has been aptly manifested in the case of the Second World War where, after more than fifty years, the European nations are still struggling to come to terms with the horrors of the holocaust, displaced persons, and the recovery of assets and abandoned properties. As the case of South Africa has recently demonstrated, there is an important nexus between truth and reconciliation, and the commission that goes by that name in this African country will forever remain a model for all nations of the world. Guilt admission and a complete and unfalsified exposure of the truth not only opens the way for a lasting national reconciliation, but also brings about a psychological liberation to individual hearts.

It is generally known that horrendous acts of unimaginable proportions took place during the Nigeria/Biafra War. There were no forensic experts around at the time to discover and analyse the contents of mass graves, and no war-crime tribunals were set up to seek out and punish the perpetrators of the widely publicised atrocities on both sides of the war. Consequently, nobody knows even an estimate of the number of persons who lost their lives and under what circumstances. What we do know, however, is that the scars of the war are still written boldly in the minds and hearts of individuals, communities and tribes, and while there is a general talk of national reconciliation after decades of political crisis, the scars of the civil war seem to have been relegated to the background.

The purpose of this paper is to call attention to some unresolved issues of the civil war that should be rectified in the new
millennium. In any effort towards national reconciliation, the Church, by virtue of its mission towards the people of God, has the obligation to provide unbiased leadership. After more than 50 years since the end of the Second World War, shocking details began to emerge in 1998 of Swiss collaboration with the Nazi regime to disinherit the Jews, especially in the banking sector. Amidst international outcry and indignation, the Swiss Bishops’ Conference, in a pastoral letter, emphasised that the exposure and condemnation of these crimes was their duty. “We have to do all that is humanly possible,” they said, “to make reparations for these mistakes.” The Swiss banks have since agreed to pay billions of Swiss Franks as compensation to the survivors of the Holocaust. The action of the bishops was informed by the conviction that faith should not remain a mere individual option: it also should involve political and social responsibility.

We have in our society citizens who have suffered, and are still suffering, many wrongs as a result of the civil war. Almost 30 years after the civil war, the path of the marginalization of the Igbo has continued to be carefully charted and sustained. Can a truly united Nigeria become a reality in this atmosphere? This is a question that should concern every Nigerian in the new millennium. It is not late for the church leadership in Nigeria to borrow a leaf from the Swiss bishops and add their collective voice to the exposure and condemnation of the crimes committed against a section of the Nigerian populace. Unfortunately, frequent discussions and interaction among clerics have revealed that on the thorny question of war guilt, for instance, opinions have been expressed strictly on ethnic lines, and these are anything but unbiased. Criticism, as Wole Soyinka would say, is like charity - it must begin at home. As we search our souls for the things that divide us as a nation with a view to writing our history on a clean slate in the new millennium, it is important to look also at the records of the church.
The Polarisation of Church and Society

The Dark Side of Tribal Loyalty and Sympathy

Ethnic hatred and rivalry has remained the greatest danger to the survival of Nigeria as a nation, and nowhere did this become more apparent than during the civil war when tribal forces and emotions were given full reign. As the late Bishop Moynagh of Calabar predicted at the time, “these tribal forces can and do enter into the church since the church is made up of men, and priests and bishops belong to various tribal loyalties and sympathies.” He warned that there was “a grave danger here that the Episcopal Conference could be split and broken under the pressure of tribalism.” As an expatriate missionary, Bishop Moynagh would be regarded as an impartial observer, and as a Bishop he ought to have known what he was talking about. The Episcopal Conference was split and broken during the Nigerian civil war and in the end we had the “Nigerian Bishops,” and the “Biafran Bishops.” The repercussions of that unfortunate polarisation of the church are still very much around for those who have the courage to see and frown at them.

The declaration of the Republic of Biafra on 30 May 1967 presented a serious dilemma to the bishops of the old Onitsha ecclesiastical province. Should they continue to regard and style themselves as a unit of the Nigerian church hierarchy and risk the wrath of the Biafran people and government, or should they show solidarity with the new state at the expense of church unity? Anybody familiar with the political atmosphere inside the breakaway region would agree that the church leaders in Biafra had in fact no choice in the matter. Yet, in identifying themselves with the new political dispensation, they proceeded with caution and studied prudence. At a meeting held at the Bishop’s house Ikot-Ekpene on 24 November 1967, six months after the declaration of the Republic of Biafra, they recorded their deliberations as “Minutes of the meeting of the Bishops of Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province.” In other words, they still regarded themselves as part of the Nigerian hierarchy and de facto did not recognise the existence of another political entity. It was not until February 1968 that they began, albeit reluctantly, to call
themselves "Bishops of Biafra," and following the mass killings and mass starvation of the populace inside the enclave, they also began to champion the cause of bringing relief to the people. They justified their active role in the conflict on the grounds of their duty to "rescue their flock from obvious danger to both soul and body," and were convinced that two things were at stake at the time, namely, "the survival of the church and the survival of the people of Biafra."4

The Bishops on the Nigerian side would equally have seen two things at stake at the time—the survival of the church and the unity of the nation. Therein lay the dilemma and vicious circle in which the church leaders found themselves. On the Nigerian side in particular, the survival of the church was perceived to depend inextricably on the sensitive issue of Nigerian unity. The military government was fighting a bitter war "to keep Nigeria one" and the church was under fierce attack for undermining that effort. The Holy See and Caritas in particular were daily castigated in the press, radio and television for their involvement in the war. As a result anything done and said in favour of the secessionists was seen as making life unbearable for the church and missionaries who were loyal to the federal cause. It was against this background, for instance, that a delegation of Nigerian Bishops was in Rome in December 1968 "to present the true story of the conflict;" and to "lobby the Curia against the activities of Caritas Internationalis."5 However, rather than converting the Holy See and Caritas, the Bishops came back enlightened and emboldened. On returning to Nigeria, a bishops' conference was quickly held and the critics courageously rebuffed in a press release that made it clear that the Pope's intervention was purely humanitarian.6 But in Rome the Bishops had presented the picture of an intimidated and frightened Church. One of them even demanded that Caritas hand over its entire relief operation in Biafra to the Red Cross and there was no doubt that the massive press attacks on the Church made him nervous. "If the Caritas relief to Biafra does not stop," he said, "my windows will be smashed."7

On the other hand, the insistence on the unity of Nigeria in the
summer of 1967, and indeed throughout the war, was an issue, which inevitably brought about a division in the church. The church leaders belonged to various tribal loyalties and sympathies, and their failure to arrive at a consensus on some controversial issues of the war can safely be ascribed to the tribal forces and emotions that pervaded the Nigerian civil war. This, more than the physical obstacles caused by the armed conflict, was largely responsible for the lack of communication between the church leaders on both sides of the war. Consequently, they could not, on their own, come out with a joint statement on an aspect of the war which had shocked the conscience of the world, namely, the mass killings of innocent civilians and wanton destruction of property in the former Eastern Nigeria. They needed the inducement of the Holy See to produce such a statement in far away Rome in February 1969. In his letter of invitation to the Rome meeting, Cardinal Cicognani of the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church had said that the meeting should serve above all “to show forth the unity of the Episcopate in spite of the sad division from which those regions are suffering.” It was no wonder that the communiqué at the end of that meeting was entitled: “Unity of the Hierarchy: Bishops’ Statement from Rome.”

The Question of Genocide
By May 1966, when the first wave of pogroms that eventually claimed the lives of over 30,000 of mostly Igbo citizens of Eastern Nigeria, genocide was a word whose true meaning was not known to the generality of Nigerians, but whose horrors and manifestations were obvious to the wider world. When the civilised world that was still wreathing under the pain inflicted on their conscience by the holocaust began to raise alarm over the strange happenings in Nigeria, something bizarre made its debut in Nigerian history—the determination by the civil and church leaders not to allow the stigma of the charge of genocide to hang over the head of the peoples and regions that perpetrated it.

Today, after the killings in Rwanda and East Timor, and the horrors of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, people have
come to realise that a systematic mass killing of a people simply on the grounds of their ethnic origin is a crime against humanity. Those indicted in these cases have either been incarcerated or are being hunted down for prosecution. Not one single person, civilian or military, has been indicted in Nigeria over the many known cases of crimes against humanity committed before, during and shortly after the civil war.

There is even a concerted effort by Nigerian historians to conceal the evidence and play down the magnitude of the mass killings that took place in Nigeria. Thus for some the pogrom of 1966 was an event in which “some Igbos lost their lives in Northern Nigeria.” Since the word “some” in this context means a “few” it is doubtful if it is used to convey to posterity the fact that of the estimated one million Igbos living in Northern Nigeria by 1966, as many as 30,000 lost their lives. Some Nazi historians have in the past made several attempts to deny that the Holocaust ever took place, a move that prompted the German government to make such abjuration punishable under German law. For a genuine reconciliation to happen in Nigeria there is need to tell the whole story of the unfortunate episode in our national history.

When the Nigerian Church hierarchy finally came together in Rome in February 1969, the whole world was eager to hear the truth about an issue that had divided world opinion at all levels. While the Biafran Bishops saw some elements of genocide in the war both in intent and in practice, the Nigerian Bishops saw the use of the word “genocide” as untoward. Mindful of public opinion back home, the latter acquiesced to a most revealing compromise, which reads as follows:

While we refrain from ascribing to any one people the nefarious intent of exterminating another whole people, yet as the religious leaders of the Church, we feel not only justified, but bound in conscience, to condemn the killing of innocent people, the looting and deliberate destruction of property, and every manifestation of hatred and vindictiveness.
With the advantage of hindsight, we can say that the Nigerian Bishops stood vindicated in their assessment of the genocide controversy: there was no extermination of another whole people at the end of the civil war. However, given the evidence of sporadic and organised mass killings of Igbo nationals all over the federation during the conflict, and the fact that by April 1968 tens of thousands of people were dying daily as a result of the blockade that purported to use starvation as a weapon of war, the charge of genocide was not only real, but also understandable. It is not our intention to enumerate here all the known cases of genocidal killings of Igbos. But to appreciate the general feeling of the victims and their leaders, it is paramount to refresh our memories with just one incident described graphically by one Irish nun after the recapture of the Midwest by federal troops:

I must tell you a little about here. It would fill a large book to write it all.... First the Biafrans took over.... Actually they were gentlemen and not many lives were lost.... Later the Federal army came and overthrew the Biafrans. That occasion we shall never forget.... They accused us of hiding Ibos. They wanted to kill all Ibos. The streets were lined with the bodies of innocent Ibo unarmed civilians. They were nearly all Christians mostly Catholic. They were tied, stripped, beaten and shot and some burned alive. Worse than the persecution of the Jews. No priest was allowed to attend them.

The Bishop came once to a dying Ibo on the street and a soldier came in his presence and fired two additional bullets through the man’s head to make sure that he’d died. The tribal hatred is terrible...They came in gangs with sticks and guns to kill our Ibo nursing students. We saved them at the risk of our lives. Poor girls.\[11\]

This account was independently corroborated elsewhere by another missionary who reported that some of them were “in
danger from irate civilians in Benin City and Sapele because of their efforts to protect Ibo refugees.” In the light of all the evidence to the contrary, therefore, any claim that there was no systematic and organised slaughter of Igbo civilians, especially in the “liberated” areas of the Mid-West, Nsukka, Ogoja, Calabar and Bonny, must be regarded as “a willing suspension of disbelief.”

Nevertheless, it stands out as remarkable that given the nature of the Nigeria/Biafra conflict only a few atrocities were committed at the end of the war. The anticipated large scale “genocide” did not materialise, thanks in no small measure to the pre-emptive outcry of the Christian world led by the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI. On the eve of Biafra’s capitulation in January 1970 the Pope made his famous appeal “on bended knees” during his public address in St. Peter’s Square urging the Nigerians “to avoid genocide.” That appeal sparked off violent protests in several major cities in Nigeria. The Pope had ignored the advice of Vatican diplomats not to use that dreaded word, but he trusted, with success, “the humanity of Gowon and others.” The federal government and the army, especially the Third Marine Commando led by Olusegun Obasanjo, were very much aware that the world was watching, and they made sure that no further genocide took place after the war.

While we celebrate that victory, we must admit, openly and privately, that crimes against humanity took place in our country Nigeria. Ethnic hatred and violence are still bedevilling our nation and what we require most for a corporate existence is not so much the fear and cover up of a stigma as the avoidance of it.

Religion and Politics

Religious Propaganda as Instrument of War

Until the National Constituent Assembly of 1977, religion did not feature prominently in the national debate. During that first national democratic exercise since the end of the civil war, we witnessed first hand the damaging effect on civil society of the use of religious propaganda as an instrument of war during the Nigeria-Biafra conflict. At both ends of the propagandist spectrum were the Northern Islamic oligarchy and the Biafran government
and its Christian allies. Caught between the debilitating web were the Christians on the Nigerian side.

Following the pogroms of 1966, a deliberate attempt was made to give the slaughter a religious colouring. The handy terms "Moslem North" and "Christian East" began to make their way into press and radio and some Northern leaders set out to appeal to Islam’s military traditions and spoke of a Holy war against the East. That was an irresponsible strategy, which unfortunately received instant solidarity from some Moslem African countries. Inflammatory broadcasts began to be beamed daily to the Northern Moslems by a government radio from North Africa. The second wave of killings in September 1966 was in fact triggered off by a false radio announcement from Cotonu that Northerners were being massacred in Eastern Nigeria. Thus the tone was set for the most devastating religious propaganda which marred the conduct of the ensuing armed conflict.

The beleaguered Biafran government and peoples found the religious propaganda a handy tool in their struggle for survival. In the words of Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the secessionist leader, the Biafrans were a terrified and frustrated people who used every opportunity to secure sympathy. They therefore fell back on religious propaganda in order to achieve a dual purpose, namely, to galvanise a feeling of a common identity internally and to secure the sympathy and recognition of the outside world. It was alleged, for instance, that it would be "a disservice to Christianity if the whole world stood by and watched how Russia and Britain helped Islam to establish itself in Christian Biafran." As the war became bloodier and the effects of the blockade more devastating, the religious propaganda became more categorical. "If the world, especially the churches, do not help us," it was alleged, "we shall all die and Christianity in Nigeria shall die with us." While this kind of talk certainly had an enormous influence on the humanitarian intervention of the Christian world, which was not immune from sectarian loyalty and anti-Islamic feelings, it also infuriated the Christians on the other side of the conflict.

Church leaders in Nigeria, especially the Nigerian Catholic
hierarchy, on many occasions strongly condemned the use of religious propaganda as an instrument of war. They did this for two main reasons. Firstly, the argument that the war was between Islam and Christianity was flawed in many respects. Apart from the fact that Gowon, the Head of State, was himself a Christian, and that “a not insignificant proportion of the Federal Armed Forces is Christian,” there were three ecclesiastical provinces in Nigeria at the time out of which Biafra was only one, albeit the largest, part. Emeka Ojukwu was aware of this when he stated that Biafra could not make full use of the religious propaganda because that would have pitted Christianity clearly against Islam and there was no such dichotomy on the Nigerian side. That, he said, explained the indecision and lack of co-operation from the Christians on the other side. They were, to say the least, indignant over a strategy that did not take them and their convictions into consideration.

The second, and by far the most important, reason behind their condemnation of religious propaganda was the actual and the perceived threats to the Christian faith in Nigeria. That threat had both internal and external dimensions. In the first instance, many Catholics, already weak in faith, were beginning “to choose between the love for their country and the Catholic faith.” The perceived one-sided support from the Christian world helped many to make that vital internal decision. Externally, the massive and unrelenting attacks on the Vatican and its relief agency, Caritas Internationalis, were rather exacerbated by the religious propaganda. The church was accused of pursuing a policy of indirect colonialism and calls were made for the establishment of a Nigerian national church independent of the Pope. This latter call was suggested by no less a personality than Chief Anthony Enahoro, the then information minister and himself a Catholic.

It was at this tragic episode in Nigeria’s history that religion was accorded a dominant place in national politics. The Christians were generally regarded as enemies of the nation by their Moslem brothers, and the frustrated military government accused them of prolonging the war by giving relief aid to Biafra. These charges and the religious debates they generated became so intense that the
Protestant World Council of Churches made a dramatic policy reversal towards the tail end of the war. At a meeting of the Joint Church Aid at Sandefjord, Norway, in December 1969, delegates were utterly surprised to read a statement from the WCC that the "massive relief air lift had saved many lives, but the political side-effects had placed Christians, churches and agencies in an ambiguous position." When attempts to get the Joint Church Aid, the ecumenical body that was responsible for the airlift, to halt the relief operation failed, the WCC issued an order to its representatives in Biafra to desist from giving aid in its name. Caritas and the other Catholic relief agencies continued their operations till the very end with disastrous consequences.

The Expulsion of Missionaries

Perhaps you feel you have lived in vain
That you have failed somehow;
But if you have touched one human heart,
Or kept one Solemn vow,
Or brought to one sad stricken soul
The hope to live again,
Why then no matter how you feel
You have not lived in vain. (Hazel Aiken)

It is remarkable that the only persons or group of persons that faced a tribunal at the end of a war that was as bitter as the Nigeria-Biafra conflict were the foreign missionaries, most of them Irish. In order "to bind its wounds, quieten the hawks, reunite its people," the Nigerian nation used the missionaries as scapegoats." They were captured, tried, imprisoned and deported to Europe in the middle of a bitter cold winter without the chance of taking even warm clothing.

The charges brought against the missionaries in Port Harcourt reflect the comic twist that is inherent in human history. When the verdict of the trial was finally read, the missionaries were accused not of giving "military and other help to the rebel regime," as
charged by the prosecuting counsel, but of "illegal entry" and "unlawful employment" in Nigeria. Of the 105 Sisters, Brothers, Fathers and a Bishop that were in all deported, some had worked in Nigeria for more than 30 years, but the authorities needed a crime that was punishable under Nigerian law. They found two and the missionaries were sentenced to six months' hard labour on each account. After a week in prison and the payment of fines, they were released and deported.

That the foreign missionaries were expelled did not surprise many at the time. As far back as 1967, when the missionaries had not yet involved themselves with political activities, the "resolution" had already been made by the Northern Chamber of Commerce to expel them from the country. By the beginning of 1968 their movements and activities on the Nigerian side were closely and regularly monitored "for security reasons." There was no doubt that the new power brokers in Nigeria, the Islamic Northern Oligarchy, would use the relief controversy to achieve a long-standing objective. Nobody, not even Gowon, the Christian Head of State, was capable of stopping that. The Commander in Chief gave Bishop Okoye the assurance that the deported missionaries would be allowed to come back after some time, provided they did not "engage in political activities." That has not happened.

The speed with which the missionaries were bundled together and shown the way out was what came to many, even the victims themselves, as a great surprise. It underscored the level of antagonism that had arisen in the Nigerian nation for a group of people whose only crime was to have saved innocent lives. If there was any consensus in church and state, it was that the foreign church workers "deceived" the Pope and the world about the Nigerian crisis. Consequently, they had to be sacrificed in order to appease the gods of Nigerian unity and to facilitate the Africanization of the Nigerian church. Accordingly, there was no official protest or popular outcry from either church or state against their deportation. The only authoritative voice against the expulsion came from an Anglican Bishop, the Rt. Rev. G. E.
Cochin, one time Anglican Bishop of Owerri. He described the expulsion of the Catholic missionaries as "unfair" and "unfortunate," and their imprisonment as not "honourable."29

The group of foreign missionaries that worked in Biafra ought to be associated with fame, honour and dignity not just for their achievements in the enclave, but most importantly because of what they gave to the whole world and to our century. This special gift has been described thus:

One episode in modern times stands out as a formative experience in contemporary humanitarianism—Biafra. An entire generation of NGO relief workers was moulded by Biafra, and several agencies were either born from the relief operation or forever changed by it. Biafra is totemic for contemporary relief, it was an unsurpassed effort in terms of logistical achievement and sheer physical courage.30

The talk here is about the pioneer relief efforts initiated and sustained by the foreign missionaries that Nigeria did not want. For Biafra, they formed the Joint Church Aid, the most dynamic ecumenical movement of the twentieth century, and when they could no longer function in Nigeria, the die-hards among them quickly got over the deportation shock and immediately put their experiences at the disposal of the world. Some moved into development programming, while others founded new NGOs, some of which, like Concern and Médecins Sans Frontières, have become world renowned. Put differently, Nigeria's loss has become "everyone else's gain."31

However, the majority of the deported missionaries were dislocated for life. They called Biafra "home," and although they accepted their expulsion bravely and in Christian spirit, their only regret in retrospect was "having to leave our people."32 These expressions were no "emotional" outbursts, as one infuriated church dignitary described them. They represented the genuine feelings of people who had volunteered for life for the missions
and who had come to live in perfect union with the people they served and loved. The forceful separation and the circumstance surrounding it have led to many broken hearts and lives of despondency. The Nigerian nation has a moral obligation to acknowledge the sacrifices and sufferings of the former missionaries. Now that they are no longer a threat to anybody, the church should plead for a general amnesty and official rehabilitation for the deported missionaries, dead or alive.

Issues of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation

The Nigerian Military Government under General Gowon won the praise and admiration of the world by the way it demonstrated that “while the black man has little to teach...about making war, he has a real contribution to offer in making peace.” It showed a rare magnanimity in victory, which surprised even Maj. General Philip Efiong, the man who signed Biafra’s unconditional surrender on 15 January 1970. Today, thirty years on, the charge of marginalization of the Igbo has replaced the optimism generated by the promise of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation.

Top on the list of Igbo grievances is the question of “abandoned” properties. Nigerian citizens who, through no fault of theirs, had to flee in their thousands, had their houses and landed assets declared abandoned by official policy. In spite of the promise of reintegration, those properties, especially in Port Harcourt and Lagos, have not been given back to their rightful owners. Then follows the issue of frozen assets in banks. Bank accounts of Easterners held in other parts of Nigeria were frozen shortly after the creation of states in 1967 and the declaration of the Republic of Biafra in the same year. This was in addition to the destruction of many bank records in the rioting that let to the pogroms in Northern Nigeria in 1966. Furthermore, by decree 46 of 1970, some 4000 Igbo policemen were dismissed from service for their alleged roles in the defunct Biafra. In the same vein, tens of thousands of other Igbo nationals lost their jobs in the civil service and in the private sector as a result of the war. Like the former policemen and women, these workers are asking for a formal
retirement from service with their benefits and glory of service to the nation.

