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RELIGION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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BOOK REVIEW
Editorial

Nigeria, like many African and Third World countries, groans into the 21st century. Many of the teething problems of the nation, such as general insecurity of life and property, harsh conditions of poverty, corruption in high and low places, AIDS pandemic, and especially the politicisation of religion in national life, are more or less of our own making. Countries that have a head start over Nigeria, especially Western countries that colonised Africa and that have been part and parcel of the misery of the continent, pay lip service to the condemnation of elite exploitation and destructive piracy that sucks the very life out of our people, that depletes the subsoil of our countries, and in addition mortgages the future of the continent. Official corruption that horrifies the West and that is attacked with relentless vigour in the European Union, for example, is condoned as one of the patterns of doing business in Africa (like the Nigerian factor in economics). The mind boggling figures of the loot of the Nigerian treasury/resources by the late dictator Sani Abacha, and the farcical attempt to recover what was stolen that represents only the tip of the iceberg of official piracy of the treasury by our so-called leaders, dramatise (like the Philippines of Ferdinand Marcos or the Zaire of Mobutu Sese Seko) the moral decay that predatory laws of “the international community”, i.e. the modern (Western) world, foist around the necks of the rest of us.

In Nigeria ethnic and especially religious bias compound the already volatile situation that crushing poverty fuels rather than diminishes. Many groups in Nigeria, like the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), periodically go through a ritual of measuring the ongoing conditions of degradation of the nation. The democratically elected government of Olusegun Obasanjo set up the popular Justice Chukwudifu Oputa Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission to enquire into, and provide redress for, human rights violations since the military entered the Nigerian political scene (1966-1999). The exercise was in imitation of a similar investigation conducted in South Africa, but lacked the moral fibre and legal teeth of the parent South African experiment. The commission concluded its investigations, submitted its report,
but characteristically Nigerians are yet to know the details of the report. The same administration unabashedly instituted an anti-corruption tribunal, an action that lacks credibility and all prospects for success given the dubious and corrupt credentials of the very government officials charged with its implementation. Indeed the fury with which federal and state executives and legislators are angling to come back to power, without concrete achievements to show to the electorate, the increase in “state-sponsored violence” that terrorises even elected delegates, demonstrate that the loot is more important for them than the good of Nigerians.

One key criticism of the democratically elected Obasanjo government of Nigeria is the lack of courage and imagination to engage creatively crucial issues that beset the nation. This is symptomatic of the general lack of courage, vision and imagination of the leadership in Africa which readily plays the ostrich while monumental problems daily gnaw at the social fabric. Instead of confronting issues raised by ethnic nationalities, the Obasanjo government and his ruling party that controls the national assembly quibble over the call for a “sovereign” national conference that should assemble all the ethnic nationalities and interest groups to debate over the structure and reconstruction of the polity. Meanwhile radicalised and militant youths of the opposing Tiv and Junkun ethnic groups of the Nigerian Middle Belt periodically massacre innocent children, women, and men with or without the collusion of law enforcement agents because they belong to opposing ethnic groups. Instead of confronting issues of exploitation of the Niger Delta resource base, the Obasanjo government headed for the Supreme Court to get a definition of the boundaries of littoral states of the federation. Meanwhile Ijaw and Itsekiri women and other women in the Delta invade and take over oil rigs and force Shell, Chevron and other oil companies to enter into agreements about employment opportunities for their jobless youth, to take care of the ecology, and to provide basic infrastructural facilities like electricity, water and roads as their contribution to the development of the oil communities. A final and
perhaps the most explosive example, instead of confronting constitutionally the northern states that adopted the Sharia law into the criminal code, and addressing the crushing poverty that allows the Sharia to assume such political importance in the north, Obasanjo and the national assembly moralise over this overriding religious issue and more or less try to wish the reality away as a bad dream.

This issue of BETH draws from a variety of contributions in our search for aspects of "prophetic response" to our national and continental problems. The focus is on an alternative way of engaging religion as a catalyst in our nation building. In the words of Jimmy Carter, a former US President, religion can indeed be "a potent force in encouraging the peaceful resolution of conflict."

The evocation of religion in the Nigerian context turns attention immediately to Islamic and Christian fundamentalism that is notoriously intolerant. Relations between these two religions evoke sad memories of violence and insecurity than creative linking of hands to create a better nation. Oftentimes in Nigeria, religious violence merges with ethnic violence to widen distress. Not all cases are reported in the mass media. It is well known that many Nigerians seek asylum not only among kith and kin in the south but also outside Nigeria as a solution to the wanton destruction of life and property that trails ethno-religious violence. As municipal and general elections draw near, a state of an uneasy peace reigns. This is why we focus on this particular issue of BETH on "religion and conflict resolution" in Nigeria.

The previous issue of BETH (2001) published as a special feature, a lecture on the constitutional implications of the Sharia law. In the present issue we publish the paper of John Paden on the politics of Sharia in northern Nigeria within the period that Nigeria

embraced democratic government. Despite the ongoing crisis and tensions engendered by the Sharia controversy, Paden sees the ethno-religious balance that is provided by constant Christian/Muslim alliances in Nigerian politics as a major key to stability in the country. Paden’s paper is complemented by George Ehusani’s contribution which contends that Moslems and Christians in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world have the resources within their religious traditions to engage one another in a “dialogue of civilisations” (Mohammad Khatami, Iran) as opposed to the violent “clash of civilisations” (Samuel Huntington, USA) which the event of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath symbolise. The circle of contributions on the preference of non-violent means as a strategy to redress crying injustice is buckled with Breifne Walker’s piece that argues from the social teachings of the Catholic Church and the experience of Northern Ireland that “revolutionary armed force” is not defensible in our world because of the violence and misery unleashed on the generality of mainly innocent people as the violent ethno-religious clashes in Nigeria clearly demonstrates.

Uzukwu’s paper on “Popular Religion” continues the argument that there are creative ways in which religion practised in the emerging African Christianity—especially in the African indigenous Churches that operate outside the official control of the mainline missionary Churches—addresses fundamental distress issues of everyday life to make Christianity in Africa a therapeutic religion. The examples chosen to illustrate this creative function of religion are drawn principally from the Nigerian context. This position is complemented by the piece by Bede Ukwuuije which takes a look at forgiveness and reconciliation from an African Christian perspective.

We think it good to conclude with two communiques of the CBCN in 2002 that critically review the state of the nation and provide informed suggestions, as has been its annual custom. In both communiques the CBCN takes firm stand not only on the Sharia issue, but also on the national conference, corruption in high places, the eradication of crushing poverty and the AIDS pandemic.
As our special feature, and a clear voice of an alternative and a new beginning to reconstruct our society, this issue publishes the paper of Rose Uchem that presents a woman’s liberation theology. The paper draws from resilient socio-historical resources of the egalitarian Igbo of Nigeria to suggest ways of putting an end to the subordination of women in both the society and Church. In this way women’s gifts and qualities are fully recognised, so that women provide creative leadership in an alternative and clearly more humane church and society. Uchem’s paper is a summary of her published PhD dissertation that is also reviewed in this issue.

The contribution of BETH to the discussion on religion and conflict resolution will, we hope, add our particular slant to the free debate going on among Nigerians and Africans over our current democratic experiment and the forces threatening freedom, democracy and integral development in Africa.

Nicholas Omenka
The Nigerian return to democratic federalism in 1999, after 15 years of centralized military rule, has raised questions about how to decentralize without provoking sentiments for partition. In addition, the 1999 presidential election witnessed a voluntary "power shift" from the northern region to the southwest, and in both major parties—the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Alliance for Democracy/All Peoples Party (AD/APP)—the presidential candidates were from the “Christian” southwest and the vice presidential candidates from the “Muslim” north. This paper examines how regional and ethno-religions factors have emerged since the transition to civilian rule in 1999. The most obvious issues are the revival of Shari’a law in the criminal domain in the far northern states, the subsequent patterns of ethno-religious conflict (especially in the large northern urban centres), the impact of the events of September 11 on elite and grassroots populations, and the challenge of insulating democratic processes from religious polarization.

The global context too has changed. In October 2001 at the Muslim foreign ministers meeting in Qatar, the 56 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) agreed to condemn terrorism and ignore the Taliban’s call for jihad against Christians and Jews. Yet, OIC national leaders also must deal with public opinion in their own countries, and the question of external influences is never far from the surface. As a large and complex “religiously mixed” country in the midst of a political transition, Nigeria is a special challenge.\(^1\)

The most recent census in Nigeria (1991) did not ask religious identities. The common wisdom—based on previous census

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\(^1\) The most recent census in Nigeria (1991) did not ask religious identities. The common wisdom—based on previous censuses
data—is that the population of about 120 million is approximately 50 percent Muslim, 40 percent Christian, and 10 percent explicitly "traditional," making Nigeria one of the larger Muslim population states in the world. Whether the next census, scheduled for 2002, in preparation for the 2003 elections, will ask religious identity is not clear. However, there is a fairly even balance across Nigeria's 36 states: 13 are predominantly Christian (especially in the middle belt and southeast); and 10 are mixed (in the middle belt and southwest). A more political way of characterizing patterns of Muslim demographics is to recognize that the 19 Northern states are predominantly Muslim and the 17 southern states are predominantly Christian. The emergence of six geocultural zones as a means of political clustering emerged in the 1990s, as the number of states increased to 30 in 1991 and then to 36 in 1996. The new capital at Abuja is meant to be a crossroads of such cultural, religious, and demographic patterns, as well as a true "Federal Capital Territory," in terms of equal political access, intentionally situated in the middle of the country.

Since January 2000, the 12 far northern states have introduced Shari'a law. Clashes in Kaduna state between Muslims and Christians in February 2000 resulted in about 2,000 dead. This was followed by backlash violence in the far north (e.g., Sokoto) against southern Christian and backlash violence in the south-east (e.g., Aba) and southwest (e.g, Lagos and Ibadan followed by about 2,000 more deaths in Kaduna in May. In late 2001, ethno-religious riots emerged in Jos and Kano, with hundreds killed. Official commissions of inquiry reports will be forthcoming, but an obvious preliminary question is whether such violence is ethnic, ethno-religious, more explicitly "religious," political, or some other pattern based on socio-economic status and competition. An overarching question is whether such violence and tension may destabilize Nigeria as a whole, as it prepares for local, state, and national elections in 2003.

In any discussion of politics, religion, or violence in Nigeria, distinguishing those patterns that are predominantly "elite" and
those that are "grassroots" is important. At the elite level there has been a long pattern of Muslim-Christian interfaith cooperation (during both civilian and military periods), while at the grassroots level, there have been sporadic instances of both intrafaith and interfaith conflict. Especially in the Muslim states there have been significant confrontations between antiestablishment groups and northern Muslim elites, which in turn, are causing these elites to reconsider how to strengthen their own politico-religious credentials. Significantly, with the return to civilian rule in 1999, the impetus for the establishment of Shari’a law has emerged largely from grassroots pressures rather than from the elites. To understand these patterns more fully, this essay will look at 1) trend lines of Muslim religious and ethno-religious identities; 2) Muslim leadership and ecumenical movements; 3) the interplay of religion and politics in Nigeria; and 4) the extent of external influences and links.