Time has come for the Nigerian society, without any exclusion, to see the noble "tasks of peace"\textsuperscript{35} promised by church and state at the end of the civil war fully implemented. The principle of "no victor no vanquished" will remain a farce as long as the legitimate grievances of the Igbo, or of any other group, are not addressed. Recently, the German government set aside \$5\text{billion} as compensation to Nazi slave labourers. If a government can work out such a rehabilitation scheme for foreigners almost sixty years after the crime was committed, and if more than 54,000 bank accounts of Nazi victims have been identified in Swiss banks and are being processed for restoration to the survivors of the holocaust and their descendants, then it becomes all the more inconceivable that the Nigerian government should continue to regard properties or assets belonging to Nigerians as "abandoned" or "frozen".

The church itself has a moral obligation to address the unfinished business of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation. The Catholic Bishops committed themselves to these ideals shortly after the end of the war and indeed were at the vanguard of the first real reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts in the war-ravaged former Eastern Nigeria . The Welfare Department of the Catholic Secretariat effectively co-ordinated, at the end of the Civil War, the largest relief and rehabilitation project ever carried out on the African continent. Besides, during and after the war, Hopeville, the rehabilitation centre at Uturu for amputee victims of the war, became a household name nationally and internationally. Technically speaking, however, both the Welfare Department and Hopeville, the village of hope, have ceased to exist. It will serve a useful purpose to review why this failure came about.

The need for institutionalised social welfare departments in every diocese was a child of circumstance, conceived and sustained from outside as a result of the tragic civil war. As it were, the structures were imposed on the local church and were not establishments that had evolved out of solid conviction that the provision of welfare is an integral part of the spreading of the Kingdom of God on earth.
Consequently, when foreign aid was withdrawn in the early 1970s, all the rehabilitation centres folded up. As a matter of fact, the Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat at the time described the national rehabilitation as "no longer urgent." The co-ordinators of the various diocesan welfare departments were promptly reassigned, and the Welfare Department at the centre was re-baptised the 'Social Development Department.' Presently, it bears the name 'Department of Justice and Peace. In effect, Caritas as an independent institution has been abolished, especially at the centre. Much of what is left of the original institution is now merely academic. This conspicuous omission is a sordid commentary on the humanitarian mission of the local church in Nigeria. The poor, the oppressed and the marginalised would want to experience the solidarity of the church in concrete structures, not in intellectual seminars and workshops.

It is therefore of paramount importance that the local church reverts to the sterling level of social ministry achieved during and after the civil war. By local church I mean the community of God’s people in Nigeria. It has a divine injunction to make a preferential option for the poor and the needy. National rehabilitation is a perennial exercise and not an ad hoc activity, and as such it requires an institutionalised welfare provision. The church, by virtue of its social mission, and by virtue of its humanitarian experience, can and should provide leadership in the task of peace envisaged in the call for national rehabilitation, reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Conclusion
The Nigerian Civil War will remain for a long time to come the darkest episode in our national history. The bitter memories it still elicits generally stand in the way of open discussion and dialogue. As a result, the call for true national reconciliation also continues to be postponed. Many groups in Nigeria have seen in the Igbo eclipse their own opportunity to rise and shine. The postponement of an equitable integration may seem to serve their interest. But recent developments in Nigeria, especially in the Niger Delta, have
shown that unspoken taboos can, and do, lead to violent reactions. Thirty years is enough time to wait before addressing the grievances nursed by the victims of the civil war. Recently, a new group calling itself the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra, MASSOB, has emerged and though its objective may be visionary, its formation underscores the general feeling of frustration that exists among those who now regard themselves as truly vanquished. A national reconciliation in the new millennium is necessary to make Nigeria truly one.

3 It is interesting to note that in a letter to the Holy Father in the same month, the “Biafran Bishops,” addressed themselves as “Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Onitsha,” and the Biafran leader, Lt. Col. Odunegwu Ojukwu, as the “Military Governor.”
4 Minutes of the Meeting of the Bishops of Biafra Held at the Loretto House, Umuahia with the Papal Delegate, the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Conway in Attendance,” 19 February, 1968.
5 Katholische Nachrichtenagentur (KNA) - Informationsdient Nr. 51, 19 December, 1968.
7 KNA - Informationsdient Nr. 51, 19 December, 1968.


17 *Biafra Sun*, Friday, 8 September, 1967.

18 Akanu Ibiam in “Paper Presented to the Workshop for Human Rights,” Bonn, 21 January 1968. Dr. Ibiam was the Chairman of the Christian Committee of the Protestant Churches in Nigeria and one of the six presidents of the World Council of Churches.

19 “A Message of Greeting and Loyalty to His Excellency, Major-General Yakubu Gowon...From the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria gathered in Conference in Lagos from September 30 - October 1, 1969.”


23 Tony Byrne, *Airlift to Biafra*, p. 172.

24 Kevin Doheny, *No Hands but Yours: Memoirs of a Missionary* (Dublin: Veritas, 1997), p. 67


26 Evangelischer Pressedienst (epd), Nr. 78, 1 April 1968.


28 Daily Sketch, 23 April, 1970.


Introduction
There are different perspectives of conflict which make it possible to define the subject matter differently depending on the angle from which one chooses to look at it. At the group, political, ideological and community levels or even from the perspective of nature itself, conflict represents the disturbance experienced in the equilibrium and security of a 'protective environment'. When it occurs it arrests the old or established order and disrupts the 'present'. On account of this, conflict has been configurated as a transition which joins the old and established to the new and not yet. This perception sees conflict not as an end in itself but rather as a process that enables movement from one state of affair to the other, thus bringing about development or change in the system.

Apart from this constructive view of conflict, some sociologists prefer to see conflict as the state which results from a clash of interest either in a group or community. Those who hold this view take as given, a model of society that is structural in its approach. This view sees society as made up of groups whose interests differ and are at times incompatible. In the light of this structural approach, social arrangements, they claim, will always tend to benefit some group at the expense of the others. As long as these opposing interests subsist in society, the likelihood of conflict being always present is established. But it does not necessarily follow, however, that the existence of groups with different interests implies that there will always be conflict all the time.

At the individual level, however, the definition or concept of conflict has a different slant. It can be taken as that state of discomfort or stress caused by an individual’s experiencing two or more desires or needs that are incompatible. As opposing group
interests cause conflict in the larger society, so also within the individual tension or conflict is felt as a result of unmet incompatible desires or needs. This could take different forms like, the desire to have and the desire to avoid certain objects or goals; the desire to gain two equally attractive but mutually exclusive goals or the individual being surrounded by non-satisfying conditions with little hope of achieving the things desired.

The implication of the foregoing is that conflict can be very much part of our everyday life just as it constitutes an integral part of the social system or community life. It stretches across the spectrum from the tension between one and his next door neighbour over the activities of a domestic pet to an all out war at the international level. If conflict is so much part of our everyday life how do we understand its role in society.

Conflict Theories

Since Karl Max and Marx Weber various conflict theories have been propounded by sociologists, Marx’s theory of dialectics, which he applied to the study of history and society, represents a struggle of opposites or a conflict of contradictions. To him history is made, as it were, from the ashes of the struggle between incompatible forces whose collusion and final resolution ultimately lead to change and development.

From Marx’s point of view, conflict, which represents the collusion of incompatible forces, is an inevitable stage in the process of ushering in development and change. Thus, conflict provides the dynamic principle that constitutes the source of change. Change can therefore only come about in society when the tension between incompatible forces is resolved. The resolution does not happen once and for all, but rather is a continuum because as one resolution leads to a change or a leap forward, it in turn creates a new set of forces on a higher level of development. The dialectical process then begins again as the contradictions between the new set of forces interact and conflict and propel change.

Marx’s theory developed and enhanced that of the German philosopher Hegel. Hegel’s point of departure was the dialectics of
human ideas and thoughts, which Marx replaced with the principle of contradictions in the economic system as the agents for historical change. According to Hegel, society is essentially an expression of thoughts and ideas and conflict between these ideas and thoughts produces new concepts that on their own provide the basis for social change. Because of the centrality of economics in Marx’s theory, his proposition has often been styled, dialectical materialism. For Marx, people’s ideas are primarily a reflection of the social relationships of economic production and so they do not provide the main source of change. It is, therefore, in contradiction and conflict in the economic system that the major dynamics for social change lies.

The mainstay of Marx’s theory is the neat division of society into two opposing groups, the owners and non-owners of property. And it is on the basis of these two broad divisions of society that many have faulted his thesis. For instance, it has been observed by Max Weber that the things that can bring about conflict or division between groups in society cannot be limited to just the division between the owners and non-owners of property. It is possible to locate subdivisions within the two broad-based divisions determined primarily by different criteria and factors like political interests, status situation or economic position of the individuals.

So, contrary to Marx’s hypothesis, conflict theorists want to believe that society is really made up of more than just two interest groups. They hold that the many interest groups do not just have different interests but that their interests are not only economic based.

Ralph Dahrendorf on his own proposed a theory of conflict hinging on the exercise of authority. To him, authority is a legitimate power attached to the occupation of a particular social role within an organisation like teachers or managers giving orders to pupils or workers. This means in every social system or organisation, there are to be found positions of domination and subjection. While some are able to take decisions legitimately and issue commands, others are not and consequently create room for conflict. The existence of dominant and subordinate positions
produces a situation in which individuals have different interests. While the dominant’s interest is in maintaining the social structure that gives them more authority, those of the subordinates is in changing the social structure which deprives them of authority. On the whole, the problem with conflict theories is that they successfully portray a society made up of many different groups with potential for conflict with each other so much that it becomes difficult to get a clear picture of how society really works.

**Biblical Conflict**

While in sociological perspective, conflict is understood as one of the social dynamics of society, in biblical theology, it is different. The difference in conceptualisation and interpretation lies in the use into which it is put in biblical contexts. The queer nature of the theological weaving of divine and human elements in the Scriptures contributes to the identifiable differences. This does not, however, rule out the fact that in spite of the differences a common ground exists between both usages in the area of the constructive and disintegrative hues of conflict.

While in sociological context, it is possible to examine conflict almost as an independent phenomenon with a life of its own, in religion it subsists as an instrument for the achievement of a definite or specific purpose except in the creation narratives, and in biblical interpersonal clashes. Where this is not the case, it surfaces to fill a vacuum created by the absence of Divine mercy, which makes it a corollary of man’s irreligious activity. In what follows, we want to identify in a broad outline types of biblical conflict with their theological underpinnings.

**The Old Testament**

**Conflict as a Primordial Factor:**

Biblical creation narratives, which reflect the ancient cosmogonic tales of creation, in circulation during the time of biblical Israel and in Babylonia, give us some glimpse of a primordial religious conflict that gave birth to the universe. In Genesis 1:1-5, the priestly document reports that at creation, confusion or chaos
enveloped the universe and out of the conflict of water and darkness, God created light. Similarly, we are told in the series of clay tablets discovered in the ruins of Asshurbanipal’s Library at Nineveh in 1873 narrating the Babylonian creation epic, that the creation of an ordered universe emerged from the victory of Marduk, the Supreme god of Babylon, over Tiamat, the deity of chaos and darkness. The Jewish concept, which the Babylonian cosmogony glibly corroborates, concurs that an ordered universe was the outcome of the resolution of a primordial conflict. Although, the incident or event looks like an accident in the Babylonian epic, in the biblical narrative, it assumes the status of a planned enterprise or undertaking by the Divine. God, as it were, is seen midwifing order from the bowels of conflict almost in a similar manner to what he did in the Garden of Eden where he had to contend with the conflict that almost marred his creative activity. In the two instances, conflict is presented as a phenomenon, which God had to deal with in order to achieve his purpose or goal for creation.

Conflict as an Agent

In many biblical instances, conflict is presented as God’s agent deliberately created to work out his Divine purpose. At the Tower of Babel, God purposefully created confusion of tongues or conflict in order to arrest man’s haughty plans and desire to overstep his bounds. Although the conflict that resulted from Divine action brought hardship in its train, but from the Divine perspective, it served a righteous purpose. In this context, conflict is serving both as a constructive as well as a disintegrative factor.

Similarly, the conflict that the Divine brought about between Abel and Cain by accepting the offering of one and rejecting the other was meant to teach a religious lesson of his ownership of the world and its riches and of the status of humans as Steward. As Steward, humans are obliged to render account as and when due at the behest of the master, an area where Cain successfully failed to hit the mark!
In another representative episode, the conflict created by the Divine in his plan that Esau the elder should serve Jacob the younger (Gen. 25:21-26), though etiological in intent, was meant to demonstrate his unquestionable sovereignty in the ordering and governance of the universe. His divine plan and purpose, inscrutable as they are, remain unquestionable by man. In all the above instances, conflict is deliberately used or created by the Divine to work out his purpose or achieve a specific goal.

**Conflict resulting from human interpretation of God's activity**

A third group of biblical conflict result from human conceptualisation and mode of interpretation of God’s activities and intervention in the cosmos. The conflicts arising from the interpretation of Divine plan, in most cases, put the individual, tribe, race or Nation at the mercy of the other. It was in the context of the interpretation of Divine purpose that the Israelites were engulfed in an unending feud with the Canaanites whose land, they claimed had been willed to them by Yahweh. Sequel to this special favour, the Israelites had to distinguish themselves from all other peoples of the earth by such things like, the circumcision, religious rights and dietary rules, the observance of which fuelled the conflict between them and others so marked out from their group or race. Park has in his investigation of conflict said, “Where races are distinguished by certain external marks, these furnish a permanent physical substratum upon which and around which, the irritations and animosities incidental to all human intercourse tend to accumulate and so to gain strength”.

Arising also from the interpretation of God’s special favour was the air of superiority of the Israelites which made them relegate all other races to the second place as people who shall continually be hewers of wood and drawers of water, while they the Israelites shall be leaders and not followers; they shall lend to others and will never borrow; etc. (Josh. 9:21; Deut. 28:12-125). This concept of vaunted importance, which the other nations were not ready to accept, brought in its train perpetual conflict and tension with biblical Israel. Because of the awareness or consciousness that they
were a special people of God from their interpretation of Yahweh's activities among them, they were unprepared to surrender their apparent 'birth-right' though it was unacceptable to the nations and even had to be corrected by God himself later (cf. Amos 9).

**Conflict as a Clash of Interest**

Under this class of conflicts, the points made earlier in the investigation of conflict theories apply. They relate mainly to interpersonal or inter-tribal clashes that are copiously reported of in the Scriptures. In most cases, the resolution of such conflicts was either by adjudication, mutual separation or demarcation of boundary lines, (Gen. 13; Gen. 31\textsuperscript{43}ff, etc.). That biblical personages were involved in such clash of interests shows that what we have depicted in the Scriptures speak of human beings and not supernatural figures of imagination. They, like people of any age and clime, were the subjects of their time plagued by the common weakness of humankind – personal interest.

**The New Testament**

In the New Testament records that we have, the expositions on the Christian faith, the sayings of Jesus, the commission of Apostles and by implication all followers of Jesus Christ, leave no room for doubt that the Christian faith by its very nature is a religion that stands out distinct and brooks no rivals. It stands out and exists as second to none while in its proselytising mandate it recognises no other religion as of equal worth. Consequently, the adherents are to see themselves as a separate entity called out from the mass of all humankind. Because of these characteristic features of the Christian faith, any religion, which rears its head in competition, registers on the path of conflict. This stance of Christianity has been referred to as the scandal of particularity\textsuperscript{8} and it continues to provoke conflict with other religionists as it promotes intra-religious conflict on the basis of the different interpretations put on some biblical claims and texts. What we are saying here is that on the basis of some vital texts\textsuperscript{9}, Christianity
brings about clash of interests and is therefore not a conflict-free religion. For example Jesus says:

"I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except by me"; "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth, I have not come to bring peace but a sword, for I have come to set a man against his father..." "He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters", (John 14; Matt. 10; Lk. 11).

The implication of the above is that a believer of the New Testament faith is a distinct individual who has drawn a line of demarcation between past and present relationships and is out to fight the battle of particularity; "Be not unequally yoked with the unbelievers", "Therefore come out from them and be separate from them says the Lord", "Therefore if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come" (II Cor. 6; 6; 17; 5). It is on the strength of this New Testament stance that the believer often finds himself pitched against the world in the battle for salvation. He has to choose on whose side to pitch his tent, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" (James 4).

Conflict and conflict resolution therefore constitute an integral part of the New Testament faith whose ultimate goal brings about spiritual reconciliation with God and mutual coexistence with mankind. The New Testament is therefore as emphatic on conflict that comes with faith as it is on reconciliation, which is its ultimate goal (II Cor. 5; Matt. 5).

**Theological Perspective on Conflict**

In conflict, man recognises two options, two different ideas or the existence of opposite interests. The bid usually to reconcile oneself with the situation brings about the process of resolution. One virtually finds oneself in this situation every day and every minute of one's life and his Christian faith rather than resolve the crisis
often heightens it in the articulation of what is believed and how to live it out.

This is specially so as the Christian tries to live the sacramental life which makes one both an immanent and transcendent being. The Christian is aligned to God, through the spirit, and is related to this earth through the body that encases the spirit. The relationship and harmonious coexistence of both in the Christian person often provoke an internal tension or conflict. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (7:15-20) alluded to this apparent conflict which all human beings have in common. The method of resolution proffered by St. Paul is what can not be observed or empirically proved but observers can feel its result. This happens after the internal transformation has taken place and the fruits of the spirit begin to tell in the life of the Christian.

Besides this individual and personal level of faith crisis are the inter-religious and intra-religious conflict zones among the various religionists. Principally, this concerns the claims that the various religions make and which in some cases are peculiar and distinct to each religion.

Christianity in its own case makes claims which are both historical and doctrinal based on the person and ministry of Jesus and on the basis of which it lays obligations on all its followers. While some of the claims are peculiar to Christianity and not found in other religions like the incarnation, vicarious suffering of Christ and the resurrection; other areas concern claims to mode of revelation, aim and purpose of life, ethics as principle for living, means of salvation and the destiny of humans here on earth. In all these, the theological understanding and perception of Christianity stand out distinct from the position of other religions and this usually constitute the area of disagreement and conflict.

Similarly, the interpretation put on some of the claims especially in the area of doctrine; teaching about God, Jesus Christ, the church and its ecclesiology and the afterlife, often stimulate intra-religious conflict and hinder ecumenical unity or co-operation. While some of these conflicts are interpretative and ideological, i.e. conflicts which manifest in formal confessional level where
discussion is couched in special language about the pillars of belief, others are experiential. The latter like the preceding two conflict areas, is a very important source of conflict or differences. This is because it is often very easy for one to appeal to the validity and immediacy of one’s personal experience in lieu of, or over against ideational or discursive sources. Usually, conflict or differences arise from such claims of unique personal or individual experience. Indeed, the experience, feelings and the intensity of perception create, as it were, an emergent faith affirmation, which has the quality of infallibility for the person involved. This immediacy, of course, carries the stamp of authenticity. What we are saying here is that theological conflict or differences do not only arise from what we formally believe and have carefully thought out in words, they can also even with equal validity spring from our actual personal experience or how we interpret or make sense of our experience. The same experience can be looked at from two or more different ways leading to a strikingly contrasting interpretation or creative ambiguity.

The fall-out from the above is that as theology continues to traverse its current areas of jurisdiction, there will always be conflict and differences in the articulation of our faith.

But rather than see this phenomenon as detrimental to Christianity, it should be seen as promotional. This is because conflict, as a theological category, is a process between chaos and resolution or reconciliation. Before any change or development can occur, there must be conflict between the established belief or order and the not yet or new. The movement, therefore, from conflict to resolution or reconciliation is a fact true to life at all levels including being converted spiritually. As the church’s goal is reconciliation and spiritual development, it means it can not avoid passing through conflict, which is a normal process towards the ultimate goal. Reconciliation occurs only as a resolution of conflict, therefore, the avoidance or denial of conflict is not the best possible option to resolution.
Church and Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a central feature of Christian experience and doctrine. Right from the point of conversion when a decision has to be taken for Christ, there is conflict whose resolution comes with the new birth and the indwelling spirit. As individuals experience conflict in growth, development and change that stalks life, so also the church is confronted with conflict in her expansionist programmes and administration.

Such conflicts had led to a complete restructuring process that had altered the support structures people had known, over the years as dependable, and in other instances had shaken the foundations of unity to the point of disintegration. Happily enough, the church has all along, with the help of her in-built mechanism, tried to cope with the conflicts that had come her way.

In the incipient church made up of the Twelve round their Master – Jesus Christ - the first conflict that rocked the fellowship, was the issue of who was to take the pre-eminent position. Luke 9:46 reports how the argument raged among the disciples and what happened when the master got to know about it. Although the report does not lucidly portray the tempo of the conflict, the fact that the issue later, in the life of the church, reared its head as to who were the apostles par-excellence, shows that it was a real problem (Gal. I:11ff; II Cor. 11:16ff). In the resolution of the conflict, Jesus gave a model and paradigm to the church for the resolution of similar conflicts. He set a child before the Apostles and enjoined them to inculcate the childlike qualities of love, humility, innocence and service rather than the worldly honour of lording it over others in his Ministry. In the resolution, Jesus implicitly made it known that the standards in his church are different from the standards used in the secular world; greatness in the church is to be assessed by the quality of service rendered. This has remained a priced paradigm for church management over the years.

In the administration of the early church and the execution of the Dominican mandate to make disciples of the entire world, the Apostles were accosted by an ecclesiological conflict in respect of the admission of the Gentiles. Because the conflict threatened the
old order and the established norms, it created chaos in the body politic of the church. As there were no precedents to follow a council of the church, the first of its kind, met in AD 49 to resolve the crisis. The success of the pattern adopted for the resolution of the conflict made church council to become a feature in the administration of the church. The collective authority of the church, which has the mandate of Jesus (John 20:23), has all along been exercised in decision making, discipline and the general welfare of the church. In both the Ecclesiocentric and Apostolic arms of the church, the church in council has remained a veritable factor for the running of the church and resolution of conflicts.

Similarly, the New Testament church gives an example of how to deal with conflict at a local church level. This concerns mainly inter-personal conflict and the mode of its resolution. The pattern given by Jesus in Matt. 18:17 is followed with the adjudicative role to be played by the church. In II Cor. 2:5-11, commonly referred to as an account of St. Paul’s painful visit, the disciplinary measure meted out on an erring member of the church by the local congregation is commended by St. Paul who expressed satisfaction over the matter. The elders and those who are more mature in things of the spirit have all the ages played this role in the church by bringing about amicable resolution of the various conflicts that had faced the church.

Conclusion

In the foregoing, it can be seen that conflict is not only an integral part of our social life and a necessary factor in bringing about change and development, but also a constituent element in God’s governance of the world.

With all biblical patterns on its use and resolution, it is clear that conflict, though commonly dreaded, can be constructive and useful in the life of the church.

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9 Theological and historical claims like The Vicarious Death and Resurrection, Ascension and Exaltation and the Divinity of Jesus cannot but stir up conflict with other religionists.
The Church and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

By

Iheanyi Enwerem, O.P.

Introduction

Ever since its historical creation as a brainchild of the struggles and intrigues among the then imperial powers, the political entity called Nigeria has not been short of conflicts. Its maturity to the status of an independent state in 1960 did not make much difference; if anything independence saw the country factionalized to the extent that there have been more conflicts in their different degrees, shapes and forms. Such is the case that a proposal has just been made to establish a centre for the “study of 38 years of conflict in Nigeria.”¹ To make matters worse, the entry of the Nigerian military class into national politics since 1966, but more particularly in the most recent past, has created the enabling environment to exacerbate rather than abate these conflicts. To buttress this assertion, one has only to recall the prevalent militaristic culture in the country which is exemplified in the ongoing abuse of human and civil rights like the restriction of people’s freedom of assembly and expression, the arbitrary arrests of citizens, and state-induced abuse of its own transition to democratic rule, to just name a few of the instances of conflicts in the country. All of these are in addition to numerous communal clashes that mostly fall within the borderline of religious conflicts.² The end-result of all these conflicts put together is an environment of socio-political instability in the country which, in turn, obstructs or at best impedes the country’s development.

When the Church’s role is brought to bear on the problem just noted, what is not in doubt is its response to the conflicts, even if occasionally. What is probably in doubt is the extent to which a study of the Church’s response to these conflicts has been carried out. We dare say that little has been done in this regard. Herein lies, therefore, the justification for this paper: it is an attempt to
examine the role the Church, in general, has either played or could play at least to minimise the conditions that generate the conflicts in Nigeria and thus contribute in creating the enabling environment for the country’s meaningful development. Underlying this attempt is our belief that religion as a normative tool, correctly handled, can play a significant role in our continuing efforts to solve our numerous problems and combat the social ills that plague the country. Hence, our thesis is that the Church has the emancipatory potential which, if properly harnessed and articulated into the consciousness of its members, could affirm the Church more visibly as an effective agent for conflict resolution.

In pursuit of the preceding intention and from a perspective that is more socio-political analytic than theological, we will adopt a historical approach to the study in question. It is not our intention, however, to dwell on those inter- and intra-Church conflicts - subject matters that deserve a special attention on their own. Instead we will strictly remain with those specific Church responses to conflicts within the Nigerian civil society in general and government, especially since the country’s independence. Our ultimate objective is to ascertain whether there is an enduring pattern in these responses and to establish their quality, if any.

Specifically, our subject matter will be studied under four headings. The first will dwell on clarifying the term “conflict-resolution” which forms the conceptual and theoretical perspectives at the heart of the paper. The second section will then look in close details a few selected conflicts vis-à-vis the manner in which the Church handled them, while bearing in mind the need to analyse the socio-political, economic antecedents to the conflicts so selected. The third section will be an attempt to assess the Church’s response to these conflicts. The final and concluding part of the paper will be an attempt to pull out some pertinent lessons that could be drawn from our finding. Our ultimate hope then is that these lessons will form part of the overall basis toward a meaningful conflict-resolution in Nigeria.

The nature of “conflicts” and “conflict-resolution”:
To begin with, what do we mean by ‘conflict’? An answer to this question is important lest what we define as conflicts would have no meaningful referent. First and foremost, conflict is a form of disagreement that is not only natural, but also does actually arise, in human social interaction. For, in the process of social interactions, people are often guided by the way they perceive life, other persons or groups, and situation around them. The result is a mutual manifestation of expected or unexpected behavioural attitudes or reactions, on the part of the parties in disagreement, toward the given situation. By extension this result leads to polarisation between the parties as each party tries to use whatever means at its disposal, including violence or force, to outwit and extract some advantages over the other. In this way, following W.B. Gallie’s idea of politics, there can be an element of ambiguity in the meaning of conflict. This is in so far as conflict, like politics, can be “a whole congeries of social processes - of competing claims, of mutual criticisms and complaints, of bargaining, debating, converting, squaring and fixing - which while commonly associated with political rule can also be applied in many walks of life that extend far beyond the field of political rule.”

The preceding remark is especially the case in a pluralistic society like Nigeria where various forms of loyalties (for instance, ethnic and religious loyalties) and the cut-throat competition underlying them could as well be described, in the words of S. Gbadegesin, as “the venom of politicisation” which has largely become “the bane” and “an unavoidable bedfellow of market politics” in Nigeria. For, in the course of the years of social interaction and especially given a growing scarcity of socio-economic opportunities open to the larger segment of the country’s populace, conflicts in the country seem to have escalated both in tone and action. Each part of the country dwells largely on memories of how it is being excluded by the other from the scheme of things. And to engrave these memories in the deeper consciousness of the people, each part of the country demonises the other, so much so that among the various groups there is a
reading of the worst possible motives into the actions of others outside their camp.

With special reference to our study, a conflict, in a way, is akin to what the Latin American theologian describes as “to conscientize”⁶ which, according to P. Freire, “represents the development of the awakening of critical awareness.”⁷ In this sense, conflicts encompass something more than just arousing the populace to political awareness; it involves, in word and action, an effective and primary commitment to empowering the victims of deprivation and exploitation to take their destiny in their hands as the agents of their own liberation.

Given that conflict is natural to human beings, it is only right to recognise that it is not necessarily bad per se; it can be positive and therefore productive on the one hand or negative and therefore destructive on the other hand. It all depends on how it is handled. Conflict is positive when it leads to an agreement that is mutually acceptable to the parties in disagreement and negative when it leads to the opposite. Herein lies the imperative for ‘conflict-resolution’ which is a major aspect of this paper, especially from the point of view of the positive aspect of conflicts. To use the term ‘conflict resolution’ is not to give the impression that conflict can be totally or completely eliminated from any given human society. Hence it is better and more realistic, perhaps, to talk of conflict management than to have the utopian belief that we can rid society completely of conflict. What matters then is how we prevent conflicts and handle them when they occur as they will once in a while, no matter how little.

In view of the preceding remark, there is, in the case of Nigeria, a growing awareness, on the part of some citizens, that the cost of the continuation of the conflicts is to the detriment of the common good to bail the country out of its current economic and socio-political instability and malaise. This observation is in line with the kind of judgement which some scholars have advanced as a necessary catalyst for conflict-resolution.⁸ According to one such scholar, “ending a conflict may require the use of a third party to lead negotiations or mediation and help reach a settlement.”⁹ This
is where and how and where the Nigerian Church comes into play: the expectation for it to play the role of a third party in the conflict between the prevailing militarised government and the civil society. This conflict, it is worth noting, is premised on power - the one over-ridding interest on the part of the two parties, government and the members of the civil society. The extent to which the Church has actually exercised this role is the subject of our next section.

**The Church’s method of conflict-management:**

It is worth asking, at this juncture, this important question: what is the primary basis of the conflicts in modern Nigeria? An answer to this question is fundamental to identifying the root cause of the conflicts in the country. Social scientists and commentators in their liberal and Marxist stripes, especially those with an interest in interaction between religion and politics for instance, have proffered various reasons for the conflicts in Nigeria. In brief, these range from various reasons of economic, cultural, and political deprivations to real or imaginary existence of the so-called enemies of the state whose characterisation is variously described as either riffraffs, layabouts, touts, or as highly placed individuals in society who are determined to derail government programmes. Besides what is specifically alleged to be government’s *ad-hoc* approach to conflict resolution which, by extension, appears to be a reflection on the poverty of leadership in the country, reasons for the conflicts in Nigeria include what the media loves to describe as a sociological phenomenon - people’s recourse to some referent to vent out their anger in the face of material needs and/or deprivation.

Seen from a historical analytical point of view, however, the origin of conflicts in Nigeria as we know it today is traceable to the particular socio-political and economic orientations both of which together gave birth to a brand of leadership that was more attentive to its class interest than to those of the masses, the major constituency of the civil society. Here for a start, one recalls the colonial intrusion into the space of what was eventually named
Nigeria, an intrusion which forcefully brought the country into the capitalist world economy. Typical of the divisive character of this economic system, it did more to encourage rather than discourage the division of the civil society into religious factions and thus leading to the centrality of religion in the country’s civil life. In other words, the class struggle inherent in the capitalist system acquired a religious garb as each religious faction sought to win converts for the purpose of using them to acquire political power, especially at the centre, and to ensure that its world view occupies the commanding position in the economic and socio-political scheme of things in the country. Thus, not to understand this interconnection between the economic and socio-political factors is not to understand contemporary Nigeria or the currently pervading conflictual atmosphere in the relationship between the country’s militarised government and its civil society as a whole.

Three broad events clearly stand out among the conflicts that took place within the period under our studies. The first and best known of these conflicts is the civil war of 1967-1970 whose effects are still very much felt in the country twenty-eight years after. Without going into details about the conflict, suffice it to say that the civil war was a culmination of the admixture of ethnic and religious politics that was the hallmark of the early independent period of the country’s history. Although there was an appearance of unity and indivisibility at the dawn of the country’s independence, the reality was the existence of pockets of factional groups, each of which perceived itself and acted in ethno-religious mould, prior to other considerations. The different religious groups, including the Nigerian Church, perceived themselves and acted in similar mould - a point which we have discussed in greater details elsewhere as to warrant no further attention. Islamic revivalism that characterised the 1960s made matters worse for a Nigeria that had a large Islamic followership under a largely religiously politicised political leadership. Such was the situation that by the time the civil war started and throughout the period it lasted, the Nigerian Church was not only internally factionalized on largely regional and ethnic basis but was also in no position to
play any significant or effective role in resolving the conflict. If anything, the Nigerian Church, at the national level, was generally perceived, justifiably or not, to have its sympathy more on the side of the secessionist than on that of the federal side of the civil war.

The second broad event of conflict was the spate of religious riots which, collectively, have since given a religious characterisation to Nigeria’s major national conflicts. Of specific reference here are the Maitatsine riots which have the record of being the first of these riots as well as claiming “the highest number of lives of Nigerians since the Civil war,” and the Kafanchan/Kaduna/Zaria/Funtua conflicts in the then Kaduna State which has the record of being the single most widespread of the religious riots in the period under our study with such a serious political impact that it was described as an equivalent of a civilian coup d’etat. Here, the Church, as a member and indeed the leader of CAN, was so deeply involved in the conflict that it could not be anything but partisan as far as the resolution of the conflicts of that period was concerned.

The third broad event of conflict is that which has arisen in the course of the people’s struggle to establish a democratic culture and governance, especially since the 1990s. Nothing has so far epitomised this better than what, in the country’s popular parlance, is now dubbed as the “June 12” event. That is, the nullification of the country’s freest democratically elected civilian government in June 1993 by the then repressive military government and the aftermath of that action. Here one recalls that following that nullification there was the imposition of an un-elected so-called civilian Interim National Government on the people; this government, itself, was quickly and easily replaced by a more repressive military government whose leadership, in the guise of working toward a transition to a democratically elected civilian rule, is currently using every coercive force at its disposal to replace itself as the anticipated civilian government for the country. This state of affairs, in a way, is the culmination of the sore relationship that has been fermenting over the years and now has matured into a full-blown conflict between the majority of the
populace and the generality of the military class and its supporters in the country.

Each of the three broad events of conflicts noted above represents an involvement that had a large-scale political impact on the country’s stability. In addition, each also represents a particular uniqueness about them, besides, of course, attracting the Church’s response. The response can be discerned to be grounded on policies that, themselves, can be streamlined into two broad perspectives, namely: the ecumenical and the political/diplomatic perspectives. Be that as it may, the Church’s approach to conflict-resolution can be seen from two levels of response, namely, the short and the long-term responses. While the short term response can be located in the Church’s usually prompt statements and/or comments, through the Bishops’ communiqués, on issues of national interest as they arise, the Church’s long term response is largely preventive. The long-term response comes by way of specific and deliberate Church policy aimed absolutely at establishing an enduring atmosphere of harmony and concord within the polity. One specific example here is the Church’s policy of ecumenism which, for us and following the Church’s Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redeintegratio, means an openness to and activity geared toward the realisation of Christian unity on the one hand and a harmonious and peaceful coexistence with non-Christian religious groups on the other hand. Thus the spirit of this ecumenism is guided by what has been aptly summarised as avoidance of negative attitude consciously or unconsciously acquired during the era of polemics and apologetics, attitudes of prejudice and bigotry, attitudes of methodological misrepresentation and oversimplification of the position and doctrines of others in order to be able to refute them, and positively, cultivation of a new spirit of self-control and self-criticism to create a better atmosphere and climate of mutual understanding between Christians [and non-Christians]; a spirit of dialogue instead of the
centuries-old monologue.\textsuperscript{14}

The ecumenical perspective can be illustrated with the Church’s very important and significant role in the formation and activities of, and membership into, such ecumenical organs like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). For the period CAN’s activism lasted, especially between 1978 and the early 1990s, governments - be it the civilian or even the repressive military governments of the time - listened whenever CAN spoke out. By so doing CAN checkmated successive governments into establishing ecumenically oriented organs like the Advisory Council on Religious Affairs (ACRA) and, before it, the Department of Religious Affairs of the Shagari era for the primary purpose, among other things, of creating the enabling environment that has relatively kept the country together till date. The import of the Church’s contributions in this regard, especially through its activities in CAN, is better appreciated, perhaps, when one recalls that, prior to the emergence of CAN, the Church’s record on ecumenism in Nigeria was virtually poor or, at best, minimal.

The political/diplomatic perspective of the Church’s response to conflicts in the country is easily discernible from its participation in a number of activities, initiated either by the Church or government, whose intent and purpose are clearly loaded with political interest. This particular perspective has an international as well as a national angle. The international angle is located in the papal visits to the country which are largely at the invitation of the Nigerian Church leaders. While the declared intention for these papal visits is usually pastoral, the messages from the Pope go beyond exclusively Catholic Church’s pastoral concern to include a good dose of political engineering that is spiced with effective conflict-management interest. For instance, at such papal visits, the Church sees to it that the Pope meets with political leaders as well as the country’s Muslim leaders respectively to whom he addresses reconciliatory messages. Besides, our experience from the two papal visits to this country shows a Pope whose visit brought the generality of the civil society together irrespective of people’s religious affiliation; to some extent, this contributes meaningfully
toward creating the enabling environment for political and economic progress of the country.

The national angle of the political/diplomatic perspective of the Church’s response to conflicts in the country is discernible from the contributions the Church makes toward carving out effective and a workable constitutional framework for the country. These constitutional matters invariably touch on the political and ethno-religious questions as was clearly demonstrated in the well-known Sharia debates that ensued in the course of the 1978 and the 1988 Constitutional reviews. The aim, whether or not it was stated, was to address concretely and, if possibly, correct the Muslim community’s perceived sense of religious deprivation as far as the Nigerian legal system is concerned. To this end, the Church not only was quick at presenting its views as a body but also allowed its clerical members to partake in such highly political activity. To have allowed its clerics to be so involved, against the background of the universal Church’s limitation of its clergy from ordinarily engaging themselves in active/partisan politics, goes to show the importance which the Nigerian Church attaches to these Constitutional matters whose aim is to ensure equitable sharing of political power at the centre without which there would be no unity and overall good of the country. This point was not lost to the Church, which explains why it noted, during the OIC controversy, that “our participation in the presidential panel on the OIC issue is a demonstration of our concern for the peaceful resolution of the matter.”

The question to ask at this juncture is this: why have all these efforts on conflict-resolution by the Church not produced the desired result - the elimination or even the minimisation of conflicts in the country? Is it that the Church has erred in the way it has handled the whole issue of conflicts or is it that Nigerians are incurably prone to conflicts? The import of these questions is realised when one recalls that no year has passed without the country experiencing one form of conflict or another. Our attempt to address these questions takes us to an assessment of the church’s effort at conflict-resolution.
Assessment of the Church’s approach to conflict-resolution:

From the foregoing discussion, it is only to be expected that the Church’s approach to conflict-resolution would either be immediate or take a longer time to execute. In all these, it is observed that the Church’s desire, at least as publicly stated, was to encourage dialogue as one way of resolving differences among the parties in disagreement. Hence the Church’s openness to be involved ecumenical organs like CAN, the ACRA or even the constitutional review committees. Seen from this perspective, it could be said that the Church’s intention and approach are commendable, the quality of their execution notwithstanding. However, there are other executionary considerations, which could lead us to a richer assessment of the Church’s response to conflicts in the country. Three of these considerations are worth mentioning; while the first falls within the range of the Church’s immediate or proximate response to conflicts, the latter two are on the remote range of its response.¹⁷

Confronting the conflict:

Notwithstanding a few exceptions, the Church’s confrontation of conflicts, in general, has not been in doubt. In fact, it has not, to its credit, shied away from recognising the reality of and the danger collectively posed by the various conflicts in the country, given the country’s ethno-religious plurality. As such, the Church has not been ambiguous or ambivalent in using the various opportunities within its control to assert promptly its views against the various conflicts or situations that could easily generate them in the country. This is evidenced in the series of comments which the Church issues not only to help government to meaningfully address the conflicts but also to arrest them if possible. The Church’s prompt, even if mild, condemnatory statement on the annulment of the results of the 1993 election is a case in point. According to the Church:

A presidential election widely pronounced to be free, fair and peaceful has been held on June 12th 1993. The wishes
of the people, as expressed in that election should have been therefore officially announced and respected.\(^\text{18}\)

What is generally in doubt, however, is the lack of courage to match or follow-up its words with concrete action in conflict management. Often, the action hardly comes at all or, when it does, it is either too late at coming or too meagre. For instance, but for the January 11, 1990 demonstration in the North when a leading member of the Church hierarchy visibly and actually led a march to back up the Church’s declared stand against the then Federal government’s reshuffle of its cabinet that was more in favour of Muslims than the other religious groups in the country, there is no record of the Church either backing up its words against perceived injustice with concrete action or even calling its faithful to a peaceful demonstration. The import of this failure on the part of the Nigerian Church is better appreciated when one recalls how oppressive governments in some countries were brought down not just by mere words/statements of condemnation but by a backing up of such words/statements with concrete physical action/s under the leadership of the members of the Church hierarchy in those countries. No where is this exemplary action better epitomised, perhaps, than in countries like Poland, Chile, Panama, and the Philippine. In the latter, for instance, it was the Church leaders who vigorously campaigned for and physically led the massive non-violent demonstration that not only finally broke down President Ferdinand Marcos’ dictatorial hold on the Filipino people but also forced him into exile and thus ushered in the enabling environment for the democratic culture they are currently enjoying.

**Defining the Problem:**

A fundamental imperative in conflict resolution is not only a clear and unbiased understanding of the problem but also the people behind the conflict in the first place. In other words, there is need for a better understanding of the most basic reason or cause of the conflict. Not wanting to appear repetitive, we simply call attention to the reasons we noted earlier to have been proffered by some Nigerians, especially those in the media profession, as the
cause of the conflicts in the country. While these reasons, to a large extent, could be said to be representative of the popular belief people have as lying behind the country's problem, the Church, in more or less sharing similar belief\(^{19}\) goes even further to insist, with specific reference to religious conflicts, that the problem is rooted in "intolerance together with disregard in high and low places for the principles of fair-play, peaceful coexistence and respect for religious pluralism."\(^{20}\)

Government's own view on the reason for the conflicts is different from what we have just noted as that of the Church and the general public. As far as the government is concerned, and from the religious point of view, the conflicts, especially between the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the conflicts are the handiwork of riffraffs, layabouts, touts, etc. who are nothing but enemies of the state. Until recently, successive governments have not looked beyond these groups of people as the human forces behind the conflicts in Nigeria. These forces are usually identified either as local or as external agents whose common denominator is the determination to take over the reins of power or at least make the country ungovernable. The Church, to some extent, agrees with government here, especially given the churches own identification of those responsible for the various religious riots in the country. On the contrary, however, the real human forces behind the religious angle of the various conflicts in Nigeria could very well be the class of people that Dan Agbese aptly described as "the religious barons who operate and enjoy anonymity like drug barons."\(^{21}\) Often these are the kinds of people who not only dine and wine with those in power, including with some Church leaders, in the country but also may even get themselves appointed into positions of power that easily mask their involvement in bringing about conflicts. Examples abound of a number of Church faithful, including knights of the Church, who were staunch supporters of the erstwhile country's dictatorial military leadership and its determination to forestall the enthronement of real democratic culture and governance in the
country. One of these, in his full regalia as a knight, was among the selected few who, embarrassingly enough, received Holy Communion directly from the Pope’s hand during his last visit to the country.