Trend Lines of Muslim Identities

The three predominantly Muslim areas of Nigeria are the nineteenth century Sokoto caliphal “emirate states” in the northwest, the historic Borno state in the northeast, and certain parts of Yorubaland in the southwest. At present, at least seven cross-cutting tendencies within the Muslim community are identifiable: 1) emirate authorities and traditional non-sectarian mainstream Muslim groups; 2) sufi brotherhoods, especially the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya; 3) anti-innovation legalists, especially the Izala; 4) intellectual reformers; 5) anti-establishment syncretists, especially remnants of the Maitatsine movement; 6) antiestablishment “Muslim Brothers” (Ikhwan), sometimes labelled as “Shi’ites;” and 7) unemployed urban youth and Qur’anic student movements, formed around local schools and teachers.
Traditional Ethno-religious Affiliation

The emirate states share the legacy of having been part of the Sokoto caliphal experience in the nineteenth century. Within the ‘northern region” of the twentieth century, they stretch from Sokoto in the West to Adamawa in the east and to Ilorin and Niger in the south. By definition they are predominantly Muslim in their traditional political structure. In the twentieth century they have evolved into distinctive “emirates” (i.e., with an emir, or equivalent, as symbolic head of the unit). Although Hausa tends to predominate as the lingua franca, the emirate states are a multilingual cluster, including Fulfulde, Yoruba, Nupe, and several minority languages. Often there are traditional rivalries among these states (e.g., Kano and Sokoto split into civil war in the 1890s), and this cluster has not always acted as a unified block. Yet, within this zone, the Sultan of Sokoto has special salience in spiritual matters, and the Emir of Kano has a special place because of the socio-economic importance of Kano emirate.

Borno (and environs) in the northeastern corner of Nigeria is the oldest continuous Islamic community in sub-Saharan Africa, dating from the eleventh century and is similar in structure to the emirate states, but with a “Shehu” as chief religious-political leader. In the nineteenth century, when Sokoto tried to conquer Borno, there was a standoff, and “resistance to Sokoto” became part of Borno’s historical legacy. The outgroup identity designation for people from Borno is “Beriberi”. The dominant language group in Borno is Kanuri, although, like Sokoto, Borno is a multilingual cluster (increasingly with Hausa as a lingua franca).

There has been an indigenous pattern of Islamic culture in Yorubaland throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in the areas that became Oyo, Ogun, and Lagos states. Major urban bases for Yoruba Muslim populations include Lagos and Ibadan. In addition, Ilorin city (and emirate) in Kwara state is a historic component of the Sokoto caliphal system. Ilorin, as a Yoruba society, but with predominant patterns of Yoruba and Hausa
bilingualism and with mixed Yoruba/Fulani/Hausa leadership patterns, is a potential bridge (or flash point) between emirate and Yoruba culture zones.

_Sufi Brotherhoods_

The Sufi brotherhoods evolved throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century, Qadiriyya brotherhood affiliation became part of the identity of the Sokoto Caliphal leadership, because of the association with the caliphal founder, Usman dan Fodio, who died in 1817. In the 1830s and after, Umar Futi and his followers spread the Tijaniyya brotherhood in northern Nigeria. Thus, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya became the two major Sufi brotherhoods in what came to be northern Nigeria, especially within the caliphal areas. By contrast, the leaders and scholars of Borno have not been affiliated with Sufi brotherhoods.

During the twentieth century, the Tijaniyya spread extensively in Kano, which was the commercial and industrial capital of the north. Because of the social networks that extended out of Kano through the long distance “Hausa trader” system, the Tijaniyya spread throughout Nigeria (including Ibadan) and throughout West Africa. A “reformed” version of Tijaniyya was developed, which accommodated many of the modernization developments of the post-world War II era. This reformation was associated with the leadership of Ibrahim Niass, a Wolof speaking shaykh from Kaolack, Senegal, but had its Nigerian base in Kano, under the leadership of Tijjani Usman, and the late emir of Kano, Muhammad Sanusi. In the mid-1990s, leadership focused on a wealthy Hausa businessman, Shaykh Abdulrazaq, who maintains a lavish mosque/school.

In turn, the Qadiriyya also experienced a “reformed” development, associated with Shaykh Nasiru Kabara of Kano. Students from throughout Nigeria would come to Kano to study in his schools and libraries. With the death of Nasiru Kabara in the
fall of 1996, the mantle of leadership fell to his son, who maintains the mosque/school across from the emir’s palace in the center of the old city

Anti-Innovation Legalists

The anti-innovation legalists are associated with the leadership of Shaykh Abubakar Gumi, an outstanding Arabist and legal scholar from Gumi village in Sokoto. Gumi studied in Khartoum and was a key liaison with Saudi authorities. Shortly after independence in 1960, Gumi was appointed Grand Kadi in northern Nigeria and hence was responsible for the regional Shari’a legal system, Gumi became the teacher of many younger university-educated elements, and many of the civil servants and professionals in northern Nigeria. His influence was extensive in the modern sector. Among the urban youth of the new towns in the north, especially cities such as Jos and Kaduna without a brotherhood tradition, social organizations and teaching networks developed under the umbrella name of Izala, taken from the Hausa version of Usman dan Fodio’s book, In Favor of Sunna and against Innovation. Although Gumi directly influenced some of the Izala groups, others set off in their own directions. This led to some confrontations between the Izala and the youth wings of the reformed brotherhoods, especially in Kano, because the Izala condemned the brotherhoods as “innovations,” (i.e, developments after the time of the Qur’an and the Sunna). Gumi became influential through his translation of the Holy Qur’an into the Hausa language. His translation was widely distributed throughout northern Nigeria and was the basis of a fundamental reassessment or “reformation” within the Muslim community, which thereby had direct access to holy writ in a vernacular language. Gumi died in September 1992, and whatever cohesion the Izala movement may have had began to splinter into a variety of localized agendas.\(^5\)
Intellectual Reformers

The intellectual reformers are most noticeable within the northern universities system, especially Usman dan Fodio University in Sokoto, Bayero University in Kano, and Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. There is a fine line between Nigerian Muslims who would like to apply Islamic principles to contemporary Nigerian political life, and those who try to identify what an “ideal” Islamic political system would look like. Clearer is the gap between those who reflect on the ideal nature of neoclassical Islamic systems in the contemporary world, and those who feel that they should impose such systems on themselves and others. The intellectual reformers, often members of departments of Islamic, Arabic, or legal studies, represent two tendencies with regard to an ideal model: those who refer back to the Sokoto reformation period as a source of ideas and values, and those who prefer to downplay the Sokoto experience and refer directly to the time of the Prophet Mohammad, looking to the Madina model as the standard by which an ideal system should be judged. Many scholars involved with the study of the history of the Sokoto caliphate are also concerned with the contemporary relevance of such history. There have been many efforts to reprint the writings of the Sokoto reformist leaders in Arabic, Hausa, and English. For the most part, such intellectuals debate the interpretation of Qur’anic and caliphal principles within an academic setting, but their influence in the media and in political life is considerable.6

Antiestablishment Syncretists

The antiestablishment syncretists emerged in the late 1970s when the oil boom in Nigeria made rapid change, urbanization, and modernization a powerful force. Their “syncretism” was a blend of traditional Hausa folk beliefs, and highly selective bits and pieces of the Qur’an. They tended to represent the “dispossessed” newcomers in the urban centers, who saw the Muslim establishment
getting richer and more Westernized to the detriment of poor and non-Western segments of society.

An itinerant preacher, Muhammad Marwa, also known as Maitatsine, led the most significant of such fringe cults to emerge, in Kano in the late 1970s. A violent confrontation between the “Yan Tatsine” and the authorities in Kano City occurred in December 1980, with thousands of resulting deaths. Even with the death of Maitatsine in these Kano riots, his followers violently challenged authorities in Gombe, Borno, and elsewhere in the north throughout the 1980s and even in Lagos in the 1990s. In general, mainstream Muslims do not regard this movement as “Muslim,” but as a cult outside the bounds of orthodoxy.

Antiestablishment “Muslim Brothers”

The antiestablishment “Muslim Brothers” (Ikhwan or ‘yan brotha) emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a younger generation of semi-educated and even better educated youth found that hey had no employment prospects in the economic austerity of the time and began to challenge the corruption and wealth of the Muslim establishment on Islamic grounds. The leader of the group in Zaria was Ibrahim El-Zak Zaky, who had graduated in economics from Ahmadu Bello University. Because he then had received training in Iran and Iranian funding appeared to be involved, his movement was termed “Shi’ite” by the larger Nigerian community, which was also an attempt to marginalize his influence because Nigerian Muslims are Sunni rather than Shi’ite by tradition. Throughout the 1990s the Ikhwan and the authorities clashed, culminating in the arrest of Ibrahim on September 13, 1996, in Zaria and his jailing in Port Harcourt. Subsequently, his followers protested in Zaria and Kaduna and about 40 were killed in direct clashes with the police. In February 1997, at the end of the month of Ramadan, several of the followers tried to take over the central mosque in Kano and were killed in the resultant clash with police. The exact nature of this “Shi’ite” movement remains obscure, but the antiestablishment
challenge is clear. Zaky, released after the death of General Sani Abacha in 1998, continues to be a vocal critic of the Muslim establishment, and, more recently, of Shari'a criminal law in some northern states.7

Unemployed Youth and Qur‘anic School Movements

Large metropoles with high immigration rates have hundreds of local Qur‘anic schools that may form around a local teacher (mallam). In the north, such schools often form just outside the “traditional” walled cities (or in the newer wards), because the traditional ward structures in the “old cities” are usually well integrated into local politics. In places like Fagge in Kano, which attract immigrant students from throughout the north and from surrounding countries, such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, students are poor (talibai), rootless, and perhaps easily swayed by itinerant Muslim preachers. These students come from rural Sunni families, and often make their living by begging or working as day labor. The key to understanding this phenomenon is to recognize that there is no stable leadership structure in place and often no respect for more established forms of religious authority.8

Muslim Leadership and Ecumenical Movements

The early Muslim ecumenical movement of the 1960s in Nigeria, especially the Jamatul Nasiril`Islam, broadened into the national arena, mainly through the vehicle of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), established in 1974. The head of the Supreme Council was the Sultan of Sokoto, the vice president was the Shehu of Borno, and the secretary general was a leading Yoruba Muslim lawyer, Abdulateef Adeghite. The vice presidents are drawn from the 36 states of the federation and include distinguished emirs and other Muslim notables (including the late Alhaji Chief Moshood Abiola, Baba Adini of Yorubaland in Ogun State, and Alhaji Abdul Azeez Arisekola Alao, the Aare Musulumi of
Yorubaland, Oyo State). The NSCIA has regular meetings that bring Muslim leaders from all states of the federation to deliberate on matters of common interest. At the international level, the council maintains close links with counterparts in other countries and cosponsors the Islamic council in London. The NSCIA cosponsored the Islam in Africa Conference in 1989, which resolved to establish the Islam in Africa Organizations network with headquarters in Abuja, the federal capital. The council handled the construction of the Abuja National Mosque and maintains the Abuja National Mosque Management Board.

In 1987, in the aftermath of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) controversy in Nigeria over whether to be a member of the OIC, the federal government established the National Council for Religious Affairs (NCRA). In modified form, this council ultimately came to have 12 Christian and 12 Muslims leaders who were intended to discuss matters of mutual concern and report directly to the Ministry of Interior. In practice the NSCIA represented the Muslims, and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) represented the Christians. After a period of deadlock in the council, the Christian leaders stopped attending, and the NCRA became moribund.