In the most recent times, however, especially since the emergence of the Sani Abacha military dictatorship, government’s identification of those behind the conflicts has shifted from the so-called “riffraffs, layabouts, touts, etc.” to a well educated and articulate class of pro-democracy politicians and human rights activists whom the government largely perceives as identifiable with the highly visible umbrella group called the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO). In fact, NADECO, to a large extent, personified and epitomised everything and everyone against the government. While the Church did not share this view with government, it is also on record that the Church did not endorse categorically and openly its support for this group. As a matter of fact, in all the communiqués issued by the Bishops during the Abacha military government that helped the emergence of NADECO and other related pro-Democracy groups, nowhere are any of these groups even mentioned for support by the Bishops. The best the Church did in this regard was to collapse these groups into a monolithic nomenclature as “Nigerians” who, “on their part, must learn henceforth to stand firm in defence of their constitution against any subversion by any group, no matter how well armed they may be with our weapons.”

As for how to achieve this noble exhortation, the Bishops’ concrete exemplary action is their composition of and recommendation to the faithful the prayer, titled, “Prayer for Nigeria in Distress,” apparently forgetting that prayer (faith) without action (good work) is dead.

The foregoing remarks, especially with regards to government’s and even the church’s explanation for reasons behind the various conflicts in Nigeria, are incapable of helping us define with clarity the real problem behind the conflicts. The reasoning behind this explanation is, at best, escapist and is premised, in
fact, on a simplistic base. We would argue that this reasoning on the part of the government and indeed the Church reveals a poverty of ideas if not a downright refusal to accept the obvious. This is in so far as both government and even the Church tend to be mistaking the smoke for the causative factor of the fire, forgetting that just as smoke does not arise from nothing, people too do not become a threat to law and order in a vacuum. They do not, out of the blues, question the legitimacy of a government. Hence, as Alhaji Yahaya Mahmoud rightly observed while commenting from the point of view of religious conflict: “religious fanaticism and fundamentalism were products of disaffection with the system, frustration, unemployment and poverty” and “when these ills are redressed, fanaticism would either go or become irrelevant.” The problem behind the various conflicts in the country, in our opinion, is systemic, hence, it is only right that people would demand for a legitimate governance and, in fact, see themselves obliged to work toward dismantling one that has lost its legitimacy.

Whether people are morally right or not to express their demand through violence - any form of violence for that matter - is not our concern or interest in this paper as to understand why they choose the avenue of conflict. In this direction, therefore, we are inclined to believe that people’s expression of their demand through the idiom of civil disobedience or even downright riots is neither surprising nor unreasonable in the context of contemporary Nigeria.

To buttress this belief, consider the following historical facts. The decade of the 1970s was relatively peaceful as far as conflicts are concerned in Nigeria. By the 1980s the military class had so much entrenched itself in the country’s socio-political space that it had by now acquired the confidence it needed to unleash its attendant dictatorial character on the entire country to a scale never known before in the country’s history. In line with the military’s obsession for wanting to be in total control of its environment, successive governments, over the years, transformed the entire country into a centralised system of government, practically wiping off in the
process all the country's original features of a federal system of government and thus reducing such an identification now to be only but in the name. This development, vis-à-vis the culture of militarism\textsuperscript{24} as it has grown over the years, has either eliminated or drastically limited the normal channels of communication through which people could air their views or vent their anger and frustration. Forced into this situation and coupled with the severity of economic conditions since the 1980s, the people had to resort to violence. It is not surprising then that there have been more conflicts - in different forms and degrees - in the period under our study than in any other decade in the country's history. Thus, that the country is perennially in conflict need not be construed to mean that Nigerians are incurably prone to conflicts or love their country any less. It simply means that conflicts have become the most handy and a meaningful mobilizational avenue open to people to express and, if possible, secure their interest within a Nigerian context that was structurally unjust right from its birth. Herein lies the problem behind the various conflicts in the country - a problem which successive governments and even the Church have either failed to see or, perhaps, have seen but lack the courage and the ideological competence to address.

\textit{Searching for and evaluating alternative solutions:}

We do not like to repeat our earlier observation of the Church's pattern of resolving conflicts. Suffice it to recall briefly that it essentially entails short and long-term ecumenical approach that dwells more on the spoken/written words than on backing such words with concrete physical action. It is easily observed, however, that this pattern of resolving conflicts has not achieved its desired intention, given the continued occurrence of tension/conflicts in the country. The observation made here is not to suggest that conflicts will be completely resolved; to suggest or think otherwise is certainly utopian. What is paramount here is to ascertain to what extent the Church has tried other possible avenues to resolve or, at least, minimise the occurrence of religious riots. One such avenue which the Nigerian Catholic Church
appeared to have taken (during the Abacha dictatorship), under the alleged influence of the Church’s Nunciature, is an apparent openness to do business with government. Nowhere is this clearly demonstrated better than in the more-than-ordinary diplomatic role government was allowed to play in the 1998 pastoral visit to Nigeria by the Pope.

This apparent alternative approach by the Church, however, is fraught with creating more problems than it appears to solve. Even if we grant some credibility to this approach, it is flawed as a viable avenue toward managing conflicts, especially the one around the struggle for democratic governance in the country. Our judgement here is based on the fact that the approach could easily confuse many Catholics into believing that government is a friend of their Church and, therefore, under the guise of one good turn deserving another, they may be reluctant to join any opposition against government. Besides, the approach serves the interest of government more than that of the oppressed masses on whose side the Church is biblically called to stand. To buttress this assertion, consider the fact of government’s interest and desire to launder its image among the international community of humane and democratic nations. Besides, there is the historical fact of government gravitating to religion either as a crisis-management-tool to wriggle itself out of political crisis or as a way to forestall the anti-government influence the radical elements within religion could have on the civil society.25 With specific reference to the Catholic Church, it is plausible to argue that having either silenced or weakened practically all avenues of opposition but the Church, and recognising it as the only institution structurally capable of successfully challenging government as well as the futility in fighting such an institution - given the Church’s international character and connections - government may have wisely chosen to court the Church’s friendship and collaboration.

The preceding remark brings us to the establishment of Justice, Development and Peace (JDP) Commissions in several dioceses in the country. We believe that, if creatively utilised, the JDPs could
serve as powerful avenues to begin to redress the Church’s lack of attentiveness to the imperative of dismantling the systemic cause of conflicts in the country. Of particular interest here is the need to inject into the Church’s educational strategy an economic and socio-political conscientization vis-à-vis the imperative for a ‘tripodal approach’, i.e. an attentiveness, at one and the same time, to the political, economic and cultural dimensions of contemporary Nigeria. In its political perspective, the tripodal approach would involve educating the people and inculcating in them the culture and spirit of democracy. The economic aspect of the tripod calls for the establishment of community banks, as it is the case in some dioceses. The aim for these banks should be geared beyond the economic empowerment of the people to include the development of a middle class in the country that, hopefully, would live up to its historical vocation as the human agents for social change. Finally, the cultural angle of the tripod - perhaps the more challenging of its three sides - calls for a cultural revival whose main objective is to inculcate and advance those cultural values that would engender a more united, prosperous and egalitarian Nigeria. The need here is for the Church to explore the possibility of inculcating cultural values into its educational system - from primary to post-primary levels - and insisting on a compulsory comparative study of the country’s major religions and ethnic groups, stressing more of those values that unite rather than polarise these constituent units.

Conclusion
A number of lessons are discernible from the foregoing assessment of the Church’s handling of conflicts. One such lesson is first and foremost, an awareness and recognition, on the part of the general public, of the influence the Catholic Church is exerting on the country’s socio-political terrain, especially as exemplified in the stand some of its priests publicly took in support of the struggle to install a democratic culture and governance in the country. Prior to the period under our study, many Nigerians, especially those who expressed their antipathy to religion, tended to see the Church as a conservative institution and therefore could be easily ignored
in the struggle for social change. This attitude toward the Church has largely changed in recent times as even some of these Nigerians now testify that the “Catholic Church is laying an excellent example” in denouncing the evil in the country.26 This is so much that government, as we saw in the course of this work, could find it reasonable to court the friendship of the Church. With specific reference to the Church’s response to conflicts in Nigeria the lesson is easily discernible that the Nigerian Church has not been found wanting, at both the immediate (short term) and remote (long term) levels of resolving the conflicts in the country. This notwithstanding, however, conflicts have continued to be more on the increase than on the decrease. Which brings us to enquire into why this is so.

Mindful of other contributory factors to the prevalence of conflicts in Nigeria, our assessment is that the Catholic Church, at its leadership level and notwithstanding its outspokenness against the malaise in Nigeria, has not so far provided the kind of example that will effectively minimise conflicts in the country. This is because, in the first place, the Church has neither come to a recognition of the systemic cause of the conflicts nor an acceptance of its own contributions to the perpetuation of the system. That apart, it is even doubtful whether the Church is ideologically ready and capable for the kind of role that is imperative of it to play in the prevailing Nigerian context, given the unqualified non-violent and, therefore, ambivalent posture on the part of its leadership toward the actualisation of social change in the country. This posture is epitomised in the way the Church currently, in the name of faith, remains at identifying and naming social evils in the country and demanding, in the name of faith, action to address them. But it could neither, as Church, prescribe how those evils are to be eliminated nor is its leadership class prepared to translate its moral weight into forging the necessary linkages with other progressive forces in the country and, if possible, physically leading by example in the concrete struggle to remove the human forces responsible for the perpetuation of the very systemic cause of conflicts in the country.


9 Ibid


11 See Iheanyi Enwerem, op.cit., pp. 47-49, 75-76.

12 For the details on this as it applies to Nigeria see Peter B. Clarke and Ian Linden, Islam in Modern Nigeria: A Study of a Muslim Community in a Post-Independent State, 1960-1983 (Mainz/Munchen, 1984), p. 19ff.


15 Here, one calls to mind the participation of clerics like Rev. Monsignor Hypolite Adigwe of Ontisha Archdiocese in some of the country’s Constitutional conferences.


17 Here we record our inspiration from Chinonye C. Ochiagha’s “The Importance of Dialogue between Bishops and Major Superiors”, a Paper delivered at the Seminar/Workshop on Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and the World on October 20-22, 1996 at the Provincial Pastoral Institute, Ede, Osun State, p.19.

19 Cf. Ibid., p. 10.
24 The “culture of militarism” is akin to what Professor Segun Sowunmi has aptly described as “the leaven of militarism” - that is, “to see politics as war [so much so as ] to be ready to use every means both fair and foul in ensuring that only those who hold particular views or opinions, on the allocation of resources and values survive, no matter how unsound their views or opinions may be.” See, Segun Sowunmi, *The Guardian*, Thursday, January 24, 1991, p. 9.
26 Bade Onimode, “The role of Gospel Teachers and Ministers in Contemporary Nigeria”, a paper delivered at a Seminar organized by the Edo State Branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) on the theme *The Role of Gospel Teachers and Ministers in Contemporary Nigeria Situation*, held on Feb. 6, 1997 at the Bishop Kelly Pastoral Centre, Benin City, p. 69.
A Politico-theological Assessment of the Ethnic and National Rivalries in the Central African Region.¹

By

Elochukwu Eugene Uzukwu, c.s.sp.

Preamble:
As I begin to write this paper the temptations facing me are many. The first is to divert to the conflicts in the Balkans since the Serbs and ethnic Albanians of Kosovo are yet to sort out their differences and Serbia is amassing arms and men in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo. One is tempted to argue that conflicts are not limited to the continent of Africa. Second, as I write, the picture of the conflicts very close to our door here in south-eastern Nigeria, the Niger Delta, remains very disturbing. Why should we go to the central African region or the horn of Africa to explore conflicts? The movement for the liberation of Izonland [as the Delta regions of Nigeria are being renamed] arose because of government neglect, reckless exploitation of land and property, an unpopular land use decree, and unjust revenue allocation formula. All these find unity of expression around ethnic persecution. Reading through the Tempo magazine of February 1999, I am unable to resist the temptation of asking who ordered the nameless soldier, referred to simply as "a soldier who spoke Hausa", to cut off the lower lobe of the ear of 70 year old Desede Seketire, former chairman of Kaima customary court in the 1950s, and try to force Seketire to eat his own flesh. It is another nameless soldier referred to as "a soldier with Yoruba tribal marks" who came and stopped the Hausa speaking soldier from forcing Desede Seketire to do the unthinkable. This happened in January 1999 in Yenagoa, capital of Bayelsa State.² I am therefore tempted to divert from the principal focus of the subject assigned to me to concentrate on aspects of State sponsored violence, and the mayhem that men under arms may sow when they lose their nerve, go beyond their brief by
taking the initiative of torturing their victims without clear order from their superiors. Or may torture be part of their brief? Also tempting is the ethnic divide - it suffices to hear that a soldier spoke Hausa or Yoruba for imagination to be filled with memories of those exploited and those who exploit, those oppressed and their oppressors, those benefiting from the nation's treasury and those who hear of the oil wealth from the wireless. My other temptation is to draw attention to the conflict in Sierra Leone, our own West African region, where poorly maintained Nigerian troops lead ECOMOG in keeping a fragile peace. In Sierra Leone humanity has been beaten into full retreat by the rebels who have specialised in maiming their victims. These victims are none other than the fellow citizens the rebels claim to be fighting to liberate. One horrible interpretation is that the rebels are simply recapitulating the pattern of human sacrifices made in the past of Africa, and are reviving African ancestral religion. What blasphemy! The more charitable interpretation is that humans in that region are declining into atavism and barbarism. The evocation of these natural temptations which I face while beginning this paper may only indicate how widespread conflicts are in Africa and elsewhere in our world, and why it may be important to seek for explanations of the conflicts beyond the obvious or ubiquitous ethnic divide.

In February 1996, during a preparatory meeting for a conference in Dakar [Senegal] on conflict resolution in the West African sub-region, the participants underlined the multiple nature of the causes of conflict in Africa, insisting that one should not limit these only to ethnicity. These other causes include land issues, manipulation of public opinion, crying poverty and hopeless living conditions, uncontrollable circulation of arms, lack of clarity about the role of the military in a democratic system, personal ambition of some so-called leaders, national conferences which derailed followed by chaotic transition programmes, irresponsible media, and so on. These points noted about the West African region apply with equal force to the Central African region. The only difference, which may not be considered a minor difference, is that West Africa is saved from the type of ethnic madness that exists between two
clearly defined antagonists like the Hutu and Tutsi. Though there may be all over Africa what the 1994 African Synod described as the "idolatry of ethnicity which leads to fratricidal wars\textsuperscript{5}", this idolatry has reached the level of paroxysm in the Central African region, precisely in Rwanda. Secondly, the factors which led to the spill over of conflicts from one part of the Central African region to another leading to a full scale war - the first world war fought on African soil involving 8 African nations - may be latent in West Africa but has become clearly active in the Central African region. It is noting the evident to remark with the Ethiopian Episcopal Conference that tribalism is the greatest problem that Africa faces today. The Ethiopian conference told the 1997 SECAM meeting in South Africa that the church does well to address herself seriously to this evil of tribalism. This may be an exaggeration, in view of the other causes noted above, but the tribal has become the obvious channel of the emergence of pent-up emotions.

The purpose of this symposium is to search for ways of limiting this violence and conflicts. My task is to focus on the Central African region, point out the multiple causes of the conflicts, and propose patterns of resolving such conflicts in the future based on the theological resources of the Christian church implanted here in Africa.

My primary focus will be Rwanda whose experience of tribalism, ethnocentrism, and racism culminated in genocide described as possibly the first popular genocide in contemporary history.\textsuperscript{5} Though I have only fragmentary knowledge of the peoples in the tiny densely populated Central African country, my narrative will draw from pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial\textsuperscript{7} history to situate the Rwandan conflict and tragedy. I shall note the potential of the conflict from this country to spill over frontiers leading to the production of a war which now engulfs the whole Central African region.

Second, I shall draw attention to the tragic consequences of a warped ethnological model, parading some groups as superior Africans [\textit{Hamites} - and so born to rule] and others as \textit{Negroes as such} [and thus inferior serfs to be ruled - Seligman's
classification]. This poorly informed model hardened into doctrine/ideology clothing with the aura of natural causality socio-economic differences that existed before the colonial era. Christian mission, charged with transmitting western education, is blamed for propagating this ideology. And again Christian mission discovered too late its error in propagating this ethnic ideology. My first point of reviewing the possibilities of theological models that may be useful in addressing the church in the countries around the region, is a re-examination of the crucial question of Christian conversion. Exploring with Metuh the theories proposed by Trimingham, Horton, Ifeka-Moller and Fisher [who depends on the classic work of Nock], one may ask how far a change of affiliation may happen without a change of conviction. This review of conversion is not limited to Rwanda but also extends to the rest of Africa so that the impact of baptismal water may ultimately be stronger than the ethnic blood [Archbishop Obiefuna of Onitsha] or at least transform the ethnic blood to create fraternity beyond ethnic frontiers. Next I shall draw from what the Churches say to their members - my principal source will be the Catholic Church. This social teaching clearly imparts the principles of justice, hospitality, care for the poor and oppressed, and reconciliation. Third I ask how one may devise a political theology, which for the region may be a liberation theology, which may provide models for getting beyond the negative forces of ethnicity while harvesting the positive forces for recreating the societies. As a matter of fact the theological model that may be more adequate here may be the theology of reconstruction proposed by the All Africa Conference of Churches [AACC] in 1991 for the reform of the Churches and societies in the region. It may not be idle to suggest that these models can be connected with the preferred model of the African synod - the model of Church as Family of God. Finally, I shall try to locate Africa and her problems in the wider world and search for ways Africa may join the global process through the Christian commonwealth. There have been calls made in this region and other regions of Africa for the unification of Africa for the better future of humans. Theology adding its voice to these calls inserts
itself in the wider vision of the realisation of the Kingdom. In this way the particularity or identity of each group is not only respected but also tested, transformed and converted in the openness to receive the other.

**Elements of Pre-colonial History:**

Historians today blame a warped ethnology, supported by colonial interest and propagated by Christian mission, for the creation of an ethnically pitched Tutsi-Hutu divide in Rwanda. As J. B. Webster, B. A. Ogot and J.-P. Chrétien wrote in UNESCO *General History of Africa*, the Hamito-Semitic theory proposed *Hamites* as Africans of a superior race coming from the East or Ethiopia. These are supposed to be responsible for the civilisations of the Great Lakes region inhabited by *Negroes as such* or the other blacks or Bantu found in this region. However, recent and more careful historiography paying close attention to oral sources, the formation and development of clans instead of castes and races, yield more interesting and convincing results. It emerges that the Great Lakes region is one dominated by political ambitions, intrigues and wars. There is the formation, development, fragmentation and stabilisation of kingdoms - movements that can be traced back to the 15th century and even before then. Instead of the sharp distinction between farmers and herders which is supposed to explain the 20th century conflicts in Rwanda the study shows clans of mixed composition - Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa and other ethnic groups both in ancient Burundi and Rwanda. History points to a fusion of groups and the existence of intimate contacts, which go as far as the Kivu region in present day Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC] before the colonial period. If there were a contact between "Bantu-speaking groups and groups speaking south Kushitic or central Sudanese languages", this appears to recent historiography as only an 'interesting' hypothesis, but it bears "on too remote a period (the first millennium) to throw light on the situation in the sixteenth century, given the cultural fusion of these populations". 
While the kingdoms around the Eastern side of the Great Lakes region like Baganda and Bunyoro fragmented in the wars of conquest and struggle for influence and domination that characterise this region, the Western side of lake Victoria, where one has the Rwanda and Burundi kingdoms, showed relative stability and firm concentration of power in the hands of defined ruling elite. These two are densely populated kingdoms - having over one million inhabitants each by the end of the 19th century. Historians have shown that demographic explosion, frequent calamities, ecological disasters, drought and famine, recorded in these two kingdoms historically led to population movements in search of pasture or watered land, and also led to the dependence of farmers on herders. The herders through the practice of transhumance were able to ensure the survival of their cattle. The subsequent cult of the cow or its use as symbol at the instigation of the divine king, *mwami*, helped the rich Batutsi herd-owners and the ruling circles to maximise their benefit from the regimes established 300 years ago.

In addition the gradual centralisation of Rwandan kingdom was effected through the system of clientship (*ubuhake* - or protection guaranteed to a family in exchange for increased obligations; a process that was used to subjugate influential Hutu lineages). Other elements of centralisation include military organisation and ideological control. There was a system of hereditary standing armies, consisting of young men of certain lineages stationed in camps located on borders under threat, who also looked after herds belonging to or protected by the king, and who later simply collected tax - Bahutu, Batutsi and even foreigners are part of the military. The instability introduced by wars of conquest in the 17th and 18th centuries, the movement of populations in search of food, better irrigated lands or richer pastures, caused the break up of lineages. Cwezi religion offered a refuge in the face of this instability and attendant injustice. The very popular Ryangombe/Kiranga cult, which involves initiation into the destiny of the civilising hero, cut across groups and classes. But the monarchies sought their legitimacy from these same religious
movements as testified by myth and ritual. The movements nevertheless constituted instruments for controlling the excesses of kings. In addition, as inequalities increased following the slave trade and contact with Europeans, tension increased. Smaller kingdoms and clans fought to maintain their independence. This is especially so in Rwanda which started making attempts to expand its influence from the central plateau region to the northern and western [Hutu] areas. Mediumship and possession [kubandwa] of religious nature became strong all over the Great Lakes region to oppose the political capitals of the various kingdoms. Towards the 19th century and also during the colonial period, kubandwa movements focused around a female deity Nyabingi, and became widespread west and north of Rwanda, and around the borders of DRC and Uganda in opposition to Rwandan expansionist policy. The Nyabingi cult was an anti-authoritarian association of priestesses who delivered oracles of the spirit-deity often challenging Tutsi government. During the missionary and colonial period, the oracles were received under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

All these show that by the dawn of the 19th century the political and economic realities in the region do not necessarily lead to a racialist stereotyping of the groups. Colonisation put its ethnic and racial stamp on differences that are social and economic and which may vary according to states involved and according to time.

Impact of Colonisation and Christian Mission.

Germany was the first colonial power that ruled Rwanda. After the First World War, the League of Nations handed over German possessions in East Africa to British and Belgian command. Belgium conveniently merged the area called Ruanda-Urundi for easier administration. But the colonial policy of indirect rule right from the time of German rule, which Belgians followed, preferred not to tamper with the native structures. It rather strengthened such structures for easier exploitation of occupied territories - strengthening the hands of rulers against opposition of subjects within the established kingdoms and reducing the conflicts
between kingdoms in the territory being administered. However, the Belgians insisted that involvement in political administration required Western education, which it confided to the missionaries. But the most disorienting policy in the region under study is the inaccurate interpretation of the social, economic and political realities of the region in purely ethnic and racial terms.

In a paper presented at the 1st SIST international congress on mission [November 11-17 1996] Mme Marthe Antoinette Balihe, a Rwandan, gave an arresting imagery of the consequences of this racial interpretation of the pre-colonial social, economic and political situation. She insisted that the missionaries [White Fathers] led by Bishop Léon Classe, the vicar Apostolic who succeed the founder of the Rwandan mission Bishop Hirth, maintained the ethnic division and the exclusion of the Hutu from political responsibility as doctrine. Reacting to the introduction of some Hutu into the administration of the territory by Belgium, Mgr Classe declared:

The gravest wrong that the Belgian government could do to itself and the country would be to eliminate the Tutsi caste. Such a solution would lead to anarchy and an anti-European communism. As a general rule it would be impossible to have better chiefs or to have more intelligent, more active and capable people who will understand progress. Besides the Bahutu could only occupy posts in mines and farms.¹¹

Consequently in Western education, administration, and in the Church the minority Tutsi [15% of Rwanda] dominated the majority Hutu [85%] and Twa [1-2%]. Bauer notes that the conversion of Tutsi to Catholicism was through Western education. As a result, by 1945 95% of Tutsi were catholic, they accounted for half the clergy and religious; and with education in the hand of Christian mission, they dominated this key area.¹² Consequently, Christian religion became one more instrument of ensuring the Tutsi hegemony. In the Rwandan kingdom the mwami (king) was
divine king having right over life and death. Traditional religion and sacred rites protected this traditional system, and so during the early period of the encounter with western Christianity the king refused baptism. But in the process of christianization of Rwanda, a prince catechumen Rudahigwa was enthroned as king in 1931 [as Mutara IV], and so started his reign as a Christian king. Baptised in 1945, Mutara IV dedicated Rwanda to Christ the King addressing this prayer to the Lord Jesus, "You have given our country a long line of kings to govern it in your stead even at a time when they did not know you".  

This prayer fits in perfectly with the ancestral Christology to be developed three decades later by John Mbiti, Bénézet Bujo and Charles Nyamiti [theologians who hail from East and central Africa]. But it is obviously a prayer that validates the position of the aristocracy - a group whose thoughts about religion, as Weber clearly stated, are far from rational/prophetic ethics. «As a rule», says Weber, «the class of warrior nobles, and indeed feudal powers generally, have not readily become the carriers of a rational religious ethic».  

They seek from religion the psychological assurance of their legitimacy.

It was therefore predictable after the Second World War, with the changes in the administration of the Church, that the dominant Tutsi would reject a reformist church. Mgr André Perraudin who was leading the new generation missionaries introduced a clear social ring to the gospel and ministry. With the replacement of Mgr Classe by Perraudin there were genuine efforts by the Catholic Church, to preach the social gospel. The new missionaries were filled with the passion not to lose the poor and working class as happened with the Church in Europe. As Jean Delumeau argued, Christendom was proclaimed, argued and theorised in Europe but never lived. Consequently Europe was never fully evangelised; and one should not say that the poorest of the poor, the working class or the proletariat was ever lost by the Church rather the Church never touched their level.  

The post-World War II missionaries saw it as clearly their mission to speak out against social injustice. This change to preaching social justice interested the Hutu, oppressed and naturally dominated by resentment.
Resentment is understood in the Weberian sense of *ressentiment* or the religious emotions of a suppressed group, blaming their depressed condition on the corrupt class and expecting divine intervention to compensate their loss and visit vengeance on the oppressors. In Korean and Asian cultures this sentiment is expressed in the *Han* or «a sense of unresolved resentment against injustice suffered, a sense of helplessness because of the overwhelming odds against, a feeling of acute pain of sorrow in one’s guts and bowels making the whole body writhe and wriggle, and an obstinate urge to take ‘revenge’ and to right the wrong all these combined». Oppressed Hutu, feeling this resentment, were turning to Protestant churches for consolation. The new social Catholicism with its emphasis on social ethics and general extension of education to the Hutu was indeed welcome news - it was the arrival of the salvation they were hoping for. But for the Tutsi it was a clear betrayal by the Catholic Church. As if this was not sufficient, the Belgian government also changed its position about considering one race inferior to the other. Predictably, this was unacceptable to the Tutsi. Tension continued to mount.

Christian mission missed the dynamic and popular elements within the central African culture for raising the prophetic questions about the evangelisation of Rwanda; what Nock followed by Metuh calls second conversion. The elites were split along ethnic lines singing different tunes. The Batutsi, after the second world war, led by notable erudite clergy like Alexis Kagamé called for independence from Belgian oppression; the Bahutu, led by their own catholic clergy and ex-seminarians were vociferous for social justice. Very few were searching for a middle ground. The field of traditional religion which offered the ground for neutralising totalitarian regimes has at the time of colonisation and mission become co-opted by secular hierarchs, or were simply reprobated by missionary propaganda. For example, there was the cult of Ryangome/Kiranga originally a civilising hero-king/prophet/magician who contested and denounced the sharp emerging Tutsi/Hutu/Twa caste and the idea of a distant *Imana* (God), who died in hunting expedition, and to whose cult followers
are initiated. The liminal period of the initiation included identification with the model and possession \([kubandwa]\) by spirit of Ryangombe. We have also mentioned the female deity, Nyabingi, whose followers were very influential in the 19th century. All these were "practices of initiatory divination and healing, offering protection against threats coming from near ancestors or abuses of power."\(^{20}\) But the colonial administrator of Rwanda, Luc de Heusch, supported by a Christian church hostile to traditional religion outlawed these rites. For according to Luc de Heusch African paganism cannot be protected like the great world religions by state law.\(^{21}\) The post-independence Hutu government showed a similar hostility to possession because of their prophetic-revolutionary bent and outlawed the \(kubandwa\) replacing it with its own Hutu revolution.

**Political Independence and the Peaking of Ethnic Intolerance**

Events that were leading up to the Hutu social revolution of 1959 appeared predictable. The Tutsi ruling elite was not able to read the handwriting on the wall. With the necessary administrative changes being introduced by the Belgian colonial authority under pressure from the UN in view of full independence, BaTutsi reaction was clinging to the myth of superiority. Balihe refers to this lack of clear reading of events in a document published by radicals in the ruling elite on 17\(^{th}\) May 1958. It is a document tracing the genealogy of the Tutsi kings and recounting their epic. The document concluded: «Since our kings conquered the Hutu country, killing the so-called minor kings, thereby making the Hutu subject to us, how could these now pretend that they are our brothers?»\(^{22}\)

Each group formed its own political party and used every available means to attack the other: *Union Nationale Ruandaise* (for the Tutsi) and *Parti du Mouvement de l'Emancipation Hutu* (for the Hutu). Kayibanda, founder of the Hutu party and ex-seminarian editor of the Church paper *Kinyamateka*, and leader of the Legion of Mary, moved through the hills for a grassroots conscientization and mobilisation using the same cells of the
Legion to communicate his ideas. The Tutsi party decided to crush the Hutu party using assassins targeting its leadership. Kayibanda went into hiding in the south. Then an uprising in November 1959 [the Hutu social revolution] ignited the north and all Tutsi huts were set ablaze. The elections the following year gave the Hutu party a landslide victory. Kayibanda led the government in 1961. The Tutsi king, Mwami Kigeri V, went into exile with ten thousand men.

Then incursions of the refugees from Burundi, Uganda and RDC led to repression of Tutsi leading to the death of thousands. In Burundi the equilibrium in the relationship of the ethnic groups was upset by the presence of the Tutsi refugees. But Burundi with a majority of Hutu was firmly in the control of the Tutsi though ethnic appurtenances are decreed out. Uprisings of disgruntled Hutu led to repressions and exile. The repression following the uprising of 1972 was really ethnic massacre [about 120000 Hutu paid for the massacre of 1200 Tutsi]. In 7th July 1973 another revolution occurred in Rwanda, the north staged a coup under General Juvenal Habyarimana accusing the government of Kayibanda of favouring people of the central region. The regional equation will be part of the causes of distress in Rwanda. Many Hutu who saw through the ethnic propaganda will join the opposition because of regional reasons and will be part of those massacred in the genocide of 1994. More repressive measures by the Habyarimana government followed more incursions of Rwandan refugees from neighbouring countries where the violent relations in Rwanda have been exported. Exiled descendants of the repressions of the 1960s and 1970s were demanding more and more their rights. This was interpreted by the Habyarimana regime as attempt by feudalists to oppress the majority. In Burundi similar incursions by the Hutu was interpreted as attempts by terrorists to destabilise the government, and no recognition was accorded the ethnic divide in the country. In both countries the economic problems and their social impact were not clearly addressed. Rather the other [Hutu or Tutsi as the case may be] was demonised in absolute terms as the cause of the evil. But by 1990 following
the marginalization of the Tutsi in all aspects of social and political life since the coup of Habyarimana, there was a well-organised and highly orchestrated incursions from Uganda into Rwanda, the beginning of the civil war which was officially interpreted as aggression from a neighbouring country, Uganda.

From then on the international community has become interested. The Tutsi in the USA, in the Ugandan army, and elsewhere in the Diaspora, used the media and their connections to advantage. The government of Habyarimana used terror, the army, the media [especially the state radio/television and the so-called Radio de Milles Collines] to plant hatred\textsuperscript{23}. The army behaved in the Tutsi area of the country as a force of occupation. In Burundi the same surveillance of the Hutu was systematically carried on. Distrust and fear plagued the unhappy memory of the inhabitants of these sister states. Jean-Pierre Chrétien has stressed the role fear played in all this sad ethnic drama which may explain the level of ethnic madness and the barbarism of the massacres that followed. Reacting to the massacres in Burundi in August 1988 he stressed:

Fear ... is not at the background of the drama, it has become the key protagonist in the affair. What does it mean to be Hutu or Tutsi? It is neither to be Bantu or Hamite, nor to be serf or lord! It is rather to remember who killed your relative fifteen years ago, or to ask each time with a different answer, who is going to kill your child in ten years time. Ethnic identification in this country, by default of being cultural or marked on one’s identity card, is written in hearts in terms of a series of remembered or feared violence.\textsuperscript{24}

Compromise, the basis of modern societies and the ideal of ancient African societies, is ignored by the logic of this emotion. When one reflects on the number killed, the type of death reserved to the victims, the destabilisation of the society, the increase in the number of refugees, one feels the urgency of finding a solution based on the resources of the groups and on the realities of the
modern period. In Rwanda 5-8000 lost their lives in the uprising of 1963. In Burundi 1200 Tutsi lives were lost in Hutu peasant revolt of 1972 while more than 120000 Hutu lost their lives. In the repression that followed another Hutu mayhem in Ntega and Maranga in the North of Burundi, the deaths are in the hundreds of thousands. Between 1973 and 1990 in Rwanda, the loss of lives in war and repression of Tutsi residents is again in the thousands. All these build up to the very well planned colossal genocide of 1994 in which close to 1000000 lives of moderate Hutu and Tutsi of all description were lost. The downing of the aircraft carrying the Rwandan president Habyarimana and his Burundi colleague, Ntaryamira is supposed to have ignited the holocaust. But the mounting tensions, the media, the stockpiling of arms, are all indicators that something of such sinister proportions was being planned. The international community was of very little help. One wonders what may be done now to redress the situation.

Towards a Political-Theological Response

I was in France when the Rwandan tragedy hit the world. I was prodded by those events to attempt a research into an African response to the role of the Church in the world. My response drew me to various conferences organised both in France and Germany. It also prodded me to add a section to the course I was teaching on African theology to reflect on emerging Church and State structures that depend on the resources of Africa. It is from those responses that finally the book A Listening Church emerged. It is not really a response in terms of political theology, it is however an attempt to show that from African resources a courageous and witnessing (prophetic) Church may be built.

The emergence of a fairly defined political theology goes back to the works of Johann Baptist Metz at the close of Vatican II. This kind of theology draws from the gains of Vatican II by moving the Church away from its self-insulation; a self-insulation that dates to the period of the enlightenment. It focuses on the impact genuine faith should make on Christians for a creative transformation of society. Sharing similar concerns with liberation theology by
relating the meanings and values of faith to personal and social transformation, it moves aside from liberation theology by addressing the concerns of those who seek the significance of Christian faith in Western post-enlightenment cultures. Metz sees theology called upon to respond to fundamental questions addressed to insiders - «the account of the believer’s hope given to the believer himself». This is because in the West religion and society have gone their separate ways since the Enlightenment; and there has been a break up of the identity of faith and religious consciousness. Believers often find themselves in Diaspora and have to face the spiritual and intellectual demands made by a pluralistic society. This situation is also applicable to non-western peoples who may have been influenced by Western education.

Political theology, as understood by Metz keeps the past and present in dialectical tension. The depth of the resources of the living past tradition is remembered (memoria) and the emerging positive forces of the present are enkindled to transform the society. Thus in the Church the memoria makes present the dead-risen Christ and lives in expectation of his «coming kingdom criticising all efforts at idolatry, whereby persons, groups, nations, or empires set themselves up as the lord of history». Again in this direction, this theology may provide a dynamic model for transforming the socio-political structures in the central African region, especially the ethnic loyalties or solidarity that some have interpreted as scientific ethnicity.

The aim of this theology is not simply another social gospel or social Catholicism as proclaimed by André Perraudin and the new missionaries after the Second World War, but a theology whose concerns are for the whole world church. This is a call for a second reformation where the emergent church is fully in touch with the churches of the poor of the third world. It is not simply a call to activism, but a search “for an integrating wisdom capable of being practiced cooperatively in reversing dehumanizing injustices”.

If the above is generally the designs of political theology, it contains the grains of liberation theology, though it starts its
reflection from the Western experience of an insulated Church and privatised religion. The designs of this theology and the theology of liberation, which arises out of the concerns of the poor, caught in the massive dehumanising conditions of poverty and oppression in third world countries, help reflection on the tragedy that has befallen Rwanda. As happened to Europe going through two world wars, and having genocide on its conscience, the tragedy of Rwanda calls to question the experience of faith and its practice in the central African region. Our first reflection will focus on the need to move towards a second conversion in this region. Our second focus will be the need to utilise all the dynamic forces of the past, foundational experiences of life in the Central African region and received Christianity, to reconstruct the societies. Finally, one needs the Christian commonwealth and a wider political vision to re-educate and reintegrate Rwanda and the central African region into the global village, thereby leaving the region open to the project of the Kingdom.

On the Need for [Second] Conversion

There is little doubt in the region under study that Christianity has been proclaimed and received by Africans. It is equally pertinent to note that this Christianity has not led to the fundamental transformation of structures. And when one passes this judgement one is not pretending that Christianity has generally anywhere succeeded in transforming socio-religious and economic or political structures. Alyward Shorter noted long ago that the reception of Christianity in Africa did not really call for radical change. Whatever this may mean, it may imply either that the fundamental aim of Christian mission merged with the aims of the African communities; or that the means of evangelisation became forceful motivation for accepting the faith.

It has been noted above that Rwandans, Tutsi but also Hutu accepted Christianity because of the promises in the area of education and social mobility. This is also the case among peoples of West Africa, for example, the Igbo of Nigeria. Therefore, what may be said here about conversion in Rwanda may be applicable to
other parts of Africa. From the evidence on the ground about the massacres of April 1994 and previous pogroms in the region, Christians butchered Christians. Dominant social symbols, like the sanctity of life and the family, were no longer effective. A husband buries his Tutsi wife alive, telling her “the hour has come”. Neighbours threaten to destroy the house of a Hutu if he kept on hiding his Tutsi wife. The wife begs her husband to bury her alive - after praying together she is buried alive. A pastor supervises the massacre of his flock. The precincts of the sacred are desecrated. Christian churches became centres of slaughter like stadiums. A traumatised French priest, Gabriel Maindron, who did his seminary training in Rwanda and who spent all his youthful life labouring in the place could hardly believe what was happening to his flock. He found it difficult to preside at Sunday mass. He did conduct the celebration, his Hutu flock assisted. There appeared to be no remorse shown by those who participated in the genocide. Father Maindron had the following conversation with one of his altar boys who was carrying a machete and who he has not seen since the massacres started:

- What are you doing with that machete? What have you been doing all this while?
- Father, I have killed a dozen or more.
- You are not ashamed?
- No! I only took part in defending the country.
- But, I tell you that you are no longer a Christian.
- Not at all! I remain a catholic. I have done no wrong, and I have no intention of coming to you to confess.  

Only those who know the power of the media in Burundi, Rwanda, DRC and the whole of the central African region will understand the damage done to the psyche of citizens in this region. This led to a UNESCO commissioned study of the Rwanda media following the genocide. Jean-Pierre Chrétien and his group of researchers were convinced from evidence that the media - especially *Radio de Milles Collines* [radio of one thousand hills], and the extremist
journal, Kangura - prepared the ground and tele-guided the Hutu population in transforming their country into an abattoir. The researchers correctly gave the title Rwanda: Les Mé dias du génocide to their book. The White Fathers who evangelised Rwanda attest that the public media is the highest instrument used by the Habyarimana regime to issue instructions to the people. Every news bulletin is preceded by previous speeches of the president. With this kind of indoctrination researchers were struck about the passionate commitment and good conscience of thousands of killers in performing this barbaric action. If people could kill with such good conscience, employ such brutality as dismembering a victim before actually cutting of his/her head, what kind of humans, what kind of Christians are these? Are they converted?

During the repression of 1963 that led to the death of more than 5000 persons, [Tutsi insurgents - refugees - had made incursions into Rwanda provoking the repression], missionaries cried out against the brutality. The bishops condemned the action as "unchristian ... shameful and degrading". Baur recorded the following comments from some Bahutu men, «Let us first settle our bills with the BaTutsi, then we shall talk about being Christians». It is possible that the foundation on which the life of the Hutu and Tutsi Christians are built is far from the apostles and prophets, rather it is ethnic loyalty and all that the term indicates.

Scholars of African religion and African Christianities (independent churches) have wondered about the meaning of conversion in Africa. The following theories are prevalent: (a) Trimingham proposes the shattered microcosm - or the collapse of African traditional societies at the impact of western civilisation, technology, economy and education - as cause of conversion to Islam and Christianity. These religions are able to support new views of the world that ethnic religions are unable to support. (b) Robin Horton proposes the intellectualist approach - whereby the movement to the worship of a supreme being as development of African cosmology in response to features of the modern situation was already in the air whether or not Islam or Christianity ever
came to Africa. Consequently, these two religions are catalysts, stimulators or accelerators of changes that were bound to occur whether these missionary religions were brought to Africa or not. (3) Fisher adopts the historical approach whereby encounter with Islam followed the patterns of quarantine (whereby the orthodox faith practised by strangers alone), mixing (natives changing affiliation without changing their conviction - first conversion), and reform (or the local people moving to orthodoxy). (d) Finally Ifeka-Moller proposed the deprivation theory, whereby rapid social change and growing frustration like being excluded from political power or reaping reward from eventual change become motivators for conversion. After examining these four theories of conversion in Africa, Metuh underlined that the prevalent opinion among scholars is that conversion is a very complex phenomenon and no one theory explains it in Africa. But it is important to understand what scholars mean by conversion. Metuh reduces this to three categories - (i) change of affiliation without change of conviction (or mixing - 1st conversion), (ii) change of affiliation with change of conviction, and (iii) change of conviction without change of affiliation (2nd conversion).

Many of the elements suggested above, especially the social, economic and political form part and parcel of the reasons given for the conversion to Christianity in Rwanda. But it does appear that there was a change of affiliation without a clear change of conviction. There may be evidence of this but can this be generalised? What does one say about the context of violence, which predated Christianity? The historical report of the pogroms and the reaction of Christians through the 1960s to the drama of 1994 had the footnote that many Christians showed heroic virtue by the manner in which they protected their neighbours as human beings and Christians. For example, when journalists pressed Fr. Maindron on whether the genocide of Rwanda was not signal of the failure of Christianity, he accepted that the Christian faith has suffered a terrible blow. But he believes that the witness of the thousands who preferred death rather than participate in the genocide is an alternative and radical Christian testimony. He
referred to the collective letter of the Travailluses Missionnaires, which declared:

Since it is mostly the baptised who killed Christians, this may give the impression that a century of struggle and missionary generosity in the service of the very poor is in vain. This is certainly not true. Plenty of evidence reach us proving that thousands of Christians, Hutu and Tutsi, put their lives on the line to save their brothers and sisters. The spirit of love overcame hate.33

He acknowledged the many faults of the Rwandan church, but he underlined the courageous struggle of this church to which one has to pay tribute: 3 bishops, 103 priests, 40 brothers, 60 sisters, and very numerous Christians have been assassinated. It is not only the church which failed, everything collapsed in Rwanda - the state, civil society, the international community.34 Consequently, it will be rash indeed to reduce the faith in Rwanda to mere adhesion. A. D. Nock in his classic study of conversion does make a distinction between this experience, which implies total change, and adhesion, which does not imply a crossing of religious frontiers. In adhesion one is touched by external circumstance of contact with the other and their ways:

These external circumstances led not to any definite crossing of religious frontiers, in which an old spiritual home was left for a new once and for all, but to men's having one foot on each side of a fence which was cultural and not creedal. They led to an acceptance of new worships as useful supplements and not as substitutes, and they did not involve the taking of a new way of life in place of the old. This we may call adhesion, in contradistinction to conversion. By conversion we mean the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a
turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right. Whatever may have stimulated the conversions in Rwanda, it remains true that the faith has not been fully purified in the country. It is true that some may have lived it to great heroism. The attitude of some state and church hierarchs indicates that there was a dominant hidden agenda to embrace Christianity out of cultural rather than creedal reasons. This is why it may be right to a certain extent to refer to Rwandan Christianity as a cult [Baur] where nothing of the old order changes; rather than the faith which challenges every aspect of the society. Again this situation is common to the rest of Africa and the world.