In March 1996, the Sultan of Sokoto, Ibrahim Dasuki, was deposed and jailed by head of State General Abacha. Dasuki was replaced as Sultan by Muhammad Maccido, but because Dasuki had been a prime mover behind the NSCIA the future of this organization remains unclear, especially because Maccido is seen more as a local leader. The release of Dasuki after the death of Abacha did not result in a challenge to sultan Maccido, and Dasuki now lives quietly in Kaduna.

A second Muslim umbrella organization, which is similar to NSCIA, is the Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN). In the mid-1980s, the impact of the spread of education began to be felt more clearly among Muslim women. Part of the response to such education was to become even more Western, and some Muslim women participated in organizations
like Women in Nigeria. Others began to reclaim their own sense of Muslim identity. The Muslim Sisters Organization was established in Kano, and later FOMWAN was established to give coherence to Muslim women’s organizations throughout Nigeria and focused on the need to counteract the role of “custom” in Nigeria Muslim societies. By the early 1990s, FOMWAN had about 400 member organizations throughout Nigeria, with a majority of member associations in the Yoruba-speaking areas. Each state selects representatives to a national committee, which publishes a magazine (The Muslim Woman) and holds annual conferences on a topic of special concern to Muslim women. The main language of communication is English, and the FOMWAN acts as a liaison with other national and international Muslim women’s organizations. Today, FOMWAN remains the major pan-Nigerian association for Muslim women, even though a wide variety of non governmental organizations focus on particular issue areas.

Religion and Politics

This section will touch on four aspects of religion and politics in Nigeria, because the perception of a level political playing field and ethno-regional balance are seen to be the keys to ethno-religious harmony and political stability: (1) religion and constitutional law; (2) religion and electoral politics; (3) religion and military politics; and (4) the Shari’a law issue and ethno-religious violence since the establishment of Shar’a law in far northern states.

Constitutional Law

The constitution announced by the military government in May 1999, which set up the Fourth Republic, was similar to that of 1979, which set up the Second Republic. The 1999 constitution states that the government of the federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion. The section on “fundamental rights” refer to “freedom of thought, conscience, and religion,” With regard to
the judiciary, the Shari'a Courts of Appeal of a state are established to deal with personal law, where all parties are Muslim. 

With this mixed constitutional mandate—for the Nigerian state not to adopt any religion, but to allow for Muslim civil law within the legal system—the “fundamental right” of every Nigerian to freedom of religion is even more salient. The “Freedom of Religion” clause is articulated as follows. (1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. (2) No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or a religion not approved by his parents or guardian. (3) No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or domination. (4) Nothing in this section shall entitle any persons to form, take part in the activity of, or be a member of a secret society.

Because of Nigeria’s long history of colonial and military rule, the role of the judiciary in the interpretation of fundamental rights has been uncertain at best. Many of the issues of conflicts of rights or limits of rights have been determined by edict or decree. The limits of unorthodox opinion, especially in religious matters, are a delicate but essential judgment made by political and religious leaders, but also by constitutional lawyers. A number of legal issues remain to be addressed through case law: the tax status of religious organizations, the right to public broadcast time, the right to be represented on national advisory boards, the basic right to preach, the right to have time off to worship (e.g., for Friday prayer or holidays), the right of religious leaders to protection from defamation, the right to be included in a nonpreferentialist model of government, the right to religious education, the protection from
having to change religious affiliation in order to acquire education, the right to change religious affiliation, and, of course, the issue of Shair'a law in the criminal domain.

The general practice in Nigeria is not to utilize legal services in pursuit of fundamental or religious rights. Rather, grievances are addressed through the political process, even when that process is military rather than civilian. The lack of federal case law is partly the result of the fragility of constitutional order and the high stakes placed on political solutions.

Electoral Politics

The federal elections of 1959, 1964, 1979, and 1983 were remarkably consistent in the alliance patterns between geocultural/religious zones. The election of June 1993, which was annulled, was an exception. The 1999 election echoed some of the earlier patterns: five of the six zones supported the winner, and the southwest zone supported the loser.

During the First Republic (1960–1966) the dominant northern party (Northern Peoples’ Congress) made every effort to find allies among the Christian middle belt factions, and ended up with a coalition that included northern Muslims and middle-belt and eastern Christians. This coalition faced a Muslim/Christian Yoruba alliance. During the Second Republic (1979 – 1983), the same alliance pattern prevailed.

During the election in 1993, which was intended to be a transition to a Third Republic, the dominant alliance was Yoruba-based and excluded many of the emirate states and the Christian east. Ironically, the apparent winners in the June 1993 election were a Yoruba Muslim (Moshood Abiola) for president and a Borno Muslim (Babagana Kingibe) for vice-president, who appeared to defeat a Muslim from Kano and a Christian from the east.

During the election of 1999, as mentioned earlier, both presidential candidates were Yoruba/Christian, and both vice presidential candidates were northern Hausa/Muslim. Hence, there
were no overt ethno-religious overtones to the election, which was won by Olusegun Obasanjo (Yoruba/Christian, from Abeokuta) and Atiku Abubakar. (Hausa-Fulani/Muslim, from Yola).

The clear pattern is that electoral politics do not divide along Christian lines in Nigeria. To the contrary, every effort has been made, through different combinations of elements, to link coalitions that include both Christians and Muslims. The stated intent of the 1995 constitution (unpromulgated) was to create a rotational system for the highest federal offices, so that no zone or region may predominate and making cross-zonal/cross-religious coalitions mandatory. This idea was scrapped in 1998-1999 as too cumbersome, but the idea of "federal character" (or ethno-religious balance) was preserved in other ways.

Religious and ethnic political parties have been banned in Nigeria since the First Republic. The idea of "federal character," which has been implemented since the civil war (1967-1970), has meant that each of the states—and hence religious segments—must be represented at the federal executive level. The fact that the critical swing area—the Yorubaland southwest—is almost equally divided between Christians and Muslims while politics tend to revolve around city-state loyalties, has lessened the tendency to politicize religion. Yet, whenever a political "crisis" occurs—including a military coup—the question of religious balance is a matter of immediate calculation.

**Military Politics**

On July 29, 1975, General Murtala Ramat Muhammad, a Hausa-Fulani from Kano, emerged as the first Muslim military head of state in Nigeria. He had replaced General Yakubu Gowon, an Angas Christian from the middle belt, who in turn had replaced Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo Christian in July 1966. On February 13, 1976, Murtala Muhammad was assassinated in a failed coup attempt apparently led by Christian middle-belt officers, Murtala Muhammad was replaced by his next in command, General
Olusegun Obasanjo, a Christian Yoruba from Ogun, who, for the next three and a half years—prior to the return to civilian rule in 1979—continued the policies of his predecessor, including the creation of new federal capital at Abuja. The next-in-command and close confident of Obasanjo was Shehu Musa Yar’Adua, a dynamic Muslim personality from Katsina emirate, who later died in prison under mysterious circumstances during the Abacha military regime.

The general pattern of top military leadership has usually been a Muslim-Christian or a Christian-Muslim team. The exception was the military regime of Muhammad Buhari (a Fulani-Hausa Muslim from Daura emirate) and Tunde Idiagbon (a Yoruba Muslim from Ilorin) during 1984 – 1985. The subsequent regime of Ibrahim Babangida (a Gwari Muslim from the middle belt) was religiously balanced (1985 – 1993), as was the successor regime of Sani Abacha (a Muslim who grew up in Kano but was originally from Borno) and his next in command General Oladipo Diya (a Yoruba Christian). Muhammad Buhari (Fulani Hausa Muslim) and Ernest Shonekan (Yoruba/Christian) were two top civilian members of the Abacha regime. The successor regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar (Muslim, from Niger state), which handed over to the civilian regime on May 29th, 1999, was also ethnically and religiously balanced.

In short, despite some of the prevailing perceptions that Hausa Muslims have dominated the top military leadership, military politics is not much different from electoral politics on the matter of religious balance. The annulment of the June 1993 election was clearly not the result of religious factors, because both Abiola and his opponent, Bashir Tofa, were Muslims.

With the return to civilian politics in May 1999, every effort has been made to "reprofessionalize" the military, that is, remove them from politics. In the process, however, the perception has been widespread in the north that a disproportionate number of northern/Muslim officers have been pressured into retirement, or marginalized in other ways. Two former military heads of state from the north—Buhari and Babangida—remain key political
figures in the Nigerian fourth Republic, although there is still tension between them from the 1985 coup.

*Shari’a Law*

With the inception of democratic federalism under the Fourth Republic, the newly elected governor of Zamfara state announced that Shari’a law (including criminal law), an issue on which he had campaigned in fall 1998, would be introduced, to be applied to Muslims only. Other states from the far north began to follow this approach. In the turmoil that followed (even the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammedu Maccido, became a target when he tried to mediate) there was clearly both mass and elite support among northern Muslims.

Subsequently, various human rights groups have started to challenge the issue of Shari’a law in Zamfara through the state court system with the expectation that eventually it will go to the Supreme Court. At the same time, various respected leaders on all sides were convened to try to prevent further violence. As of 2001, 9 of the 17 Supreme Court justices were Muslim, and it was hoped that the issue could be settled politically while running its course through the courts.10

The issue of Shar’a law is of concern both within Nigeria11, and externally. The US. Commission on International Religious Freedom has a section in its 2001 report that focuses on Shar’a developments, and has expressed a concern about extra-judicial enforcement of Shari’a laws.12 Recent conflicts are also being evaluated through the analytical perspectives of “federalism theory,” which balance powers at the state level, and raise the issue of the responsibilities and structure of the Nigerian police in state and local matters.13
External Influences and Links

Even prior to the globalization of communications and transportation of the 1990s, each of the tendencies mentioned above within the Nigerian Muslim community had some pattern of external influence or linkage within the broader Muslim community (ummah). Yet, with the emergence of a Nigerian oil economy in the 1970s, the most noticeable external linkage pattern was the sharp increase in numbers of annual Nigerian pilgrims to Mecca, and the increased ties to Saudi Arabia (plus, of course, the extensive links and settlements in Britain). The oil economy has also allowed for extensive Nigerian investments in road and air links with neighboring countries and international locations. Needless to add, the national borders—drawn by colonial powers and basically artificial—are porous, because they cut all major ethnic groups (Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Kanuri, and Igbo). Finally, the problems of immigration and customs inefficiency and corruption at many ports of entry also reinforce the permeability of boundaries.

Historically, the following "international" patterns are also clear. 1) The traditional emirate authorities in the northern states derive from the jihad that established the Sokoto caliphate in the early nineteenth century, and clearly have ethnic—especially Fulani—and religious ties that link into the Sudanic belt in West Africa. Even prior to the establishment of Sokoto, trans-Saharan trade and Islamic culture flourished in the Hausa city-states, especially via the commercial capital of Kano. 2) the Sufi brotherhoods are all transnational, with the Tijaniyya linked closely with Morocco and Senegal, and the Qadiriyya with the Maghreb and Iraq.14 The Tijaniyya, being more associated with Hausa long distance trades, has extensive links throughout West Africa. There is hardly a market or commercial center in West Africa which does not have posters of Tijaniyya saints and leaders. 3) The anti-innovation legalists have close ties with Saudi Arabia, sometimes by way of Khartoum, and have been instrumental in linking northern Nigeria to the boarder world of Sunni Islam, and in
challenging the Sufi tradition.15 4) The intellectual reformers clearly have scholarly ties throughout the Muslim and Western worlds. 5) The anti-establishment syncretists have ties with local groups in neighboring African countries, especially Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.6) The so-called “Muslim Brothers,” surprisingly, have their ties with the Shi’a world, especially Iran (since 1979), rather than the Sunni world, and are often ready to challenge the various authorities within the Sunni world. 7) The urban youth and migrant students may be more insular in their experiences, but have access to radio and cassettes from a variety of external sources. 8) Finally, the elites of the ecumenical movements have extensive contacts worldwide.