The evidence all over Africa of what Archille Mbembe calls the politics of the stomach is partly responsible for the way the faith was embraced in Rwanda. The desire to control political and economic power pushed the elite initially to accept western education and Christianity. The practice of injustice by the ruling elite, the refusal to democratise, and the exploitation of ethnicity to the point of scientific ethnicism are all directed towards holding on to political power and the gains such power gives. Remi Anifowose showed in a similar analysis that the shortest cut to affluence and influence in Nigeria is through politics. In Nigeria, "the possession of political power leads directly to economic power. Those who hold positions in the power structure determined the location and distribution of scarce resources. Exclusion from this power position is hence very costly". Mbembe blames it all on famine - we live in a time of famine, the scarce resources has to be controlled by my ethnic group, it is time now for us to eat. Leadership becomes a self-recruiting oligarchy, and no self-recruiting oligarchy has been known to tolerate opposition to itself.

The church in Rwanda at one time favoured the ruling Tutsi and later the Hutu underdogs - leading to both joy and distress. In Burundi the persecution of the Catholic Church and the expulsion of missionaries and proscription of small Christian communities in
the various hills of Burundi in the 70s came on the heels of the Church's stand for a more equitable society. The persecutions that have the aim of preserving the privilege of one group over the legitimate human rights of another sharpen the ethnic divide, resentment, and fuel vengeance.

Ethnicity has been so exaggerated in Rwanda, Burundi and now in RDC that this pest has to be clearly reprobated in the church. In two books that tried to test the 1991 project of the All Africa Conference of Churches on theology of reconstruction, Kā Mana insists that the continent needs to be liberated from this pharoanic pest by the God of exodus. He passionately argues that African governments sacrifice at the altar of the god of blood and soil - which is another word for tribalism and ethnocentrism. The oppression these unleash is comparable to Pharaoh's oppression of Israelites in Egypt. God's word intervenes to judge and condemn these pests. Kā Mana moves further to condemn all theological or philosophical projects in Africa that tend towards identity - the Zairian rite, the Christology of Christ-ancestor, Christ master of initiation, emotional (irrational) prayers of sects and independent churches, inculturation. While sharing Kā Mana's preoccupation about the evils associated with ethnicity, especially the way it is lived in the central African region, it must be emphasised that ethnic identity or concreteness of a group is clearly important for their self-perception and self-definition in the world. What is wrong is the self-perception and definition in absolute terms, as not to allow the other to be, not to reap from the traditional wisdom that the stranger is a blessing, that the stranger is the ancestor in transit. Blood and land need to be affirmed and at the same time denied or rather transcended. The whole of the Scriptures is replete with this affirmation and again with openness to universality. From the promise of the land to Israel, to co-opting Canaanite festivals as festivals in honour of Yahweh, Yahwism does not fail to project the picture of what Brueggemann calls the «aniconic». If one cannot hammer Yahweh into images [the struggle against idolatry] the picture of Yahweh's «imageless identity» emerges. Yahweh becomes a God «available for and attentive to those who do not
participate in the image-making, image-enhancing, image-producing and image-consuming ways of imperial life.» This is another way of affirming that Yahweh as a living God is “engaged in a radical social practice which creates an alternative social possibility”\(^5\). To project such an imageless identity of God that is not colonised by political and religious hierarchs is the intentionality of political theology in this region.

This is the type of call that Cameroonian theologians and political scientists [especially Archille Mbembe, Eboussi-Boulaga, and Jean-Marc Ela]\(^4\) have consistently made in their radical position about Christian theology and Christian witness in Africa. One must move away from types of inculturation theology that pretends Africa is vegetating in a mythical past, one must address the massive oppression and deception of the people by the elite, political or ecclesiastical, and one needs to adopt the Christic model. Despite the uniqueness of Jesus the Christ as Son of God, his genealogy roots him into a people and a defined land (Matthew and Luke). For as the Fathers of the Church correctly say, what he did not take he did not redeem. But it is clear that for Christ to explode the particularist institutional model, what we may today interpret as including racial or tribal idolatry, he had to contest the leaders of his time. Eboussi sees the confrontation with Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenians as a way of leading Christianity towards its novel self-definition. The transformation of social structures, which is the project of prophetic Christianity, automatically implicates protest. According to Eboussi, for Christianity “its protests is actually its self-definition, for it comprises the actions and deeds by which it posits itself in its specific difference. These primitive refusals and rejections reveal the sort of on-going obstacles it will have to surmount in order to be itself”.\(^4\) Jesus’ confrontation with the Jews led to his death-resurrection through which a community where there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male and female emerged (Gal. 3:28).

What may have happened in Rwanda and what happens in other African countries is that those who have been profoundly touched by the faith, on the one hand, and those who were no longer ready
to accept the ethnic alibi for all socio-economic problems and the racial discrimination, on the other, did not have the physical force to impose their viewpoint. This may be their Achilles' heel, but here also may lie their strength. They are people of the future, with them will arise a new kind of story; with them will begin a new *memoria*, a new living myth. Their task can be described, as Emmanuel Levinas rightly stressed, with that Greek word which describes gratuitous public work - *leitourgia*: a task without reward; a task whose reward rests only in patience and future hope. To accept the faith is to face the challenges of a prophetic religion.

**Attempts by the Church leadership to project a prophetic faith:**

Bishop Perraudin and the post-World War II missionaries launched the social Catholicism - good news to the Hutu but a betrayal for elite Tutsi. Theirs was, nevertheless, a redeeming action for the Christian church. It is moving Christianity away from being a bourgeois religion, for private life only and having no impact on the structures of society. Eboussi describes this bourgeois religion as propagating the individual - "a closed subjectivity, finished and perfect in itself, maintaining only purely extrinsic relationship with society".42

One must acknowledge, despite the many lapses of the church in this region that serious attempts have been made to free the church from self-insulation. The formation of small Christian communities was one of the striking ways of doing this. According to Baur, by the time the communities were outlawed in Burundi by the Bagaza regime in 1986, the impact made on the life of Burundians was significant. And this explains why the Church was oppressed, missionaries sent packing, and Burundi moving towards scientific socialism:

Perhaps a more decisive reason for the oppression of the Church than her colonial hang-over was her pastoral programme which had been initiated in the same year the second Republic was born [1972]. It began with a synod of the whole People of God and envisaged as a major means
for indigenizing the Church the general setting up of small Christian communities, already successfully introduced in the south. On every hill such a community, called *Inama Sahwanya* (Community meeting), was formed. It comprised 50 to 100 families, which took over the basic responsibilities regarding prayer, education, sacraments, charity and finances. Together with this new ecclesial organization the Church took a major role in social and economic development. Most successful were its centres of adult education, the *Yaga Mukama*. In 1986, the year when they were suppressed by Bagaza, they counted 300,000 participants - more than all pupils in the schools. This double church activity was seen as competing with the policies of the government that built up its political party also in small groups on the hills and did a lot for development.  

The impact of the church succeeds in proposing an active role in society - a privileged role in the education sector, and another privileged role in its pastoral programme of small Christian communities. These small groups have been positively used for human development and negatively employed as channels of ethnic tension. But generally the official position of the Catholic Church has been peace, reconciliation, and protection of the humanity of the other.

In the neighbouring Kivu zone of the republic of Congo, where Burundian and Rwandan ethnic conflicts had been exported through the refugees, the position of the Church is also clear. Bishop Muzihirwa made a heartrending call in October 1996, before his untimely death, for an end to the war which Rwanda and Burundi and their allies exported to the Congo people. He drew attention to the hospitality Kivu people gave to Tutsi refugees between 1959 and 1962, and again the hospitality given to Hutu refugees in 1994. He made appeal to both groups to respect the law of hospitality and “not to spit into the well from which they have taken drinking water”. And he called upon Burundi and Rwanda to
cease the hostilities they are exporting, appealed to the international community to take immediate charge of the repatriation of the refugees, and then asked the Zairian government to fulfil its obligations to its citizens. The bishop of Kivu was making the declaration in 1996 little did he foresee the eventual development of a full-scale war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The war of liberation of the Congo started in the same region in 1997. A year later precisely as from 2nd August 1998, another war started which has engulfed the whole region. The Congo Episcopal conference in an extraordinary meeting in Kinshasa 2-7 November 1998 drew attention to the disaster that Congolese have been experiencing without respite because of this war. There is break down of law and order, massacres, looting of property, groaning, tears, anger, rancour, vengeance, total ruin, indebtedness - brief, a situation of material and spiritual desolation. People who do not wish to enlist in the army abandon their villages, traders horde and hide their lorries and goods for fear of their being confiscated. No one talks about investment. The bishops assemble the national feeling by declaring "no" to war, and refusing the spectre of an imposed dictatorship. They however cautioned against xenophobia, which threatens any group that is faced with external invasion, and the exploitation of the ideology of ethnocentrism that has made Africa a continent of war and a market for arms. Recognising the root of sin acting in all and the evils being experienced as fruit of jealousy, envy, selfishness and hardness of heart, the bishops called for profound conversion of heart. This is the prerequisite for reconciliation, mutual pardon and life in unity. In short in the DRC local church the voices are raised with courage and sincerity condemning the war, denouncing injustice, and inviting all to peace and reconciliation.

The churches in Burundi and Rwanda have the unenviable task of convoking their assembly and trying to persuade the warring parties to trust, and to reconcile. The critical role memory must play in this situation is not minimised. In Rwanda, the bishops note, in their report to the 1997 SECAM conference that hate,
rancour and settling of scores at a level unknown in the history of the nation was the prevalent context of living. This is of course compounded by the situation of refugees, the destabilisation of the society, and the fear and repressed anger that follow such an experience. In Burundi the bishops made a passionate call for dialogue and negotiation. For they were convinced that “political dialogue or sincere negotiation … is the unavoidable way towards peace and reconciliation”. Consequently, no one should be afraid of dialogue or negotiation, say the bishops. For, it is the opportunity to mutually listen to one another and appreciate one another in order to resolve in a peaceful and durable manner, and for the greater interest of the nation, the problems that generate conflicts.

UPRONA, the government party, rejected this call as coming out of bad will and the inability of the bishops to condemn the genocide being committed against the Tutsi. In a lengthy reply that was copied to the Vatican, the diplomatic corps, etc. UPRONA proposed doctrinal, philosophical, ethical, political and other reasons why one should not negotiate with genocide. This kind of reply only tells us that a powerful work has to be done to the psyche and memory of people in this region as part and parcel of dialogue and reconciliation. The resistance to the dialogue proposed by the church also shows the weakness of this institution. But it is in this weakness and in continuing to propose this ideal for the creation of a humane and resilient society that meets its dreams that the church continues to fulfil its mission of proclaiming the Kingdom to the world.

Beyond Ethnicism - global citizenship in view of the Kingdom
Ethnicism is not a project with a future; where it is allowed to succeed it produces and entrenches hate and moves society towards entropy. Experiences in Rwanda and Burundi, and the two Congos project the worst in ethnicism. In this section I like to propose that while maintaining identity the project humane living lies fully in recognising the difference in the other. But insofar as ethnic nationalities insulate themselves, marginalise others by their power
or number, develop the terrible heresy of scientific ethnicism as practised in Rwanda and Burundi, and as exported into the neighbouring countries, so much do they dig their own graves.

The mission or the human enterprise in this world must be recognised as a mission of building relationships beyond one’s group. I tried to argue in *A Listening Church* that the clear anthropological project of African societies is the mass creation of relationships. The fact that there has always been problems in this area only shows that relationship is never taken as a given but remains a project - to be ever re-designed and to be ever re-negotiated and celebrated. This is true of a single individual African, who is defined ontologically as subsistent relationship precisely because it is true of the kindred, clan, village-group, ethnic group, whose survival or self-definition is in building and servicing channels of relationship. This is why the famous Igbo adage *ife kwulu ife akwudebe ya* [a thing stands and another stands beside it - to confirm, support, and confront] is extensible as a philosophy of community inter-relatedness. The southern African version of it is *humans are humans only along and with other humans* [*motha ke motha ka batho ka bang* - a Sotho proverb]. It is pertinent to note that while acknowledging the ambivalence in attitudes to the other, the overall tendency in traditional African societies is to welcome the other. As the North Kete of Congo sing,

*Mama Shangu’a Mbambi*

*Prepare food for the stranger*

*Having feet one must glide (travel or be on the move)*

*If you are going to a foreign country*

*Will you carry your house on your back?*

Proverbs, songs and pithy sayings encapsulate generations or ages of experience. This may be institutionalised, for example, in the hospitality ritual that obtains all over Africa. It may form part of the religious structure like the particular totem of the Manja chief in Central Africa - the rabbit that has large ears. And it becomes an imprescriptible law guiding the administration of society like the
very well known pattern of palaver or consultation and deliberation at various levels before arriving at decisions that involves the whole society. This pattern takes care of the difference of each and all while pushing forward the greater dream of achieving the aims of the wider society. That is why the small Christian communities worked so well in Burundi and Rwanda, and their patterns were copied by the state. But this same pattern has not really worked fully in inter-state and international relationships. Some believe the colonial enterprise may have halted the move to find adequate means of establishing humane relationship beyond one’s ethnic borders.

The founding fathers of independent Africa were not really thinking of independent tiny states like Rwanda and Burundi despite the total surprise of the colonial invasion. They were dreaming greater dreams of federation of States in the French Equatorial Africa. For example, Barthelemy Boganda’s Central Africa was supposed to include French Equatorial Africa but also Cameroon, Angola, Belgian Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. It was a big dream. People in Gabon opposed the idea not wishing to be financiers of such a union. However, the pan-African movement right from its inception in the New World, with DuBois as founder, and especially as from the Manchester conference of 1945 had the project not only of freedom from colonial domination but a strong emphasis on political and economic integration. Nkrumah was in the forefront of this struggle up to the founding of the OAU in 1963. But the achievements of pan-Africanism in the direction of regional integration leave a lot to be desired. However, there appears to be no viable way out than such integration which maintains the cultural differences while joining the great dream of a United Africa.

The Harvard expert on world strategy, who was director of security planning for the National Security Council in the Carter Administration, Samuel P. Huntington, wrote an explosive article in 1993 titled, “The Clash of Civilisations”. In 1996 Huntington developed the same article into a book, The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order. In the book Huntington
wanted to respond to the many critics of his article by restating his basic thesis that in this period after the Cold War, conflicts in the world will no longer arise from the criteria of ideology, non-alignment, East-West, North-South. Rather the future conflicts in the world will arise from the clash of civilisations. The civilisations are seven in number: Western, Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Latin American, and African. According to Huntington, these are the new emerging tribes. Military conflicts will arise when one acts against the interest of the West or the interests of another major civilisation in any part of the world. Africa being the weakest of all these civilisations will normally attract the least attention even if pogroms or genocide are being committed there. Huntington argued,

In this new world the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities. Tribal wars and ethnic conflicts will occur within civilisations. Violence between states and groups from different civilisations, however, carries with it the potential for escalation as other states and groups from these civilisations rally to the support of their ‘kin countries’. The bloody clash of clans in Somalia poses no threat of broader conflict. The bloody clash of tribes in Rwanda has consequences for Uganda, Zaire, and Burundi but not much further. The bloody clashes of civilisations in Bosnia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, or Kashmir could become bigger wars. In the Yugoslav conflicts, Russia provided diplomatic support to the Serbs, and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Libya provided funds and arms to the Bosnians, not for reasons of ideology or power politics or economic interest but because of cultural kinship.51

Huntington’s predictions are being dramatised both in Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, and the Balkans. Africans instead of retreating
into the ethnic cocoon must be part of the great dream and move towards regional and then continental integration.

Our discussion has clear evangelical bearing. Integration may be interpreted theologically in view of the very nature of the church's ministry in the world - the ministry of reconciliation. The church does not exist for itself; it is not a simple inward-looking group with the means of salvation for its members. The church is there to proclaim the Kingdom and to dramatise the coming of this Kingdom through its very life. That is why mission is at the very heart of the church. That is why we have shown above that a bourgeois Christianity betrays the mission of the Church to the world. And that is why today, part of the mission of the church is conflict resolution - an enterprise that may be advanced through teaching Africans the intricate connections between nationalities, ethnic groups, and the importance of transcending the vision of the «nation-prison» to embrace the wider African human, to embrace the wider humanity. For humans are humans only along and with other humans. This is the way the church fulfils its prophetic role. Those who have projected the image of this new vision of humanity by receiving the other, by dying to save the other, become examples to be taught and transmitted for the healing of memories.

Since the central African region is our focus, it may be right to conclude by emphasising the prophetic contribution of the visionaries who paid with their life to project a new humanity, the Christian ideal of fraternity beyond the ethnic group. These were those Rwandans/Burundians who put their lives on the line to save the other. This may be the place to emphasise the prophetic role played by movements within traditional religion in this region to break the narrow vision of ethnicism in order to focus on the wider dream of inter-relationship. This reference forms part of the stratum of a comprehensive history of the region for the healing of memory. The Ryangombe/Kiranga cult as we said above cut across ethnic groups. Even when the ruling Tutsi elite co-opted the myth of Ryangombe as a founding myth for the monarchy, the cult never lost its fire as a movement of social contestation and therefore of
renewal. The Nyabingi cult, a movement of prophet-priestesses remained vibrant in the post-independence era even when transformed into a Holy Spirit movement. In Uganda this anti-authoritarian movement became transformed into an army that fought against the present Ugandan government of Yoweri Museveni. I demonstrated in the Listening Church the impact of a prophetic movement in the old Kongo kingdom in the 17th and 18th century to unify the kingdom against Portuguese disruptive and enslaving policies. A woman of singular character and courage, Kimpa Vita (Dona Beatrice of the Kongo) carried this attempt forward. The movement of Kimpa Vita combined both politics and culture with a new kind of Christianity tailored to suit the Kongo realities of the time. Following the defeat of the Kongo army at the battle of Mbwila (1665) the kingdom was disorganised and the capital of the kingdom (San Salvador - Mbanza-kongo) was deserted and overgrown with weeds. The various clan-chiefs or kings who made up the federated kingdom were at war with one another. No clear leader emerged to unify the kingdom. Dona Beatrice (Kimpa Vita) emerged with the singular purpose of uniting politically the split kingdom with the spiritual support of a Catholicism cut to the measure of Congolese religious universe. She confronted the Portuguese Capuchin, Fr Bernardo da Gallo, and wanted to know why there were no African saints. An older woman, Fumaria, had been announcing visions of the apocalyptic destruction of the people if the king did not come down from the hills to resettle in and rehabilitate the capital San Salvador. People were calling Fumaria a saint. Dona Beatrice connected the recognition of African saints with the political unity of the kingdom. Her verbal outburst before Gallo, who was later to condemn her to be burnt at the stake, was significant,

You do not want to recognize Congo saints. That explains why you want to lay hold of the old woman [Fumaria] and chastise her. You do not want the restoration of the kingdom. You do not have sufficient courage to do it as she will do it.
She was able, through her negotiations; to bring the warring chiefs under one united kingdom; though the chief she favoured did not save her from the stake on the 1st of July 1706. But her movement was able to recreate the Christian symbols in terms of the Kongo experience. She is part of the regional personalities to be proposed to central African memory for healing and for the transformation and integration of the societies.

A similar thing may be said about Simon Kimbangu from the same Congo from whom the Kimbanguist church emerged. It is an example of both a protest against missionary church, and a proclamation of a Christianity that is not self-insulated but is at home in Africa. The independent churches share this approach, being a reaction against European conquest, domination in politics, economics, social and church life. However, it must be said that their later development around the structures of the existing missionary churches did not help sharpen their contribution to the reform of church and its structures.

When the Churches in Africa in obedience to Christ carry out the evangelising mission, the memory of Jesus’ death-resurrection is proclaimed and expanded in the memory of all those Christians who have given their life so that others may live. The kingdom is proclaimed in the lives of those who placed their life on the line in opposition to ethnic chauvinism and consequently for the regional integration of the central African countries respecting identity and difference. Here the stories of Dona Beatrice may merge with stories of those in the Holy Spirit movement. Christians in central Africa will also draw inspiration from the traditional cults that protested against ethnicism like Ryangombe/Kiranda. They constitute part of the foundations for a better appreciation of the grace effected in the Christ through whose death-resurrection the differences between Jews and Greeks, Jews and Ethiopians, Tutsi and Hutu, are no longer looked upon as cause for disintegration, but as the test for the unity of all in the Christ.
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1 Ebelo Goodluck, "In soldiers' shadows", Tempo vol. 12, n° 04, 4 February 1999, p. 20. Things have moved fast since March 1999 when this paper was written. The Kosovo crisis has assumed another dimension after the bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO; and violence in the Delta region of Nigeria reached its peak with the murder of police officers in November 1999 and the sending a detachment of army and mobile police to Odi where the massacre took place.


4 Message of the synod, n° 36..


8 Ibid., p. 812.

9 Ibid, pp. 820-827.


13 Baur, 454-455.


21 Cited by Willame, p. 118.


28 Lamb, «Political Theology», 774

29 Lamb, «Political Theology», 777-778.


33 Poincaré, p. 124.

34 Ibid, pp. 124-125.


36 Archille Mbembe, *Afrique indocile*. 
41 Eboussi-Boulaga, p. 103.
42 Ibid., p. 61; Bourgeois religion is described in detail by Metz in his *Faith in History and Society*.
43 Baur, op.cit., p. 461.
44 Taken from the paper of Balihe, SIST congress 1996.
47 See the analysis of this in philosophical terms by Matthew Chukwuelobe, *Ultimate Reality and Meaning 1999*
51 Ibid., p. 28.
On the Social Dimension of the Sacrament Of Reconciliation

By

Anthony A. Akinwale, O. P.

The sacramental celebration and reception of reconciliation is almost always exclusively conceived along the lines of personal piety. The aim of this modest essay is to propose the thesis that, far from being a demonstration of personal piety, the goal of the sacrament of reconciliation is to bring about the reconciliation of all with God, and of all with all, that is, the reconciliation of all with Christ as Head.

But a theological reflection on reconciliation involves many other theological issues each of which will require a treatise in itself. If we are to understand the nature of reconciliation a priori, a theological reflection on sin is necessary. Furthermore, to come to grips with the damage inflicted by sin, a theological reflection on the harmony of creation is a prerequisite. Finally, having reflected on these, an adequate theological reflection cannot fail to show us that the ordinary way to this reconciliation necessarily passes through the Church. Hence, our theological reflection must include a consideration of the nature of the Church as sacrament of reconciliation.

The second Vatican Council invites us to broaden our notion of reconciliation by the implicit ecclesiological reference it gives to reconciliation. The reconciling nature and mission of the Church find an articulation in the teaching of the council according to which “the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men. . . .” (Lumen Gentium, n.1). There is therefore need for consistency between theology of reconciliation and theology of the Church.

The prerequisites of a theology of reconciliation, which I have just enumerated, inform the structure of this essay. The essay will
be in two parts. In the first part, I shall undertake a reflection on
the transition from the original harmony of creation to the need for
reconciliation. Included in this reflection will be brief discussions
on the nature, cause, and effects of sin. In the second part of the
essay, I shall attempt a discussion on reconciliation within the
framework of a reflection on the nature and mission of the Church
in the light of the paschal event. Theology of reconciliation must
have an ecclesiological reference if we are to rediscover the social
dimension of the sacrament of reconciliation. Such a rediscovery
is needed to rise above a notion of reconciliation that reduces the
sacrament to a means of dressing the wounds inflicted on personal
piety.

From Original Harmony to the Necessity of Reconciliation

The book of Genesis contains two narratives of creation (Gen
1:1-2:4a; Gen 2:4b-25). But neither of the two accounts represents
an eyewitness report given by the correspondent of a print or
electronic media house. To see things otherwise will lead to
degeneration into Biblical positivism. The Biblical accounts being
referred to here represent a myth born out of an etiological inquiry
embarked upon by the Hebrew people. In the historical
consciousness of the Hebrew people, a historical consciousness
informed and formed by faith in and covenant with the one true
God, God created a beautiful world. The refrain of the Priestly
narrator in the first chapter of the book of Genesis sums up this
faith-filled conviction: God said, “Let there be. . . . And there was.
. . .And God saw that it was good.”

By the mere fact that God brought creatures into being he
conferred goodness on them. St. Thomas Aquinas would seem to
be echoing this Biblical teaching when he wrote that “Goodness
and being are really the same, and differ only in idea.” To be and
to be good are identical. The goodness of creation was in the order
and due proportion God put into it. Creation itself is the bringing
forth of order from the primeval chaos described at the beginning
of the book of Genesis. The Greek word kosmos signifies order.
As pointed out by John Scullion, “Creation is order; ‘before
creation’ is the opposite of order; it is tohu wa bohu, a formless waste or chaos.” The creative word of God conferred existence, beauty and harmony on the work of God. The beauty and harmony of creatures consist in their subjection to human beings and in the subjection of human beings to the Creator. Creation owes its origin to a perfect agent, God, and its goodness consists in its orientation to perfection in God, that is, in its return to God as its end. Just as the goodness of a thing is contingent on its tending to its end, the goodness in creatures is contingent on their tending to their end, which is God. Whatever is not ordered to God loses its internal harmony. Contrary to the position Origen advances, to the effect that creation proceeds from divine punishment, and contrary to the position of the Gnostics that creation is the result of an error, creatures proceed from God’s goodness and perfection, and find their own goodness in tending to God’s goodness.

Of all the creatures made by God, the Priestly narrator informs us that the human being alone, not only in its maleness but also in its femaleness, is created in the image and likeness of God. It is endowed with an intellect which is capable of knowing truth, and with a will which is capable of choosing good. Human beings, like all creatures, desire their own goodness. But in addition to what they have in common with other creatures, they tend to their goodness through operations that are rational and deliberate.

Human beings find their goodness but not in isolation. As Bernard Lonergan puts it, individuals not only have capacities for operating, their operating is co-operating. In theological terms, the good that is the object of human operations is to be found in God. The individual finds its goodness in tending to God. But this goodness is not attained apart from being-with-others, and being-loved-and-loving-others. For the God to whom the individual must tend to find his or her goodness is a God who is found in the experience of loving and being loved. Whereas, like the Priestly narrator, the Yahwist does not furnish us with a fact-by-fact description of how man and woman were created, the theological significance of his rather graphic “description” of creation of the woman brings to our attention the divine intention of interpersonal
harmony between the man and the woman. When the Yahwist paints the portrait of a God who saw that it was not good for *ha adam* to be alone (Gen 2:18), he was pointing out that the being and the operation of human beings find their authenticity and efficacy in co-operation within modes of collectivity: family, society, the state, community of worship. According to Scullion, God’s observation as reported in the Yahwist narrative, points out the fact that the human being is created to live in community and that the origin of all human community is to be traced to the community of man and woman. In this regard, the Judeo-Christian tradition has a precedent and an ally in the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, postulates that human beings cannot achieve their ultimate goal, which is happiness, if they do not enter into friendship. For Aristotle, happiness, is attained through virtue. Virtue, the mean between excess and deficiency, is not in us by nature. Moreover, for him, virtue is not infused. It is acquired in friendship.

In the Yahwist account, when God said, “It is not good for *ha adam* to be alone”, God was speaking of a natural yearning found in every man and woman, an innate quest for communion in every human being. Every animal has a natural habitat in which it was conceived, in which it is nurtured, and in which it conceives and nurtures. The same is true of the human being. Its natural habitat is love in a network of relationship. To be truly human is to have been conceived in love, nurtured in love, and to conceive and nurture in love, within a network of relationship constituted by modes of collectivity. Consequently, there can be no pursuit of real goodness in isolation. The man or woman who seeks his or her own good outside the natural habitat that love is embarks on a path of destruction, a destruction of the self and of others in self-victimisation and in the victimisation of other selves. Human relationship is the *locus caritatis*, the privileged place where human subjects encounter each other, love and are loved, and, in this experience of loving human intersubjectivity God is found. They are able to love each other because God has loved them first. And this divine impulse of love, when it is not resisted,
On the Social Dimension of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

communicates to them the desire to love, a desire, which brings them together. God's love confers the capacity to love God and to love one's neighbour. The writer of the first letter of John wrote down inspired words when he said: "God is love. He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (I Jn 4:16). The harmony between God and human beings necessarily finds expression in harmony among human beings. The one who really loves God will love the creatures of God. Where this obtains the goodness of creation is intact, where it does not there is sin, there is conflict and the need for reconciliation.

That sin is conflict reflects in the type of disposition that sin is. It is not a disposition in the sense of that which inclines a power to act, as is the case with science and virtue. Rather, it is a disposition in the sense of that which disposes a nature to the extent that the disposition becomes like a second nature, as is the case with sickness or health. Hence, sin is a disposition in conflict with human nature. The sin of origin "is an inordinate disposition, arising from the destruction of the harmony which was essential to original justice, even as bodily sickness is an inordinate disposition of the body, by reason of the destruction of that equilibrium which is essential to health. Hence it is that original sin is called languor of nature." This inordinate disposition affects every dimension of human existence because, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, it "infests the different parts of the soul, in so far as they are the parts of one whole, even as original justice held all the soul's parts together in one" (Summa theol., I-II, 82.2, ad. 3).

Sin brought about corruption of the good of nature by diminishing its beauty and power. The beauty conferred on human creatureliness is lost when the human being turns away from the beauty of divine light. For it is when the radiance of divine light touches the human being that his or her beauty becomes manifest. The human intellect is weakened by ignorance and prejudice which occasion conflicts. The will, in its inordinateness mistakes the apparent good for the real good. Its inclination to virtue—a prerequisite for common good—is diminished. (Summa theol., I-II, 85.1). But when the love and pursuit of common good is no longer
a concern the love and pursuit of competing and conflicting interests become the order of the day. Then the power to love is replaced by the love of power.

**All Conflicts Traceable to the Fall - A Fourfold Alienation:**

The book of Genesis traces all conflicts to the Fall. Before the Fall, there was a four-fold harmony in creation, that is, between the human being and God, between the man and the woman, between the human being and the universe, and within the human being. This four-fold harmony was disrupted at the Fall. Here we must read the book of Genesis on its own terms, that is, in terms of its symbolic character. What precipitated the Fall was a conversation. Human beings ceased to converse with God and entered into a fatal conversation with the tempter. A conversation was opened. A promise was made. And the promise was kept. The first couple ate of the fruit of that tree. We don’t know what the fruit was. Was it greed, pride, worship of the self? Whatever it was, it made them feel good at first, then they later felt bad. For to feel good is not the same as to do good. They acquired the knowledge of good and evil as the tempter promised them.

But what was special about this knowledge? Just what is the knowledge of good ad evil? And why would God want to keep them the first man and woman ignorant? Why would God not want them to increase their knowledge?

Charles Williams, in his book, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, offers an interesting explanation of this knowledge of good and evil.

It is not merely to know more, but to know in another method. It is primarily the advance (if it can be so called) from knowing good to knowing good and evil; it is (secondarily) the knowing ‘as gods’. A certain knowledge was, by its nature, confined to divine beings. Its communication to man would be, by its nature, disastrous to man. The Adam had been created and was existing in a state of knowledge of good and nothing but good. They knew that there was some kind of alternative, and they knew that the rejection of the alternative was part of their
relation to the Omnipotence that created them. The relation was part of the good they enjoyed.  

Continuing along the same lines as Williams, one can say that the knowledge being referred to here is not merely and intellectual operation. It is an experience. All along they had been experiencing good. Now human beings would experience its alternative. The knowledge of good and evil is the experience of a conflict; the conflict between good and evil. It is this conflict that is at the origin of all conflicts: conflict within the human person, conflict among human beings, conflict between the human person and the cosmos, conflicts of gender, conflict between the races in our world, conflicts of philosophies, of religion, of culture, and conflicts of interests.

The four-fold harmony that was in creation now gives way to a four-fold alienation. And each dimension of the alienation is, at the same time, cause and symptom of other dimensions. First, when human beings are not at peace with God, they become afraid of God. We find an illustration in the myth of the fall. When the communion between God and human beings was broken by the disruption of cosmic order that human disobedience is, the man and the woman hid from God upon hearing his sound (Gen 3:8-10). But breaking of communion with God is not merely a private affair. It has dire consequences for interpersonal relationship. Which leads us to the second manifestation of the alienation. It is the alienation within the human family.

The temple of humanity is torn asunder when human beings disobey God. For it is difficult to recognise and respect human rights when what is due to God is not given to God. One who gives God his due loves God, and, for the sake of God whom he or she loves, loves his or her neighbour. When human beings are in conflict with God they are in conflict with one another. The insight of Augustine’s City of God comes to mind here. When a society is fragmented and in turmoil one must inquire as to which God or gods such a society worships. The first man, who, at the first sight of the first woman exclaimed in joyous ecstasy: “This
one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” (Gen 2:23) will no longer be at peace with the woman. Instead, he will lord it over her. (Gen 3:16). This takes us to the origin of gender conflicts that have made victims of millions of women and men. Here I must point out the utter illegitimacy of using this inspired verse to justify male domination and all forms of injustice to women.

The verse does not prescribe what the relationship between man and woman should be. Rather, it tells us what it ought not to be precisely by pointing to the fact that the communion between man and woman having been broken by the sin of the man and the woman, the consequence is male domination and all embarrassing forms of gender conflicts. In other words, the verse is pointing out that male domination is not something promoted by the book of Genesis. Rather, it is a sin that is symptomatic of the wound inflicted on nature by the sin of origin. To have overcome this sin of seeing and using the woman as inferior to man is to have had one’s gender bias healed by the grace of Christ in whom there is no male or female (Gal 3:28).

As a further indication that all is not well between the man and the woman, while, before the fall, both of them were naked but felt no shame before each other, after the fall they felt the need to clothe themselves. They felt no shame because, before sin, there was mutual trust between the man and the woman. Neither was afraid that the other would exploit his or her vulnerability. Since, as has been said already, the community of the man and the woman is the origin of all human community, conflict within the community of the man and the woman will turn out to be the origin of conflict within the human family itself.  

Thirdly, having been deprived of peace with God and with one another, human beings can no longer live in harmony with the cosmos. Again, the words of the book of Genesis provide an illustration:

Accursed be the soil because of you!
Painfully will you get your food from it
As long as you live.
It will yield you brambles and thistles,
As you eat the produce of the land (Gen 3:17-18).

Fourthly, alienated from God, from the community, and from the cosmos, the human being cannot be at peace within himself or herself. This loss of inner peace is, at the same time, cause and symptom of the loss of peace with God, with the community and with the cosmos. The man and the woman were afraid of God. But no one who fears God can experience interior peace. Aquinas’ reflection on the cause of sin is more explicit in the emphasis it lays on this inner disequilibrium. For him, sin is an inordinate act which, accordingly, “has a cause, in the same way as a negation or privation can have a cause” (Summa theol., I-II, 75.1). In the inordinateness of sin, that which naturally is and ought to be in human nature is lacking. The will rebels against the direction of the rule of reason and of the divine law and, in this absence of direction and right order, it turns towards a mutable good. It mistakes what feels good for what is valuable. The fact that this self-alienation is, at the same time, cause and result of other alienation is lucidly expressed in the teaching of the second Vatican Council:

The dichotomy affecting the modern world is, in fact, a symptom of the deeper dichotomy that is in man himself. He is the meeting point of many conflicting forces. In his condition as a created being he is subject to a thousand shortcomings, but feels untrammelled in his inclinations and destined for a higher form of life. Torn by a welter of anxieties he is compelled to choose between them and repudiate some among them. Worse still, feeble and sinful as he is, he often does the very thing he hates and does not do what he wants. And so he feels himself divided, and the result is a host of discords in social life (Gaudium et Spes, 10).
The four-fold alienation I have been trying to describe comes from the knowledge of good and evil. Again, to quote Charles Williams, the knowledge of good and evil is knowledge of the pain of schisms, the experience of "what the good would be like if a contradiction were introduced into it. Man desired to know schisms in the universe. It was a knowledge reserved to God; man had been warned that he could not bear it". But the tempter came to suggest that there was nothing evil in acquiring it. He came to tell the first man and woman that there was no evil in experiencing conflicts in the universe. Human beings have always had to battle with the temptation to conceive the best way to live as the desire, the acquisition, and the utilisation of what is good in a way that is evil, that is to say, apart from the Creator of all that is good. Succumbing to this temptation not only affects the relationship of the human subject with God, it affects interpersonal relationship inasmuch as it manifests itself in a disregard for the image of God in other human beings which is a sign of disrespect towards God himself.

The devil was able to convince the first man that living in the world can be more beautiful without God. Hence, after God created a beautiful world, human beings, persuaded by the tempter, distorted its beauty and, by so doing, set in motion a chain of evil reactions. One man struck the cord of hostility towards God, and it continues to echo throughout the whole universe. Hostility to God is hostility to life. And the consequence of hostility to life is death. The many iniquities of the history of our world, our own iniquities and the iniquities of others; the many forms of alienation and hostility that the human race has witnessed and continues to witness; the times we have been victims and the times we have been perpetrators of evil deeds: all can be traced to an act of disobedience. Ever since human beings succumbed to the tempter's attractive but deadly proposition to construct a universe without God, ever since the decision to put God on the sidelines, the original cosmic equilibrium has been disturbed.

The existence of a four-fold alienation which I have been describing is an indication that a privatised notion of sin does not
come to grips with the effects of sin in our lives. It is a wrong diagnosis which can only lead to a bad therapy. One must go beyond this privatised notion in order to move beyond the privatised notion of reconciliation that it begets.

Theology of Reconciliation in the Framework of Ecclesiology

The four-fold alienation that disobedience to the will of God engenders necessitates a four-fold reconciliation: reconciliation with God, reconciliation with others, reconciliation with the cosmos, and reconciliation with the self. It is my contention that the ordinary way to true reconciliation, which is a four-dimensional reconciliation, necessarily passes through the Church. My aim in this part of the essay is to present this four-dimensional reconciliation as that which is attainable in the Church. For, as I have said, theology of reconciliation must have ecclesiology as reference point.

The Paschal Mystery: Three Moments in One Event of Reconciliation

A succinct statement of the theology of reconciliation can be found in the words of the prayer of absolution in the current Catholic Rite of Penance. According to the words of this prayer:

God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself, and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the remission of sins. Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace. And I absolve you from your sins; In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The link between three themes of capital importance in Christian theology is visibly expressed in the words of this prayer. Reconciliation is presented in its indissoluble relationship with the death and resurrection of Christ, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and with the ministry of the Church. God chose to accomplish the work of reconciliation through the instrumentality of the death and
resurrection of his Son. Remission of sins was effected through the mission of the Holy Spirit. And the work of reconciliation is brought into the here and now of our existence through the ministry of the Church. A careful celebration of the Church’s Easter liturgy serves as an invaluable pointer to the fact that the death and resurrection of Christ, and the mission of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost are not three events as such but one Easter event which took place in three moments. In this respect, it is not out of place to recall that in the Johannine account of the Easter event, the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and the emission of the Holy Spirit on the disciples all took place on the same day. The following provide indices to buttress our position.

First, the repeated reference to the “hour” of Jesus by the author of the fourth Gospel directs his audience to the fact that the hour of Jesus’ passion is also the hour of his exaltation. As Jesus became conscious of the imminence of the hour of his death, he recognised the same hour as the hour of his glorification. "Now the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified" (Jn 12:23). Yet, the approach of this hour troubled him (Jn 12:27).

Secondly, when Jesus appeared to Mary of Magdala as she stood weeping by the empty tomb, Jesus told her: “Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find my brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father. . . .” (Jn 20:17).

Thirdly, the same Jesus would later appear to the disciples, “in the evening of that same day”, according to Johannine paschal chronology, to offer them peace, and to emit the Spirit on them in view of their mission to forgive sins (Jn 20:19-23).

With these Johannine indices, there are grounds to affirm that the summary statement of theology of reconciliation in the prayer of absolution finds its inspiration in the Johannine chronology of Easter. Reconciliation is the gift of God the Father of mercies to his Church through his Son, the risen Christ’s emission of the Holy Spirit on the disciples who not only receive this gift, but are to continue to dispense it to the world.
The Culmination of the Paschal Mystery at Pentecost as the Defining Moment of the Church.

The culmination of the paschal mystery in the mission of the Holy Spirit was the Church’s defining moment. The nature and mission of the Church were defined when, at Easter, the Church was instituted by Christ as a prolongation in history of his own ministry of reconciliation: “As the Father sent me, so am I sending you” (Jn 20:21). And, to empower the Church to carry out this ministry of reconciliation, he breathed the Spirit into the disciples: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone’s sins, they are retained” (Jn 20:22-23). Earlier, than these, the author of the fourth Gospel had alluded to the reconciling potentials of the paschal mystery when he reported Jesus’ response to the request of some Greeks to see him: “when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:32).

The linkage between the paschal event, the Church, and reconciliation is not restricted to Johannine theology. It has a precedent in the Lucan theology of the Acts of the Apostles. In spite of the divergence of paschal chronology between Luke and John, the Pentecost narrative in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles suggests the linkage, and, by so doing, provides a point of convergence with Johannine theologies of Church and reconciliation. To highlight this linkage, three recurrent features of patristic exegesis of the Lucan Pentecost narrative should retain our attention here: the contemporaneousness of Pentecost and the birth of the Church, the interpretation of the phenomenon of speaking in tongues as negation of the linguistic diastasis of Babel, and the parallel between the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the gift of the Torah at Sinai.

Concerning the first, Irenaeus of Lyons testifies that the Spirit David asked for in the psalms was the same Spirit that was given by Christ to the Church on the day of Pentecost.

It is this Spirit that David asked for the human race, saying, “And establish me with your governing Spirit.” It is also this
same Spirit that Luke reported as having descended on the day of Pentecost upon the disciples after the Lord’s ascension, having power to admit all nations to the entrance of life, and to the opening of the new covenant; from whence also, with one accord in all languages, they uttered praise to God, the Spirit bringing distant tribes to unity, and offering to the Father the first-fruits of all nations. Wherefore also the Lord promised to send the Comforter, who should join us to God. For as a compacted lump of dough cannot be formed of dry wheat without fluid matter, nor can a loaf possess unity, so, in like manner, neither could we, being many, be made one in Christ Jesus without the water from heaven. . . . For our bodies have received unity among themselves by means of that laver which leads to incorruption; but our souls, by means of the Spirit. This Spirit, again, he [Jesus] did confer upon the Church, sending throughout all the world the Comforter from heaven. 

In the light of this and other patristic interpretations of the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, one can understand the assertion of Jean-Marie Tillard that the mission of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecost event progressively shaped the Christian consciousness of the origin, manifestation and nature of the Church. The Church is seen as the “immediate result of the gift of the Holy Spirit”.

Concerning the second, that is, the reversal of Babel at Pentecost, Jerome, in his Letter 120 addressed to Hedibia, while attempting to reconcile the chronologies of John and Luke vis-a-vis the sending of the Holy Spirit, points out that the power of the Holy Spirit facilitated the preaching of the Gospel to the nations because it provided therapy for the tongues which were to preach Christ.