Conclusions

The fact that the Muslim elite establishments in the emirate states, Borno and Yorubaland, have normally felt comfortable working with mainstream Christian counterparts, should not obscure the fact that at the grassroots level since 1999, highly localized Muslim and Christian groups, often competing for land or jobs or educational opportunities, have found cause to challenge each other, as well as the establishment. The boom land bust cycles of an oil economy (e.g. in late 2001, oil revenues in Nigeria dropped by one-third) plus the often high expectations for change in the new civilian political arena—including a demand for “law and order” based on recognizable principles, rather than military decrees—have created a rich drama of ethno-religious expression based on the hopes and fears of ordinary Nigerians.

Within the emirate states, a cleavage has been forming between the Muslim establishment and Muslim grassroots elements. This has had spillover effects on Muslim-Christian relations, as the hard driving evangelism of some Christian groups, who have made it their mission to convert Muslims at the local level, created the potential for inter-faith confrontation in various socio-economic domains. These conflicts are increasingly difficult for emirate and
civilian gubernatorial authorities to contain or mediate, without asking the federal authorities to call in national police and military resources.

Into this mix, the revival of Shari’a law during 2000-2001, combined with the impact of contemporary globalization and communication trends—especially through the Saudi connection—created a volatile situation. Yet, a clear consequence of the Shari’a revival was partially to close the gap between Muslim elites and grassroots elements in the north, even though the interpretation of Shari’a law is left to councils of ulema within each of the far northern states, and hence does not have a standardized impact.

This Shari’a revival was further inflamed after September 11, in the fog of confusion as the “war on terrorism” took on global proportions, and the “Osama riots” unfolded in the Fagge area of Kano. Several weeks passed before traditional authorities, such as the Emir of Kano, could be mobilized to condemn Osama bin Laden.16

A major key to stability in Nigeria is the continued pattern of religious balance and coalition building, both within the military and among the civilian political class. Nigeria remains a multi-religious—rather than a secular—society, and religious balance issues are at least as important as ethnic or state balances in the various “federal character” endeavors. The larger issues of democratic rule, federalism, human rights, rule of law (including Shari’a law), and equity of access to resources will have to take account of the fragile balance of geocultural and religious zones in Nigeria, and the need for conflict resolution efforts across such zones. At present, the weakest link seems to be the challenge of decentralizing power—including the police force—without “balkanizing” or partitioning the country, or creating a situation of such chaos that the military is tempted to intervene. One hopes that no side will use the Shari’a issue as an excuse to destabilize the entire country. The polarization of ethnic, religious, and regional clusters must be addressed politically, constitutionally, and
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economically if Nigeria is to meet the test of the three-tier federal elections coming up in 2003, and make a real transition to democratic federalism.

NOTES


3. The six zones include: 1) northwest (Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, Katsina, Jigawa, Kebbi, Zamfara); 2) northeast (Bauchi, Borno, Adamawa, Taraba, Yobe, Gombe); 3) Middle Belt (lower north): (Plateau, Benue, Niger, Kogi, Kwara Nasarawa and FCT); 4) southwest (Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti); 5) southeast (Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi); and 6) south-south (Rivers, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Edo, Cross River, Bayelsa).

4. The 12 states with Shari'a law, as of December 2001, are: Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Niger, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Jigawa, Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe, and Borno.


6. For example, see Mahmud Tukur, Leadership and Governance in Nigeria: The Relevance of Values (Zaria: Hudahuda Press, 1999).

7. For a journalistic account of this movement, see Karl Maier, This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria, chapter 6; "The Faithful," Public Affairs, 2000.

8. See, for example, the work of Paul Lubeck, Islam and Urban Labor In Northern Nigeria: The Making of a Muslim Working Class (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

9. For details on the Zamfara endeavor, see Zamfara State of Nigeria, Shari'ah Penal code Law, January 2000, which in 55 pages, defines terms, criminal responsibility, punishments and compensation, joint acts, abetment, attempts to commit offences, criminal conspiracy, hudud and hudud related offences, qiyas and qiyas related offences, and criminal intimidation (including offense by or relating to public servants, offences related to religion, and offenses relating to
ordeal, witchcraft and jujus. The author is grateful to Governor Ahmad Sani for extensive personal discussions of these issues in May 2000, during the governors's visit to Washington, D.C.


11. As of November 22, 2001, one Web site (http://www.comlNEWS113.htm) that carries Nigerian English-language newspaper articles, listed 441 recent articles dealing with "Shari'a in Nigeria". Needless to add, Hausa language newspapers are also focusing on this issue.


16. BBC, "Nigeria's Emir opposes bin Laden," November 23, 2001. "One of Africa's top Islamic leaders, the powerful emir of the northern Nigerian state of Kano has told the BBC he is opposed to Osama bin Laden's version of Jihad against the United States. The emir also said he was monitoring U.S. bombing of Afghanistan to ensure that it was aimed solely at what Washington called terrorism, and not Islam in general..."
CHRISTIAN-ISLAMIC COOPERATION IN THE BUILDING OF A JUST AND PEACEFUL SOCIETY

By

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Introduction

After failed experiment in recent centuries with secularist fundamentalism expressed most graphically in the French Revolution which actually abolished religion for a while, and atheistic communism which effectively banished religion from public life, the twenty first century society has come to recognize the resilience of religion as a factor in the private and public behaviour of citizens in many parts of the world. Along with the forces of culture and ethnicity, the importance of religion and the identity that derives from it have assumed centre stage especially by the global security crisis that followed in the wake of the September 11, 2001 bombings of the World Trade Centre in New York and the reprisal war against the Taliban of Afghanistan. This war for some observers approximates to a clash of civilizations, that is: the Secular West versus the Islamic East. Or "a clash between Muslims and Christians everywhere!" as the fanatics of Kano Nigeria seemed to have understood it when they unleashed violence on Christians at the beginning of the bombardment of Afghanistan in October 2001.

Perhaps it has become clear to everyone that the world cannot pursue justice, peace, social integration and solidarity within and amongst nations while neglecting the place of religion in the life of people. Instead men and women are beginning to explore the immense potential for good to be found in all religions. People are asking how these can be exploited for the promotion of justice and peace, and for the building of a more wholesome human society.

Those who have this orientation and the accompanying expectation are encouraged by the experience of Poland where the Church served as the rallying point for the peaceful revolution that led to the collapse of the oppressive Communist regime of Poland and other East European countries that were shut off from the rest of the world and held under the tight clutches of dictatorships.

*John Paul II’s Bold Initiative*

On January 24, 2002 Pope John Paul II hosted in Assisi, the city of St. Francis, a gathering of 200 leaders of the various religions around the world, including Christians of various denominations, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and adherents of African Traditional Religions to pray for an end to violence and collaborate in working for global peace. While addressing a crowd in the Vatican on the eve of this gathering, the Pope declared that each believer is called to be a peacemaker. On this basis, he said, men and women of different religious affiliations not only *can* collaborate, but indeed *must* engage in defending and promoting effectively the recognition of human rights, which is an indispensable condition for authentic and lasting peace. He said in the face of the violence that today wreaks havoc in so many of the earth’s regions, there is the need for religions to become a factor of solidarity, by repudiating and isolating those who abuse the Name of God for purposes or with methods that in reality offend him.¹

During the meeting in Assisi, leaders of the various religious groups individually and collectively committed themselves to the pursuit of peace and harmony in the world. The Pope affirmed in the midst of these religious leaders that “the mission of religion consists in fostering peaceful coexistence among peoples and cultures, in reciprocal respect.” Once again, he made his passionate appeal to the world: “Violence never again! War never again! Terrorism never again! In the name of God, may every religion bring upon the earth Justice, Peace, Forgiveness and Life, Love!”²

In this paper I reflect on the prospects or opportunities for
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Christian-Muslim cooperation in promoting human rights and in the building of civil society in countries like Nigeria where adherents of the two religions cohabit. This theme takes us a little beyond the level of Christian Muslim dialogue aimed at peaceful coexistence to that new stage where we examine the points of convergence among the religions and how we can actually exploit the potentials therein for collaborating in initiatives, programmes and projects that will contribute towards the building of civil society, towards the promotion of human rights and the emergence of a just, democratic and peaceful society.

Towards a Dialogue of Civilizations

In 1996, American political scientist, Samuel Huntington, published an outstanding book that he titled The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order. In the book Huntington asserts that in the new post cold war world, civilizations (culture, religion and ethnicity), more than politics and economics will provide the driving force for the challenges of the future. His principal assumption, which has been partly justified by the wave of ethnic and religious conflicts all over the world in recent years, is that the relationship between the various civilizations will necessarily be characterized by conflicts.

However, following closely the footsteps of Pope John Paul II, President Khatami of Iran recently took up the challenge posed by Professor Huntington and argued rather persuasively that contrary to what the learned Professor thinks, rather than conflict, civilizations can and must pursue dialogue. He called for a Dialogue of Civilizations, through which individual men and women and peoples of diverse world views shall be able to live together and engage in creative exchange in a world that will promote peace and human solidarity. We very much agree with President Khatami that our different religions and cultures need not be reason for hatred, conflicts and wars. Instead that the different religions, cultures and civilizations can be studied and understood
as different strands of an immense human patrimony that can be used to foster national cohesion and global solidarity.

The Bases for Dialogue and Mutual Cooperation

We shall begin by identifying some of the fundamental elements in the teachings of Christianity and Islam that can provide the basis for dialogue and mutual cooperation in any humanizing process and project. Firstly, Christians and Muslims mutually acknowledge the existence of one God who is Creator (and Father) of all. There is the concomitant acknowledgement and recognition of human beings as creatures (and children) of the one God, who are endowed with equal dignity and sanctity. That is why Muslims and Christians—and also adherents of African Traditional Religions—aspire to the human person (all persons, including “unbelieving persons” as defined by these religions), a divine origin, a supernatural end, and an existence that is imbued with transcendence. This is a point of convergence for Christianity and Islam which modern pluralistic societies must capitalize upon in their search for justice, peace and social integration, and in the overall task of nation building.

Secondly, and related to the first point, is the fact that Muslims and Christians along with Jews have reference to Abraham as their father in faith. And so they are one people with a common religious ancestry, wherever they are to be found in the world. They share the fundamental elements of the Ten Commandments of the Law as revealed to Moses. They mutually acknowledge the supremacy of charity and the “golden rule” as a workable moral principle for guiding human social relationships. Christians and Muslims recognize the priority that must be given to the common good, the good of all in society, over and above the good of individuals and groups. Once again, modern pluralistic societies such as Nigeria must capitalize upon this fundamental disposition of the two religions and not only engage in a social analysis that is solidly based on these principles, but also jointly build up social, economic and political institutions and structures that will give expression to
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these beliefs.