When the Gospel begins the Church is filled with the Spirit so that, by his grace and favour, all believers would be washed of their sins, and that, by the fire of the Holy Spirit which the Lord have said he would send, the tongue which was to preach Christ would be healed.
For the writer(s) of the book of Genesis, prior to Babel, the mythical unilingual character of humanity symbolised its unity.\textsuperscript{13} However, while Babel is a symbolic representation of the destruction of this pristine unity of humanity, Pentecost is a symbolic representation of the reconciliation of linguistic diversity in the common comprehension of the Apostolic preaching. In other words, divided humanity rediscovers its unity in Christ’s Gospel of reconciliation preached by the apostles on the day of Pentecost. And, since the birth of the Church is traced to Pentecost, Pentecost itself becomes the event of reconciliation par excellence giving birth to the Church as the assembly of the reconciled.\textsuperscript{14} Through the culmination of the paschal victory of Christ at Pentecost, God was healing humanity of its wounds of racial divisions and linguistic confusion. The birth of the Church is the coming into existence of the basic cell of a renewed humanity, a humanity renewed by reconciliation.

Concerning the parallel between the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost and the gift of the Torah on Mount Sinai, just as the book of Deuteronomy paints the picture of an assembly (qahal) of the People of God on the day of the promulgation of the Torah (Deut 9:10; 10:4; 18:16), the Acts of the Apostles also paints the picture of an assembly: “they were all united together” (Acts 2:1). This Sinai-Pentecost parallel will be the object of a deeper reflection by Augustine:

The fiftieth day is also recommended in the Scriptures, not only in the Gospel which announces the coming of the Holy Spirit, but also in the old sacred books. There, in fact, after the Passover celebrated by immolation of the lamb, fifty days are counted up to the day when, on mount Sinai, Moses, servant of God, received the law written with the finger of God: but the Gospel teaches us that the finger of God signifies the Holy Spirit. One evangelist had it said by the Saviour: “I expel demons by the finger of God”, and another expresses thus the same thought: “I expel demons by the Spirit of God.” . . . . The lamb is immolated, the Passover is celebrated, and fifty days
later, the law is given on account of fear, written with the finger of God. Christ is put to death, like a sheep led to the slaughter, according to the words of Isaiah: the true Passover is celebrated, and, fifty days later, the Holy Spirit is given on account of love, the Spirit which is the finger of God, and contrary to men seeking their interests, weighed down because of that by a difficult yoke and a heavy weight, and not finding rest for their souls, for charity does not seek its own interests. . . . Read Exodus, and see how many days after the celebration of Passover the law was given. God spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai on the first day of the third month. Mark therefore one day since the beginning of this third month, and see what the Lord said among other things: “Descend, speak to the people, purify and sanctify them today and tomorrow; let them wash their clothing and be ready for the third day, for in three days the Lord will descend on mount Sinai before all the people.” Thus, the law was given on the third day of the third month. Now, count from the fourteenth day of the first month, when the Passover was celebrated, until the third day of the third month, and you will find seventeen days from the first, thirty from the second, three from the third, which amounts to fifty days.¹⁵

Just as Sinai was marked by the theophany of the old covenant, Pentecost was the theophany of the new covenant. Each of the two theophanies was witnessed by an assembly: the qahal at Sinai, and the ekklesia at Pentecost. In both cases, God gathered a people to witness the conclusion of a covenant whereby humanity, hitherto divided, is renewed and reconstituted.¹⁶ As Tillard points out on the basis of the words of Deut 5:21, the law whose promulgation was celebrated at Sinai represents a radical criticism of a world founded on injustice, rivalry and greed, three contributing factors to division in our world. The prescriptions of the Code of the Covenant touch on the social, economic, cultural and political contexts of a world separated from God. Customary modes of inter-human relationships are being called to question. The challenge that the Torah poses is the challenge of reconciliation of a divided humanity through an option for the common good of the
The birth of the ekklesia at Pentecost marked the fulfilment of what took place at Sinai, the conclusion of a new Covenant designed to create a new world. Little wonder that in her liturgical celebration of Pentecost, the Church makes her own the words of the Psalmist: “Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth.” The Spirit received at Pentecost is God’s offer to humanity of a much and long desired reconciliation. One can say with Tillard that:

> The Spirit of the Lord has the power to deliver [the world] from the network of injustice, of rivalry, of greed which mortally wounds humanity because he knows how to break down the walls of the prison in which individuals and groups have locked themselves so as introduce them into communion. And humanity becomes its true self only in communion. This is what saves it. Thus, the Church is, by the fact of her birth, actively involved in the problems of the world.¹⁷

The Church, we can deduce, was constituted and empowered at the culmination of the new Passover by the Spirit of Pentecost to be the sacrament of the reconciliation of a new humanity. The author of the letter to the Ephesians, in a passage marked with a remarkably strong emphasis on reconciliation of Gentiles and Jews through the blood of Christ, was keenly aware of the connection between the birth of the Church in the paschal mystery and God’s universal offer of reconciliation. Hence, he went to a great length to remind the recipients of his letter:

> Do not forget, then, that there was a time when you who were gentiles by physical descent, termed the uncircumcised by those who speak of themselves as the circumcised by reason of a physical operation, do not forget, I say, that you were at that time separate from Christ and excluded from membership of Israel, aliens with no part in the covenants of the Promise,
limited to this world, without hope and without God. But now in Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far off have been brought close, by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one entity and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, by destroying in his own person the hostility, that is, the Law of commandments and its decrees. His purpose in this was, by restoring peace, to create a single New Man out of the two of them, and through the cross, to reconcile them both to God in one Body; in his own person he killed the hostility. He came to bring the good news of peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. Through him, then, we both in the one Spirit have free access to the Father.

So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are fellow-citizens with the holy people of God and part of God's household. You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone. Every structure knit together in him grows into a holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:11-22).

This graphic expression of the birth, identity and mission of the Church leaves no one in doubt as to the vital role of the paschal mystery in the reconciliation of all with God and of all with all. The hostility that pervaded humanity has been killed in the person of the crucified Christ. From the time this hatred and hostility killed Christ on the cross it became a spent force. The Church is born at the time of reconciliation. Her identity and mission can only be defined in terms of God's irrevocable offer of reconciliation in the paschal event. Into this Church all are invited, and in the one Spirit they have the status of fellow-citizens.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation: A Re-incorporation Into Christ Through the Assembly of the Reconciled

If a large segment of this essay has been devoted to making statements on ecclesiology, it is because of the earlier expressed
contention that we cannot understand the nature of the sacrament of reconciliation without an adequate understanding of the nature of the Church. The Church, we have seen, is a communion of the reconciled brought into existence by the paschal event. The reconciliation in question is not merely a private affair with God. It is a reconciliation with an ecclesial-communal dimension. If sin disturbs social equilibrium then true reconciliation must deal with this disequilibrium. Hence the social implications of reconciliation.

The Church as communion of the reconciled is a place where the wounds that sin, hatred and division have inflicted on humanity are healed. Augustine's allegorical exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan is to be recalled here. According to Augustine, the man who fell into the hands of robbers signifies Adam, representative of humanity. He fell from the heavenly city, signified by Jerusalem. He was on his way to Jericho, signifying his descent into mortality. The robbers, into whose hands he fell, were the devil and his angels. The near death situation in which they left him signified the wounds inflicted on the human condition by sin. The priest and the levite who did not stop to assist him but went by signified the shortcomings of the official representatives of the old covenant. The Good Samaritan signified Christ. The inn into which he took the wounded man signifies the Church.

Christ has brought us into the inn that the Church is through the sacrament of baptism. Baptism washes away the sin of origin and incorporates the Christian into Christ and his body, the Church. Again, as Augustine would say in another version of the allegorical exegesis of the same parable of the Good Samaritan, through baptism, iniquity was blotted out but infirmity was not brought to an end. We are still weak and sinful.

I have already argued that sin not only affects the human being's relationship with God, it also affects relationship with others, with the cosmos, and with oneself. To be more specific, the communal dimension of sin which shows itself in the strained or broken relationship with others includes a strained or broken relationship with the ecclesia. Sin affects our relationship with Christ and with the Church. In fact, one cannot speak of the communal dimension
of sin without speaking of its ecclesial dimension. Sin inflicts wounds on the body of Christ. The Church that is instituted for the reconciliation of the world experiences sin and division among its members. The sacrament of reconciliation re-incorporates the penitent into Christ, the one Mediator, through the ministry of the Church, the assembly of the reconciled. This re-incorporation into Christ is not a private affair. For in Christ, there is reconciliation not just with God but also with others. If our sins wound others they wound Christ. In the same way, if we make peace with others we make peace with Christ. There can be no person without community, and what affects the persons affects the community, what the person does affects the community.

The reconciliation effected in the ecclesial community is a reconciliation that responds to the imperatives of a four-fold reconciliation. I shall buttress this argument with three points which shall be emphasised in italics.

First, reconciliation with the Church represented by the priest fulfils the social or communal dimension of reconciliation insofar as reconciliation with the Church is our re-insertion into a humanity renewed in communion, a reconciled humanity willed by God. The restoration of our relationship with the ecclesial koinonia is our re-entry into the assembly beautifully described by the author of the letter to the Ephesians, one in which the cord of hatred and hostility is broken, and walls of division crumble. In the first part of this essay, I had used the imagery of the natural habitat. Love, the natural habitat of human beings is destroyed by sin. To this imagery I shall now add the allegorised reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan by St. Augustine. In the Church, the inn in which the wound of human nature is healed, our hitherto destroyed natural habitat is rehabilitated and transformed into a supernatural habitat where reconciliation in and with community re-establishes a new humanity. How this reconciliation with the Church fulfils the demands of the social dimension of reconciliation is a point that is so important to grasp that it should be further clarified.
As communion, the Church is God’s offer of reconciliation of all things in Christ prolonged in history. The Church is not just God’s offer to Christians. She is God’s offer to the whole world. If she is to live according to her identity and mission as God’s irrevocable offer of reconciliation-in-Christ prolonged in history, it is required of her to open up to embrace our separated brethren as well as adherents of other religions. The Church becomes a truly reconciling Church when she undertakes ecumenical dialogue as well as dialogue with other religions. In other words, the Church lives up to the Spirit of Vatican II when she enters into dialogue and collaboration with all men and women of goodwill. In this respect, one who is reconciled with the Church in Christ through the sacrament of reconciliation is transformed by the grace of this sacrament into a peacemaker in a world torn apart by innumerable latent and open conflicts.

Secondly, this reconciliation with the Church is a reconciliation in Christ, since the Church, as has been said repeatedly, is the communion in Christ of all those reconciled with God and with one another in Christ. According to the fundamental intuition of Paul which inspired Tillard, reconciliation with the Church and reconciliation with Christ are inseparable insofar as there is a mysterious identification between the eucharistic body of Christ and his ecclesial body, the Church. This aspect of Pauline theology is a reflection of the common faith of the early apostolic communities. One is saved by being in Christ and in his Spirit, and one is in Christ by being member of his body in solidarity with other members of the same body. Reconciliation is the restoration of this solidarity, and the Christian existence, which ecclesial life is, is the absolute negation of all forms of self-sufficiency. Living in Christ is inseparable from relationship with others. The reconciliation in Christ that salvation is, is reconciliation of all with God and of all with all. For as the Christological canticle of the letter to the Ephesians teaches: “God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and on earth, by making peace through his death on the cross” (Col 1:19-20). God made peace with the
world in his Son’s death on the cross, and the peace dividend is brought into the here and now of our existence through the sacraments, in this specific instance, through the sacrament of reconciliation.

Thirdly, since alienation from God and from others was at the root of the four-fold alienation described in the first part of this essay, it follows that to have dealt with alienation from God is to have dealt with alienation at its roots. Consequently, to have really dealt with alienation from God necessarily demands and manifests the resolution of conflicts with one’s fellow human beings. It is to have dealt with alienation with the self and alienation with the cosmos. For one who is at peace with God will live in harmony with the rest of creation and with himself or herself.

The Obedience That Made the Difference

Since this four-dimensional reconciliation has been brought about by the death of Christ on the cross, since our peace dividend flows from the death of Christ, it is important, before this essay is brought to a conclusion, to recognise what was it in the death of Christ on the cross that brought about this reconciliation.

When the death of Christ is considered from the purely human point of view, it is almost inevitable, perhaps impossible to avoid drawing the conclusion that it was a tragedy. But the paradox of the Christian faith is that this event is proclaimed as offering the possibility of reconciliation to the whole universe. But this paradox of the Christian faith is predicated on the fact that the God Christianity proclaims is not a God who is handicapped by evil in the course of realisation of his plan of salvation for our universe. This God became human like us in all things but sin. According to Irenaeus’ doctrine of recapitulation, he recapitulated in his life all the stages of Adam’s life and, by so doing, identified himself with every stage of human existence from birth to death. But unlike Adam, in this recapitulation, he did everything right because he did not sin. He summed up all things but broke the cycle of disobedience initiated by the first disobedience; his death put an end to the rebellion to God that manifests itself in social conflicts
and cruelty. Following St. Paul, Irenaeus sees a mystical identification between Adam and Christ. Like Adam, who contained all his descendants in himself, Christ sums up in himself all the divided peoples of the universe from the time of Adam until now.22

It was Christ’s obedience unto death that made the difference. God inspired him to accept the death of an innocent on the cross thus making it possible for the cycle of disobedience to be broken. This cycle of disobedience to God’s will was the obstacle standing in the way of reconciliation of all with God and of all with all. His love for the Father and for us made him to accept an unjust death. He knew it was an unjust death. But his Father willed that he accept this unjust death and he freely consented. The union of his human will with the divine will during the course of his life, and in particular, at this decisive point that his passion and death was changed the course of history for good. This obedience in the union of his human will to the divine will was the absolute negation of the Adamic rebellion which triggered the four-fold alienation I have talked about. Adam made a difference by pretending to be God. Christ made a difference by becoming obedient to God to the point of death. While the first man struck the cord of hostility, Christ, by his obedience unto death, has neutralised its effect by striking the cord of forgiveness. Hence, while sin is knowing good as evil, desiring good as evil, acquiring good as evil, and using good as evil, forgiveness is knowing evil as occasion for good. That forgiveness is knowing evil as occasion for good is what Christ proclaimed on the cross when he prayed: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Plunged into the darkness of conflicts, Christ obediently and lovingly entered into the darkness of death using this power to bring us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his wonderful light. It was an obedience and love that turned an occasion of evil into an occasion for good. Hence we speak of Good Friday and not Bad Friday.

By virtue of the theory of recapitulation according to which Christ saved us by summing up in himself all men and women of
every age, place and race, the efficacy of the redemptive work accomplished in the paschal event is not restricted by any boundary of race, nation, gender, religion, language or culture. The work of recapitulation is the work of God in and through his Christ. Being the work of God in person, it is the work of one who is omnipotent, and who, in his omnipotence, is not restricted by any boundary. In God’s providence, care of the universal and care of the particular are neither in tension nor in opposition. The sacrament of reconciliation is the actualisation in space and time of the reconciling effects of the death on the cross. In other words, what took place 2,000 years ago can be felt through the grace of the sacrament of reconciliation in which Christ’s forgiving love is not merely present in symbol but really present. While this sacrament, and indeed all other sacraments, remain the ordinary way of actualising the effects of Christ’s redemptive achievement, all that has been said so far in no way denies that God can chose extraordinary means of actualising his reconciling love.

On a final note, it has to be stressed that reconciliation does not mean business can continue as usual. A truly contrite heart avoids occasions of sin and is ready to make amends. In fact, the community has the right to expect certain things of the person. That is why ministers of the sacrament of reconciliation must take into account the communal-social-ecclesial dimension of sin and reconciliation. In concrete terms, in that sacred moment in the celebration and reception of the sacrament when penance is given and accepted by the penitent, the rights of the community must be well considered, not just the individual’s gesture of willingness to rectify his or her relationship with God.

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1 Cf. Gen 1:10, 13, 19, 22, 25, 31. The climactic rendition of this refrain in v. 31 is instructive: “God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good.”
2 See Thomas Aquinas I, 5.1.
On the Social Dimension of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

5 Cf. Summa theol., I-II, 82.1; Augustine, In Ps. Cxviii, serm. iii.
6 Charles Williams, The Forgiveness of Sins, 122.
7 Pope John Paul II consistently teaches that the health of the society is dependent on the health of the institution of marriage. We cannot build a humane society if the marital community itself is turned into a locus of dehumanising and depersonalising experience.
8 Charles Williams, The Forgiveness of Sins, 123.
9 My guide in highlighting this linkage is Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard’s work, Église d’Église. L’écclésiologie de communion (Paris:Cerf, 1987). The English translation of the work in this essay is mine.
13 This does not contradict what has been said earlier in this essay to the effect that the disobedience of Adam and Eve was the origin of all conflicts. Instead, Babel should be seen as the symbolic expression of the break of communion with God which occurred in the first disobedience in the garden of Eden.
19 Cf. St. Augustine, Serm lxxxii, 6.
20 The problems and prospects of ecumenical initiatives in Nigeria in particular will take this essay beyond its focus. However, it is the subject of another essay I am working on.
23 An explanation of the conceptual possibility of such extraordinary means of reconciliation demands a theological reflection on Christ and other religions. Like the issue of ecumenical initiative, this will take us beyond the scope of this modest essay.

*Airlift to Biafra* is an important addition to the growing list of books on the Nigerian Civil War written by the chief players in the humanitarian sector themselves. As a Danish photographer put it in 1968, if any one man could be said to be the originator of the Airlift to Biafra, that man would be Tony Byrne. As often happens when any literary work is on the drawing board, one has to make the decision either to please the masses or the experts. *Airlift to Biafra* is an option for the former. It is written in the form of a novel without footnotes and references to archival materials. This omission may be disappointing to researchers who may have historiographical needs for these essential scholarly tools. Yet, the book in its entirety is an invaluable primary source for having come from a major player in the events it describes.

The story is cast on a brilliant plot with plenty of humour. The narrative has the hallmarks of mission romanticism, which, over the centuries, has assiduously popularised a successful, literary form the *lettres edifiantes et curieuses*. The first chapter, “Too Hot for Pyjamas,” in particular, is faithful to this tradition. In it one finds both elements, depending on what is uppermost in one’s search for information, the absolutely edifying or the banally curious. It is a chapter that describes the years the author spent in Eastern Nigeria as a missionary, during which he came to a sincere appreciation of Igbo people and culture, “learning and sharing experiences in friendship and mutual respect” (p.22). This important training and transformation helped him to stand firmly by the people during the tragic and momentous years of the civil war. It helped him to combine his resolve to save lives with his often-scornful attitude towards the peoples’ political aspirations. He is thus able to describe the legendary relief pilot, Count von Rosen, who was breaking the rules for exactly the
same reason as he did, as "a victim of Biafran war propaganda" (p.127). The next eight chapters describe the eighteen months airlift from its inception to the fall of Biafra and the expulsion of the foreign missionaries. The epilogue is a brief discussion of the aftermath of the humanitarian intervention, issues like the expulsion of the missionaries, the Africanization of the Nigerian church, and the impact of Biafra on modern relief organisations.

The attitude of the local church in Nigeria towards some tragic events in the civil war does not emerge from the book. More study needs to be done to determine, for instance, whether the church on the Nigerian side did enough to stop the genocide by starvation going on in the secessionist enclave, or why there was no official church statement or condemnation regarding the expulsion of more than two-thirds of the entire foreign missionary personnel in Nigeria after the war. As the author rightly points out, only one powerful church voice was raised against the appalling condemnation, imprisonment and expulsion of the Catholic missionaries—that of an Anglican church leader, Bishop Cockin (p.172f).

What is borne out very clearly in the book is the ambivalence that characterised the entire humanitarian intervention in the Nigerian civil war. This is an issue which is certainly going to dominate historical debate for many decades to come. On the one hand, it was the Vatican, which led a coalition of all church relief organisations in the world in a coercive breach from the air of the sovereignty of an independent nation. On the other, it was Vatican diplomacy that stood firmly against any attempt to turn the humanitarian programme into a political movement. It regarded, for instance, the use of parachutes to drop relief aid as "quasi-military equipment" (p. 16) and therefore forbade their deployment in the relief operation. This ambivalence seems to haunt the author all along his narrative. He calls the notorious gunrunner in the service of both the Biafran government and the church relief organisations the seemingly harmless name Dutting, instead of Wharton, the name by which everyone knows him. This may be the author's way of sounding non-political, but it does not answer the tricky question of where
humanitarian intervention ends and political involvement begins. At the end of the war, Msg. Bayer, the Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, was fired by the Vatican Secretary of State for actions embarrassing to the Holy See. In the book, the author lets Bayer describe his fate in words that bear out the church's dilemma: "If we do anything, we're blamed and if we do nothing, I think we deserve to be blamed. Personally, I always preferred to be blamed for at least trying to do the right thing" (p.166).

In the main, *Airlift to Biafra* is a one-sided account of a very complex event: the author writes almost exclusively from personal experience and involvement. The operation to fly in relief materials into the Biafran enclave from the island of Sao Tome was carried out by Joint Church Aid, a confederation of some 35 church and non-church relief organisations. Some of these individual organisations like Nordchurchaid, German Caritas, the American Catholic Relief Service, to mention just a view, made immense contributions in men and materials to the airlift project. These contributions have received only perfunctory treatment in the book that is if they are treated at all. Nonetheless, *Airlift to Biafra* is a most valuable contribution to the history of a phenomenal event. Anyone wanting to know the place of Biafra in modern relief efforts, the traumatic psychological state of blockaded and besieged people and their beloved white missionary helpers, the indomitable spirit of the relief pilots and a classical example of the church's social ministry in its relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, *Airlift to Biafra* is certainly a book to read.

Dr. Nicholas Omenka, Abia State University, Uturu Nigeria
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**BOOK REVIEW**

Tony *Byrne*. *Airlift to Biafra: Breaching the Blockade*.

Reviewer: Dr. Nicholas Omenka.