Thirdly, Muslims and Christians, along with Jews, associate God closely with peace. They see peace as a gift of God, but which human beings must also work for, for themselves and for others. Most Christians and Muslims understand that peace is a social, much more than an individual, endowment, and therefore no one can enjoy peace in isolation. No one can privatise peace. That is why shalom is the standard greeting among the Jews. Islam ("submission" [to God] in Arabic, "to resign oneself") is said by some to be a derivation of salam or salem which means peace. Christians on their own part call Jesus Christ "the Prince of Peace," whose kingdom shall be a kingdom of unending peace. It was Jesus Christ who taught: "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called children of God." Therefore the individual pursuit of a life of peace, and the project of peace building are fundamental to the religious vocation of Christians and Muslims alike. Adherents of these religions in Nigeria must be constantly challenged to translate this fundamental mission of theirs into concrete commitments, programmes and projects for the advancement of peace.

The Counter-witness of Religion in the Course of History

The foregoing is the truth of our common religious patrimony, which in the course of history has often been ignored or discountenanced by fanatics, extremists, fundamentalists, warmongers, conquerors, expansionists, crusaders and jihadists, who were often propelled not by religious sentiments, but by the primordial sentiments of pride and arrogance, greed and avarice, and hatred and vengeance. Some of the most brutal wars in history were allegedly fought in the name of religion, and some of the worst atrocities and abuses against the human person have been committed allegedly in the name of religion. Whole populations have been wiped out, cities have been sacked, groups and sects have been banished, and individuals have been tortured to death in the name of religion.
Nigeria has had its fair share of violence in the name of religion: from the Maitatsine crisis in Kano in the early 1980s to the Sharia riots in Kaduna and Jos in the years 2000 and 2001, we have sordid tales of brutal killings, torture and massive destruction of property in the name of religion. Today many of us recognize that those who killed, tortured and abused others in the name of religion at whatever point in history, were not true apologists of Islam or Christianity. We know that those who have sacked, maimed and killed people in the name of religion only succeeded in giving religion a bad name, for as John Paul II once said, “the God of peace is never glorified by human violence.”

Religion: Responding to the Challenge of Relevance Today

In the last 200 years humanity has experienced enormous advancements not only in science and technology, but also in the knowledge and appreciation of human rights, dignity and freedom. With the age of Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, and the two World Wars fought in the first half of the twentieth century, the very fabric of human society was shaken like never before, and subsequently, individual human beings and social groups have taken hold of their God-given freedom and they are not about to surrender it to any despot, even if such a despot is dressed in religious apparel. Strengthened by the 1948 United Nations Declarations on Human Rights, the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and similar charters and conventions, modern humanity is poised to resist any attempt at enslavement by primitive religious ideologies. They would rather throw religion overboard and order their affairs as purely secular societies than be bogged down or constantly distracted by the violent squabbles and skirmishes of the affiliates of competing religions.

Modern men and women seem to be challenging all religions to demonstrate their usefulness for the human society by uniting
people, by giving them a sense of meaning, and by promoting among their adherents such values and principles as will make for reconciliation, integration, unity and peace. And indeed religions in the modern world do have the potential and the mission to promote justice and peace and to build up civil society, since religions often provide the spiritual force and the moral basis for the maintenance of social equilibrium, notwithstanding the many instances in history when religious sentiments have been capitalized upon by selfish individuals and groups to cause division, violence and war.

To appreciate the infinite potential for good in the collaboration or cooperation of Christians and Muslims in modern pluralistic societies, we must first make the distinction between the practice of religion and the politics of religion. Living in a country where Christians and Muslims each claim fifty percent of the population, I am able to say without fear of contradiction that the genuine practice of Islam and Christianity will hurt no one in our land or in any land whatsoever. Instead, the faithful practice of these religions, which include private and public prayer, fasting, and acts of charity, and the dissemination of the fundamental teachings of the religions, should normally ensure a just, peaceful and united polity. Because of the transcendental values they share in common, and the elementary moral principles by which good is sought and evil is avoided, the faithful practice of Islam and Christianity can only lead to a better human society, one that thrives on justice and peace. On the other hand, it is often the politics of these religions and the manipulation of religious sentiments for selfish individual interests that fuel the intolerance, discrimination, persecution, hatred, vengeance and violence that we have witnessed in the recent past in our country and in other countries.

Religious fanatics and extremists have never been acknowledged as the best examples of their faith. They may make waves (and they have often made violent waves for a little while), but in the end, they are often dumped in the ashes of history. Society never fails to take note of the other kind of power that shines through the humble disciple who draws people to his or her
faith by the witness of a holy life, devoted to the pursuit of justice and peace, a life which constantly points the way to the rest of society.

St. Francis of Assisi was one such symbol of peace at the height of the crusades and jihads of the 12th and 13th centuries. He was acknowledged as a “man of God” by Muslims and Christians alike, because of his commitment to peace and universal brotherhood in the midst of the deafening drums of war. The prayer attributed to him, “Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace! Where there is hatred let me sow love...”, sums up his life. Mahatma Gandhi lived in the 19th/20th century as a Hindu. But with his radical non-violent ideology, he made disciples among Christian and Muslim clerics alike. “Non-violence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed.”

One of the disciples of Gandhi was the Black Civil Rights leader, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. who has today been proclaimed as a frontline American hero for both Blacks and Whites. And his firm faith in peace through justice that echoed from the Birmingham prison reverberates with relevance today: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was a Catholic nun. But her commitment to peace and to upholding human dignity was acknowledged and acclaimed by Buddhists and Hindus and Christians and Muslims alike. In our day Pope John Paul II has successfully established a reputation as an agent of peace even in the minds of those who are hostile to the Catholic faith.

In Nigeria, one of the foremost human rights crusaders is Chief Gani Fawehinmi, a very staunch Muslim. His commitment to human dignity, human rights and the pro-democracy struggle in Nigeria has been acknowledged and applauded by Christians and Muslims alike. Rev. Father Matthew Hassan Kukah, former Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, is well known as a social crusader and defender of human rights and dignity. His commitment to human rights and freedom throughout the period of military dictatorship in Nigeria endeared him to most Nigerians, Christians and Muslims alike, and at the beginning of the
present democratic dispensation he was appointed into the Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission. He has made many friends among the Northern Muslim elite, and has succeeded in opening many channels of dialogue among otherwise discordant voices and disparate peoples. These kinds of people, and not the fanatics are the best examples of religious witnessing.

**Christian-Islamic Collaboration in Nation Building**

Religion indeed can be an instrument of reconciliation, integration, unity and peace in any country. When freed of destructive politics, religion at its best, can constitute the underlying moral force behind society’s just and peaceful ordering. When the political adventurists who camouflage as champions of religious causes are exposed for who they are and shown the way out, Islam and Christianity can become the soul of the modern society, even as the society makes incredible advances in science and technology that are speedily transforming the face of the earth.

Fidelity to the best tenets of Christianity and Islam can protect humanity from the self-destruction that will arise, if men and women take their own destiny entirely in their hands. Christianity and Islam at their best shall enhance social integration since they give men and women a sense of meaning. They shall enhance wholesome existence for individuals and peace for the society since they teach people that the meaning of human life is beyond humanity. Christianity and Islam are capable of promoting justice and equity in society since they teach people to do to no one what they would not want done to them. Indeed, Christianity and Islam in collaboration have the potential to promote solidarity among the various segments of the society since they teach their adherents to be charitable towards those in need, and to be their brother/sister’s keeper.

To extend the dialogue of civilization even further, Christian and Islamic groups could come together to initiate and jointly run
human and community development projects as well as programmes that are aimed at the promotion and defence of human rights and dignity. Community Health Centres, Orphanages, Vocational Schools and Special Institutions for Handicapped Persons and Problem Children could be jointly funded, owned and run by Christian and Islamic groups in a particular town or village. Individual Christians and Muslims could come together to found NGOs and constitute pressure groups to promote and defend the rights of women and children, to educate the population on the benefits of mutual tolerance and respect among people of different religious and political persuasions, and to offer legal aid now and again to poor individuals and minority groups whose rights are often violated by the powerful elements of society. All these are possible in Nigeria if Christians and Muslims follow the best tenets of their religions and refuse to let selfish individuals manipulate religious sentiments for their own political advantage.

Obstacles on the Way of this Collaboration

We must however mention that chief among the obstacles on the way of this dialogue of civilization is the harsh poverty experienced by the mass of Nigerians today, along with the ignorance of the majority of the ordinary people. These factors could indeed make Christian-Islamic collaboration and cooperation in nation building as enunciated above, an uphill task. Millions of young able-bodied persons are either unemployed or underemployed. They are a ready tool in the hands of troublemakers; and most of the crises in recent years have been compounded by them. Also widespread in the land is the mutual ignorance among the people that breeds suspicion and mistrust. This ignorance is often exploited by mischief-makers who have often dragged their compatriots into senseless violent skirmishes.

Therefore programmes or projects aimed at enhancing the democratic culture, building civil society, reducing violence and
promoting human rights in Nigeria, will achieve only limited success if they do not take these factors into account, and if urgent steps are not taken to improve the level of education, and reduce poverty and especially youth unemployment. Even in these areas a coalition of Christian and Islamic forces (using the religious imperative of brotherly love, sharing and solidarity) could play an advocacy role towards making the government of the day shift attention from prestige projects and giving priority attention to basic education, primary health care, poverty reduction and employment generating projects.

Conclusion

Thus, in a country like Nigeria, devastated by many years of dictatorship, with an economy that has been ruined by corruption, greed and graft, yes, a country that is today crying for moral rearmament or ethical revolution, a coalition of moral and spiritual forces among Christians and Muslims can play a pivotal role in the emergence of an accountable leadership and a corrupt-free nation, since the individual and social morality of the majority of our people are often determined by their religious beliefs and practices. The Nigerian society needs the moral persuasion of Christianity and Islam in the project of raising a more honest, transparent and accountable leadership, and a more law abiding, disciplined and productive population. A number of well-known religious leaders in Nigeria can help in many ways to strengthen the organs of civil society. With the overwhelming popularity of religion in Nigeria, religious leaders of both persuasions, especially when they act together, could indeed be the rallying point and the catalyst for the emergence of a new Nigeria that is socially transformed and that encourages peaceful coexistence. This paradigm is replicable in other lands that are populated by Christians and Muslims, who today are often at each other’s throats.
NOTES

4 Speech at Shahi Bag, 18 March 1922, on a charge of sedition, in Young India 23 March 1922
5 Letter from Birmingham Jail, Alabama, 16 April 1963, in Atlantic Monthly August 1963, p. 78
CATHOLIC TEACHING ON REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCE: IS THERE A BETTER WAY FORWARD FOR MORAL THEOLOGY?

By

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In a recent interview, the distinguished Irish writer, John Banville was challenged that he had not written about the “Troubles”, the 30-year war in Northern Ireland, giving rise to over 3,000 deaths and countless people maimed or injured. In response, the writer began to talk about a novel which he published in 1990 called The Book of Evidence:

I realised many years after I had written it that The Book of Evidence was, in many ways, about Ireland because it was about the failure of imagination and the failure to imagine other people into existence. You can only plant a bomb in a crowded street if the people walking around in the street are not really human. And what happened in Ireland in the last 30 years was a great failure of the imagination ....

This is a suggestive comment about the very nature of morality, in particular the power of moral imagination. It has a direct bearing on conflicts in many parts of the world, involving the use of violence by the State and by groups opposed to the State (The I.R.A. in Northern Ireland). It is worth probing a little to see what John Banville has in mind.

In The Book of Evidence, the narrator, Freddie Montgomery, steals an antique painting from the house of a wealthy friend. Then in a state of impatience and rage, he murders a young woman, Josie Bell, a worker in the house, who has come upon him making away with the picture. He strikes her several times with a hammer and is
deaf to her pleas for mercy. Finally, alone in prison, Freddie is driven to wonder about what he has done and what he has made of himself. He cannot say that he did not mean to kill her - only, that he is not clear as to when he began to mean it. He recalls the day when he first saw her standing “with the blue and gold of summer at her back”. But for him, she did not really exist, no more that

“when she crouched in the car and I hit her again and again and her blood spattered the window. This is the worst, the essential sin, I think, the one for which there will be no forgiveness: that I never imagined her vividly enough, that I never made her be there sufficiently, that I did not make her live. Yes, that failure of imagination is my real crime, the ones that made the others possible. What I told that policeman is true—I killed her because I could kill her, and I could kill her because for me she was not alive”.

This is the heart of the matter. Transfer this failure of imagination to politics, how we think about freedom and justice, including our enemies. If we do not imagine other people into existence, then we must relate to them as abstractions, representatives of a class, an ideology, agents of “imperialism” or “terrorism”, “infidels” or “Islamic fundamentalists.”

Limits To The Use Of Force

For many countries, Moral teachers have placed strict limits on the use of violent force to achieve moral ends. At the core of the Catholic tradition is a strong sense of justice: the State’s obligation to defend the common good and the general obligation to oppose tyranny and other kinds of injustice. However, the Catholic Church has taught traditionally that violent struggle can never be just except that it is the only way to resist intolerable tyranny, extending over a long period of time. To resist all other injustices, one is obliged to use non-violent action, appropriate to the structures and
institutions which need to be changed.

In this article, I will present the main elements of Catholic teaching about the use of physical force for the sake of justice, freedom, some other moral end. I will then highlight some of the significant features and refinements in the official Catholic Tradition over the last thirty years or so. I will conclude by suggesting some ways in which the tradition needs to develop in a more fruitful theological direction.

*Catholic Teaching On Violent Resistance*

The substance of the Catholic Tradition about violent resistance to injustice is found in Paul VI’s encyclical on development, *Populorum Progressio* (1967):

31. There are certainly situations whose injustice cries to heaven. When whole populations destitute of necessities live in a state of dependence barring them from all initiative and responsibility, and all opportunity to advance culturally and share in social and political life, recourse to violence, as a means to right these wrongs to human dignity, is a grave temptation.

32. We know, however, that revolutionary uprising—save where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country—produces new injustices, throws more elements out of balance and brings on new disasters. A real evil should not be fought against at the cost of greater misery.

The substance of paragraph 31 on the moral legitimacy in certain circumstances of a revolutionary uprising against the State, is a restatement in modern terms of St. Thomas Aquinas’ teaching about lawful tyrannicide. The main features of St. Thomas’ argument are
found in Pope Paul’s letter: the presumption that the purpose of
government is to safeguard fundamental personal rights, and to
guarantee the common good; in certain circumstances, the prima
facie obligation to obey authority is outweighed by the obligation
to eliminate an intolerable tyranny; a strong distrust, for pragmatic
reasons, of armed force as a means; a sober understanding of the
most likely effect of a revolutionary uprising, that is, new injustices,
and damaging fragmentation in the society.

Lastly, Pope Paul VI said that the cost of eliminating the evil
must be weighed against the misery in the life of the community for
whom the armed struggle is being carried on. There is a recognition
here that there are moral evils which we must oppose effectively.
However, the principle as stated here questions the assumption in
much contemporary discussion, of a direct link between armed
uprising and a desired state of freedom.

*Populorum Progressio* takes very seriously the evil which
prompts many people to take up arms. There is no mistaking the
moral passion which pervades the entire encyclical. Pope Paul VI
called attention to morally outrageous situations; he called for “bold
transformations, innovations that go deep”. The determining
horizon of the encyclical was the concept of “development”,
specified throughout as “integral human development.”
Nevertheless, in Paul VI’s view, the goal of human development
cannot be reached by revolutionary armed force, which may inflict
even greater damages on the community than the tyrannical regime.

The argument here is a pragmatic appeal to widespread human
experience of armed force as a means to bring about necessary
political change. Pope Paul VI intended to underline the ethical
elusiveness of the concept of “revolutionary uprising”, its capacity
to produce new injustices, and the possibility that it may not realize
the human good which justice demands—initiative and
responsibility for destitute people, opportunity to advance culturally
and share in social and political life. However, Pope Paul VI
clearly acknowledged the possibility of a justified revolution.
A year after *Populorum Progressio* was published, the 2nd General Conference of Latin American Bishops took place in August/September, 1968, in Bogota and Medellin, Colombia. This conference made a lasting contribution to the Church’s understanding of injustice and the complex moral problems around the concept of violence. The Medellin Conference introduced new concepts and terms which helped to throw fresh light on the engagement of theology with social and political realities. In some ways, the proceedings of this conference have since become part of the Church’s official teaching.

Medellin departed from the traditional preoccupation with social order in past Church teaching. This was replaced by a critical account of the preconditions for peace:

Peace is above all, a work of justice. It presupposes and requires the establishment of a just order in which men and women can fulfil themselves as men and women, where their dignity is respected, their aspirations satisfied, their access to truth recognized, their personal freedom guaranteed, an order where man is not an object but an agent of his own history...¹

The Medellin Conference gave wide currency to the notion of “institutionalized violence” in Catholic moral debate. The term was used to evaluate what the Conference called “a structural deficiency of industry and agriculture, of national and international economy, of cultural and political life”. All of this amounted to a condition of dependence and violation of human rights. “This situation demands all-embracing, courageous, urgent and profoundly renovating transformations...”

The Latin American bishops wanted to break decisively with certain disabling features of the Catholic tradition. For a long time, this tradition was marked by a profound fear of civil disorder, along with a narrowly religious preoccupation with ideal possibilities.
Medellin sought to end the implicit alliance between the Catholic Church and powerful interest groups. Some of these groups used the term “violence” to stigmatise the behaviour of those who opposed their dominant positions. It was necessary to release the moral discussion of force from a one-sided concentration on isolated physical actions, isolated from social and political contexts. The Latin American Bishops wanted to make very clear that massive social injustice is a major cause of violence. Hence, the “evil” of violence cannot be located uniquely in the actions of those who try to overcome injustice by using armed force. The term “institutionalised violence” describes and evaluates the potential for violence which may be present in legal, economic, political and social institutions. A heavy burden of responsibility is placed on those who maintain an unjust order through violent repression. The Christian cannot allow the sense of outrage, provoked by acts of killing and maiming, to be trapped in an exclusive preoccupation with “reactive violence”—the actions of those who are reacting to the violence of the State.

Moral ambiguities

The Medellin Conference mentioned the dangerous ambiguity attached to the use of armed force as a means for change. Initial noble impulses evaporate too easily in clouds of revolutionary rhetoric. The serious moral problem is the steady diminution of personal responsibility for violent force, once this particular choice has been made. The choice for armed resistance may also reduce or cancel out the freedom to undertake many fruitful, nonviolent actions which are immediately possible. The Latin American Conference concluded:

If we consider then, the totality of the circumstances of our countries, and if we take into account the Christian preference for peace, the enormous difficulty of a civil war, the logic of violence, the atrocities it engenders, the risk of provoking
foreign intervention, illegitimate as it may be, the difficulty of building a regime of justice and freedom while participating in a process of violence, we earnestly desire that the dynamism of the awakened and organized community be put to the service of justice and peace.\(^3\)

This is a highly significant passage. The themes mentioned deserve close attention. "Armed revolution" or armed struggle, is a very complex social movement, which cannot be evaluated morally in a straightforward way. In the midst of violent uprisings, rational intentions to use armed force strictly in proportion to the evil to be eliminated, are overtaken rapidly by other factors. These belong to the very nature of an armed struggle.

The Latin American Bishops distinguished their position clearly from passivity or acceptance of the injustices inflicted on poor people. Instead, they called for a bold, new struggle which involved a transformation of the theology and pastoral practice of the Church. Change will come not from appeals to the powerful in society to be converted but must come from the people who are most in need of justice.

**Puebla And Nonviolent Action**

Ten years later, the 3\(^{rd}\) General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla, 1979, concluded their reflections on the use of force with a further moral demand: that Christians should "use all possible means to promote the implementation of non-violent tactics in the effort to re-establish justice in economic and socio-political relations."\(^4\)

There is a hint of another vision of morality underlying the general argument against armed force to achieve change. The Puebla Conference referred to Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 36, making the point that morality is not simply identical with external behaviour; it also includes "soul-making". The best structures and systems can become inhuman if *human inclinations*
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are not improved.

There is a very substantial point here about the nature of morality, about the deepest sources of our actions. Morality is concerned with the “inner” world of instincts, feelings, inclinations, attitudes—what lies behind and in between actions and prompts them. It is this area which needs to be purified. It generally has a determining influence on the means we choose to achieve our goals, particularly in times of conflict. However, it is this inner moral world which is corrupted by the dynamics of armed struggles.

Over three decades, the conflict in Northern Ireland has corrupted moral language and imagination. Paramilitary spokesmen have suppressed moral sensibilities to create a free space for acts of “liberating” violence. A human being who dies a painful death in a bombing incident or is maimed for life, is transformed into a “casualty of war”, to be “regretted” like all casualties.

Moral Arguments And The Christian Story

At the core of the Catholic Moral tradition are the values of justice, the defence of the common good, and non-collaboration with tyranny. What is in question is the structure of the arguments about means. It is clear that the Catholic Social magisterium has been against armed struggle; it has only allowed for the possibility of armed force in extreme circumstances. However, the opposition in the magisterium to armed struggle has been mounted largely on pragmatic grounds. The argumentation is mostly detached from the story from which the Christian Community derives its basic character and convictions.

We may recall here a very suggestive passage from Aquinas’ question on war in the Summa. Fighting in war, he argues, is quite inconsistent with the duties of a bishop or a cleric, because all holy orders are ordained for the ministry of the altar in which the passion of Christ is represented sacramentally. So their office is not to kill, or to shed blood, but to be ready to shed their own blood for Christ, to do in deed what they portray at the altar.
The historically conditioned nature of this text does not take from the important suggestion contained in St. Thomas' answer: that there may be a fundamental congruence between the passion of Christ, including the manner of his death, and a moral imperative to refrain from physical force as a means to achieve good ends.

This text invites us to engage with the deepest roots of human behaviour and the nature of freedom. Armed struggles corrupt persons and whole communities; they congeal into lasting feelings and attitudes of hatred, bitterness and vengeance. The Christian story centred around the passion and death of Christ, summons us into an entirely new freedom; freedom from the fantasies generated by hatred and organised killing, that is, the realism of compassion. What is at stake here is a quality of consistent attention to reality, inspired by love. The person who attends in this way to reality is going to hunger and thirst for justice. Attention to the demands of justice, motivated by love, leads to a particular kind of character. He or she is equipped with the necessary virtues or skills to work for justice in a habitual, nonviolent and creative way. The myth of the necessity of violence to achieve change is all pervasive. To put an end to the spiral of violence demands creative thinking and action.

NOTES


2 Ibid. p. 461.

3 Ibid.


6 Summa Theologiae, 2a 2ae, Qu. 40.2.
POPULAR RELIGIOSITY IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

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It may be good to start by clarifying the terms I use in this essay. By popular religiosity I understand the non-structured, non-expert and most common attitude or response to the sacred by the generality of people belonging to a socio-religious group. The response is immediate and in tune with everyday life-problems common to ordinary (non-elite) members of a social group, and possibly arises from ineradicable seedbed of ancestral memory (traditional religious culture) that Christian theological syntheses and centralised liturgy, for example, cannot easily set aside. In my definition I emphasise that insofar as popular religion is not a structured product of experts, then religious hierarchs who normally ‘police the truth’ through imposing official views of the faith and supervising official practice in assemblies do not have real control over it. Popular Christian religion in Africa fuses Christian and traditional religious culture ensuring the preservation of both. For example, among Igbo Catholics of Nigeria the popularity of sodalities like the Legion of Mary, St Jude, St Anthony, Sacred Heart, and so on, that involve prayer for all needs and fellowship, arises from merging piety introduced by Irish missionaries with the cells of associations that form part and parcel of Igbo socio-religious organisation. Catholics who have more rituals than Protestants favour popular religious practices like the use of holy water, candles, and holy oil.

However specific African Christian popular religiosity focuses on foundational aspects of African religious culture that were either condemned by missionaries as ‘pagan’ or simply marginalized in Christian doctrine and life. This may explain the popularity of these practices in all Christian denominations including radical
Pentecostalism. Two presuppositions inform the practices: [1] the “function of religion as instrument of integral health”, and [2] the dominance of the “spirit-dimension in the human religious world ensuring the happy mingling between spirits and humans”. These are crucial in any assessment of popular religious sentiments in Africa; they harbour the core of ancestral religion [African traditional religion – ATR]. That these practices are found among Christian groups who accuse one another of heresy projects an interesting African “hermeneutics of suspicion” towards cerebral ‘elite religion’ in favour of religion that solidly plants the human person ‘bodily’ in her/his world.

African Indigenous (or Independent) Churches (AICs) that started emerging from the end of the 19th century led the way in reintegrating these profound orientations of African religious culture into Christianity. Consequently, what appears as popular religion in the mainline churches—healing, ecstatic experience and spirit-possession—is part and parcel of the organisational structure (Church Order) or liturgy of the AICs. In other words, what is marginal, non-expert, non-central in the mainline churches, is core style in the AICs. They are tolerated in the Catholic Church, but have been entrenched within the very structures of AICs. Since AICs have successfully integrated these into the structure of their Church Order and liturgy, they indicate the way other churches could discern these sentiments as contributions to contextualization or inculturation.

On the other hand the “new African Pentecostals”, militant or “born again Christians”, radically evangelical, popular with the youth, condemn both Catholic and AIC culture-related practices. But they presuppose the same ancestral religious universe in their exorcisms and healing rites. Their popular appeal through “gospel music” and extension of the “sacred space” of worship to include public transport systems in Nigeria and Ghana, for example, make them important for any review of popular religion in Africa.

This paper focuses on religion, “integral health” and “spirit-experience” to point out (a) their successful integration within
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AICs, (b) the ‘pastoral tactics’ of the Catholic Church, and (c) the need to make them central to Catholic pastoral and theology.

Christanity as therapeutic Religion

The emergence of what are generally called Aladura [i.e. Prayer-people; Zionists in South Africa] churches in Nigeria dates perhaps to the 1918 influenza epidemic. The epidemic made such an impact on Nigerian Christians that they felt the need to rely more on prayer than on medication. Cells of prayer groups emerged. They were called Aladura (prayer-people). They criticised the mainline churches for not praying enough. Subsequent emergence and flowering of AICs like Cherubim and Seraphim, Christ Apostolic Church, Church of the Lord (Aladura), or Celestial Church of Christ, in Western Nigeria or Benin Republic, but spread all over West Africa and even Europe, have prayer as a common denominator. God works wonders (takes care of the everyday) in prayer.

One example of the AIC holistic approach to everyday life through prayer will illustrate our topic. In Nigeria the Church of the Lord (Aladura) provides space, time, ritual and therapy for pregnant women. From the 6th month of pregnancy the expectant mother could reside within the ‘parish enclosure’ or ‘faith-home.’ This does three things: it gives her security from attacks of evil people and evil spirits/forces, it allows her time to follow more closely the numerous prayers and services (spiritual exercises) going on in the parish, and it leaves her in the care of experienced midwives, who supervise this ministry and impart instruction about childbirth and childcare. ‘Security from evil forces’ is top on the list because passage through pregnancy and delivery is replete with crises. It is a time “…when a woman is especially susceptible to the attacks of witchcraft and enemies, but prayer and faith, assisted sometimes by a dream or vision, set her free from the resultant inhibitions and tensions, so that labour is facilitated.”

The above example shows how the Christian religion is
functioning in a structured way to solve problems relating to all aspects of life. Catholics do not yet have such a popular integration of Christianity into everyday life. But AICs in this *popular holistic approach to the sacred* imbibed the genius of ATR, an ancestral religion that has long-tested and efficient structures to respond to the everyday demands of life. Consequently illness, disharmony within families, all threats to life, economic and political problems are subjected to socio-ritual rhetoric. In the ‘parish enclosure’ of the *Celestial Church of Christ*, Benin Republic, totally sealed off from attacks of evil spirits, the sick and distressed are lodged for given periods, pregnant women, people with crises of relationship in their families are asked by *visionaries* or rather *seers* (a *ministry* dominated by women) to spend days of seclusion and prayer within the enclosure.\(^2\) When AICs proclaim, “Our churches are not only churches but hospitals; bring therefore your problems of health and need, and God, the great physician, will heal you”, they give a Christian response to foundational African religious concerns. Their churches are ‘healing homes’. Christianity provides an environment for the integral health of Christians.

What does this say to the mainline churches, precisely to the Catholic Church? First, the church leadership reacts because members are lost to “healing homes.” Second they realise the need to confront all life-problems religiously and in a structured way. To realise this, they must abandon their ‘fire-fighting tactic’ and develop a ‘holistic pastoral strategy’ in response to variety of life-problems that daily challenge members of their church; a ‘pastoral strategy, truly Christian and truly African’. Hospitals that localise illness to ‘parts of the body’ are good; they are appreciated; but they are inadequate ‘pastoral tactic’. They fail to link intimately the cosmic, spiritual, social, economic and political in the one struggle to ‘display life in full’—the meaningful response to the ineradicable everyday search for harmony that structures African religious view of the universe.

Spirited attempts made to respond to this foundational concern of religion in Africa are only *individual initiatives of pastors*. For
example, the prayer ministry of Fr. Goddy Ikeobi, started in 1973 in Onitsha archdiocese (Nigeria), has spread all over Nigeria. In Elele (near the oil city of Port Harcourt), Enugu and Lagos, priests gifted in prayer-healing are solicited by Catholics, non-Catholics, and people of other faiths. While Ikeobi refuses to provide lodging for the sick or distressed within the parish compound, Emmanuel Ede (in Elele) has effectively converted his ‘Catholic Prayer Ministry’ centre into an “enclosure” with hospital, counselling services, and asylum for the mentally deranged. However, Elele is an exception; it is not integrated as ‘pastoral strategy’ of Port Harcourt diocese. The Nigerian Church hierarchy gives tacit approval to the Prayer Ministry because it reduces the flow of Catholics to “healing homes”. Many priests and laity in Nigeria consider healing and deliverance ministry as integral to pastoral work. Blessing of holy water, holy oil, etc., especially after Sunday mass, to intensify prayer in the homes, is popular. But there is surveillance of priest-healers. They are feared because of the personality cult that could develop around them. One of them left the priesthood and the Catholic Church, similar to the Malawian priest-healer who recently abandoned his diocese and the Catholic Church. That there have not been more schisms in Nigeria shows the level of tolerance by the hierarchy.

The growing Impact of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal

This movement in Prayer-healing ministry is an added challenge for the Church to embrace courageously the therapeutic dimension of religion like AICs. The archdiocese of Kumasi in Ghana has monthly healing masses. For the diocese this is an effort to make prayer-healing normal in Catholic worship, a way of handling religiously everyday life-problems. Many parishes in Nigeria adopt similar monthly and even weekly ‘healing masses.’ This is still far from the “boldness” of AICs. John Mbiti of Kenya called for a clear “health ministry” in the church and an appointment of “Christian medicine-men and diviners”. On the one hand this helps to check
the invasion of the healing ministry by quacks. On the other hand it re-emphasises that African Christianity must integrate into its structure the unbreakable link between religion and healthcare. Eric de Rosny, Jesuit missiologist initiated in Cameroon as ‘seer’ (ndimsi) according to the canons of ATR, has taken the therapeutic dimension of religion many steps further. He insists that ATR instead of being called ‘African Traditional Religion’ should rather correctly be called ‘African Therapeutic Religion.’ And in this therapeutic work the nganga (dibia or babalawo “Africa’s traditional medical practitioners”) stand out and continue to command influence even after the collapse of all patterns of African socio-politico-economic structures precisely because of their capacity to recapitulate and reintegrate all aspects of African life and world – cosmic, social, psychological, religious, and pharmaceutical [African medicinal herbs] – into one great struggle against violence, against the enemies of life, especially against witchcraft and sorcery, in order to re-establish order in life. Catholic pastors and protestant ministers, despite their commendable [individual] efforts in this direction have not successfully integrated all these structures into the Christian response as the AICs.

The AICs’ successful integration points to emerging radical African reinterpretation of Christianity. This emergent reinterpretation is closer to Jesus of the Gospels and the Apostles than to the later development of Western Christianity. Jesus’ [and Apostles’] proclamation of the Kingdom, accompanied by deeds of power, is not utterly discontinuous with ATR concern to provide rhythm in ‘structures’ of everyday normal life: ritual-healing and healthcare are one with religion. If the Church in Nigeria and in Africa encourages this reinterpretation of Christianity, it displays a religion that is more biblical and less aseptic, closer to the concerns of Africans, an intensive fellowship that does not deteriorate into a sect. Here Christian denominations and even other religious groups like Moslems enjoy a common ground for dialogue of life. In this dialogue of life (as opposed to intolerance and violence) all
religions planted in Africa learn from the canons of ATR to deploy the cosmic, social, psychological, religious, and pharmaceutical dimensions of the world into one great struggle against violence, against the enemies of life, especially against witchcraft and sorcery, to establish harmony in life.

Reintegrating World of Humans and of Spirits

The wholeness that popular religion clamours for in Nigeria and Africa is the sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God dominates biblical religion. The Church that emerged from the Pentecost experience is a Church under the regime of the Holy Spirit—the promised Gift of the Lord. Similarly, the resilience of ATR is based on the dimension of 'spirit'—the key to understanding West African religious universe. West Africans move in and out of the spiritual world with relative ease, humans and spirits intermingling. Today in Nigeria and all over West Africa, there is no dimension of religious practice as popular as the 'manifestation of the Spirit and his powers'.

Once again compared to the mainline churches, the AICs have given unlimited hospitality to the regime of the Spirit. They are 'Spirit-churches'. They accuse the mainline churches that regulate the Spirit's actions, of suppressing the gifts of the Spirit. AICs with sweet songs accompanied by drumming and dancing delight in boisterous invitation of the "Holy Spirit [to] come down". The Charismatic renewal movements (Catholic or Protestant) and Pentecostals share similar views of the Holy Spirit and reject restrictions on the Spirit's manifestation that are central to Church doctrine and life. Dominated by youthful Christians, and displaying a 'dance-able' liturgy spiced with 'gospel music', they are positioned to re-evangelise Africa under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Market squares, stadiums, and commuter-buses, are considered along with churches as the space for celebration and evangelisation.

The Catholic Church is not outdone by the claimants to the Holy
Spirit. It gives limited recognition to the Charismatic movement. In Nigeria bishops are counted among members. But rules for charismatic prayer must be followed; e.g. merging traditional piety (like Marian devotion) with charismatic prayer. Furthermore, Isseleuku diocese runs a “School of Evangelisation” where agents are trained in Charismatic or evangelical styles of preaching. Catholic Charismatic ‘Gospel Bands’ compare well with evangelical counterparts. However, the Catholic Church has to confront aspects of spirit-experience that remain popular.

The Spirit-experience is fully integrated within the structures of AICs. AICs “synthesise” the ATR world of spirits in their [spirits’] operation into the biblical Holy Spirit. The multiplicity of ATR spirits that dominates West African religion [denounced by Pentecostals] is subjected among AICs to “higher order integration in a Generalized Holy Spirit”. Not only is the Holy Spirit manifest by possession, ecstasy, glossolalia, but also He fully controls operations in the Church Order. AICs’ leaders and those called to ministry as visionaries [seers] had revelation of their vocation through dreams, visions/auditions, and prophecy. For example, the vision of Samuel Oschoffa (founder of the Celestial Churches of Christ – with headquarters in Benin Republic) on 29th September 1947, which was decisive for his vocation, was overpowering for him. He heard a voice saying:

Samuel, Samuel, Samuel the Blessed has confided a mission in you on the part of Jesus Christ – because many Christians die without having seen the presence of Christ, because illness drives them towards fetish and diabolic things – and they are thus marked for death and hell. I give you the power to make miracles of healing through the power of the Holy Spirit.5

Among AICs, when the Holy Spirit takes “possession” of visionaries, these act as mediums narrating to people the words of the Spirit (in the language of angels) that are often carefully recorded. They predict or identify sickness, accomplish faith
healing, solve human existential problems, and bring success to business of clients. The Spirit’s manifestation has a clear social agenda – to resolve life-problems – fulfilling the therapeutic function of religion. In the mainline churches the gift of prophecy is limited to the proclamation of the message of the Gospel; but AICs freely enter into the problems of individuals to divine, predict, warn, and provide healing services. AICs thus display religious features normally associated with OT prophets (like Elijah and Elisha), and ATR priest/diviner-healers.

The Catholic Church distrusts aspects of the above Spirit-experience and refuses to welcome it. The Church suspects trance and opposes the depersonalising aspect of ‘possession’ [loss of memory]. But AICs, Pentecostals, and Charismatics approve of these and claim that they are consonant with the Bible. AICs further insist on verifiable criteria for discernment of spirits – every manifestation of the Spirit has a social agenda, the common good.

The Catholic opposition to AIC practice should be taken with a pinch of salt. The process through which Catholic priest-healers discern good and bad spirits/forces, exorcise evil spirits/forces, and elicit confession from witches, clearly assumes the same ‘map of the spiritual world’ with which the AICs operate. This world is fundamentally ATR-specific – where good and bad spirits/forces either favour or are against life. AICs have successfully synthesised good spirits into one Holy Spirit. In liturgy the Holy Spirit descends and takes possession just as the ATR spirits (orisa in Yoruba) descend and take possession; but always with a social agenda. Catholic charismatic prayer groups that tilt towards the AIC pneumatology meet official opposition. Pentecostals denounce any covenanting with spirits of ATR. But both supporters and opponents share the same view of the spiritual world.

The rootedness of all in ancestral spirituality explains the popular appeal to the Spirit among Charismatic renewal movements, AICs and Pentecostals. This popular appeal to the Spirit challenges the Church to redefine Christian spirituality and mysticism. Instead of the Jewish-Christian ascent of the soul to
God, or the Buddhist descent of the soul into itself, ATR mysticism prefers prayer for the descent of the spirit into the beloved to ‘dance’ for the good of the community. In this way possession is taken for granted, nay demanded, by the African religious imagination. AICs are in the lead in making Christians recapture the perception of relationship with ‘spirit’ as play that makes both humans and spirits ‘laugh’ for the transformation of the world. Through this popular spread of African Christianity, African Christian imagination, like the patient artist, is carving a new image of Christianity, whose display in worship covers every area of human experience; a therapeutic religion that creates an environment for the happy intermingling of the human and spiritual, to free the world of evil forces, converting Christian religion into an instrument of social transformation.

NOTES


THE ROLE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION: AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

By
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What role can forgiveness play in the process of reconciliation? This is a crucial question that needs to be addressed in contemporary African societies. When relationship has been damaged or made impossible, how can a society be reconciled and totally restored?

A Nigerian movie "Odo echi," depicts a pathetic situation where a man Odoechi held a whole village to ransom. He possessed a mysterious power to kill and indeed killed any successful person or simply anybody that challenged him - from a newborn child to an old titled man, including young successful men and lovers. He did not even spare his own children and wife.

What strikes any viewer who knows about African traditional societies is the total absence of traditional structures for conflict resolution and for the restoration of harmony after a "great" disorder. Though some people, titled men included, suspected his occult activities, at no moment did they come together to search for solutions to the total despair of the entire community. The story ended in an astonishing, yet, disturbing way: a confrontation between Odoechi and a catholic priest in prayer turned to the favour of the priest. When the priest’s prayers overpowered Odoechi, he fell down, confessed his crimes, and died instantly.

As it is in films, some facts were exaggerated of course. However, nobody would doubt that it depicts the plight of many individuals and families in contemporary Nigerian and African societies. People commit odious crimes and move around boldly. In Odoechi’s case, a Christian would be tempted to celebrate the victory of the Christian faith in the living God, but the ending of

this story cannot be admitted as totally Christian. This story raises a lot of questions. What happened to the social and Christian structures for conflict resolution in and for the healing of a society? If Odoechi did not die, would he have been forgiven and re-admitted into the society without atoning for his crimes? If he were to atone for his crimes, would his atonement be enough to match the gravity of his crimes? These questions can be narrowed down to the meaning of Forgiveness/Reconciliation and its connection with Truth and Reparation.

My contention is that the vindictive death of the criminal, which may satisfy the modern taste for revenge, does not correspond to the African traditional approach to communal healing; neither does it align with the demands of the Christian faith. African Christians must make efforts to propose another way of dealing with such crisis in our societies.

Let us start by examining the way reconciliation works in the African traditional societies. Then we shall see how it can be prolonged by the Christian notion of forgiveness as a necessary ingredient for reconciliation.

RECONCILIATION IN AFRICAN TRADITIONS

Most African traditional societies have established modalities that guarantee the restoration of harmony after an odious crime and disorder. That was the case of Okonkwo who was forced to exile in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. The practice of reconciliation depends on the understanding of the human person as relationship in community. It forms part of a conflict resolution process directed towards the healing of the individual and the society.

*The Human Person as a Relationship in Community*

The community is very important in African traditions. Africans live in community. The individual person is a network of relationships. The best word to define this network is “relatedness”\(^3\).
The Role of Forgiveness in the Process of Reconciliation

It is said among the Igbo that before a birth, the individual already pre-existed in the world of the spirits. When she/he comes to the world, she/he could be the coming back to life (re-incarnation) of an ancestor. Therefore in order to live well, the individual must constantly negotiate the tension between his/her own wishes and that of the community. Hence, the Igbo people say, "Ife kwulu, Ife ozo kwudebe ya". This is another way of saying that no one is an Island. I am because we are.

This African concept of the human person always poses a problem to the West. This explains partly the misunderstanding between African and Western countries as regards the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1945. African nations feared that this declaration would consecrate "western individualism". They ratified it only after adding "The African Charter for human and peoples' rights". This Charter recognizes the fundamental rights of the individual and at the same time considers that, to benefit from the said rights implies accomplishing one's obligations to the community. Among the obligations are:

- obligations to the family, the society, the State and the International Community;
- the obligation to preserve the harmonious development of the family and to work towards its cohesion.

The realization of one's life follows the logic of a harmonious vision that encompasses the individual, the community and the cosmos. The society is ready to fight any disorder that endangers this harmony. A way of dealing with disorder is the process of reconciliation.
The Process of Reconciliation

The process of reconciliation can be activated at diverse situations in life, especially in case of conflicts between individuals or groups. It can also intervene during different (passage rites) rites of passage: birth, initiation, marriage, funerals, investiture of a chief, new yam festivals, New Year festivals etc. Let us concentrate on conflict resolution, now.

The most important element of conflict resolution is the exchange of words, what the French speaking African countries call “la palabre”, or long term dialogue. This deliberation follows some steps. First, there is the period of complaint. Persons, who consider themselves as victims, complain to a person of influence recognized by both the accuser and the accused. The person of influence works through mediators. The mediators conduct an inquiry and gather information from both sides. Sometimes to find evidence, supernatural forces: ancestors and oracles may be consulted to identify who is telling the truth.

After the inquiry, comes the public confrontation that resembles that of a court of justice. This enables the belligerents to voice out the accumulated violence. The mediators, who are actually the jury, deliver a form of judgment after deliberation.

If the evidence cannot be established through these means, the people involved could be asked to go through an ordeal or trial. The result is considered to be a divine judgment. The less dangerous ordeal in the Igbo tradition is the taking of oath. This can be done by holding a palm leave, or by placing hands on a sacred object representing a supernatural entity. One can also swear on the blood of an animal or simply on the honour of one’s family. In more serious situations, the suspects might be sentenced to the highest degree of ordeal. This degree is usually rare but real. At this level of ordeal, the suspects might be required to put their lives at risk to prove their innocence. In some areas they could be asked to drink a poison, or jump over a deep well. If the suspects survive the ordeal, they are considered innocent. Whoever does not survive is
The Role of Forgiveness in the Process of Reconciliation

considered to be guilty.

If one is found guilty he is bound to atone for his offence or crime. The sanction varies according to the offence: a sum of money, a fowl, a goat, etc. In extreme cases, the offender can be ostracized from the community. In Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart, Okonkwo was sent to exile in his maternal home.

It could be interesting to note that, in most cases, the sanction is accompanied with the possibility of restoring dialogue in the society. The prosecution process does not seek necessarily to establish the truth. Sometimes the truth may be sacrificed for the peace of the society. This justice is beyond what may be considered as legal. The ceremony of reconciliation that marks the end of such a long process tries to purify the whole society and reopens the way to life. During the cleansing ceremony, the leader or an elder in the assembly exhorts both parties. He blames the offender as well as the victim. The latter is also considered to have disrupted to society’s harmony for accepting to be drawn into the cycle of violence. Among the Beti of Cameroon, the culprit renders apologies to the assembly. At the same time, the offended renders apologies as well. If the victim receives any type of settlement, like, goat from the culprit, he shares it with him and the assembly.

At the end of the ceremony, both parties resolve to guarantee the peace and harmony of the society. The reconciliation may be symbolically sealed with a simple act of communalism or mutual acceptance of one another. The symbolic act may be in the form of drinking from the same cup, eating from the same dish. After this, living together becomes possible once more. One has to note that at the end of the ceremony, people are appointed to make sure that both parties respect their engagement.
The Burden of Memory

From the above analysis, one can see that African traditions insist on remorse and reparation as preludes to reconciliation. It is noteworthy that this process assigns responsibilities and calls crime a crime. As Wole Soyinka would put it, “justice assigns responsibility and few would deny that justice is an essential ingredient of social cohesion….Justice constitutes the first condition of humanity”. However a question has to be asked: is this process enough for the healing of individual and collective memories? The burden of memory continues to weigh on someone who has gone through a trauma. Is it always necessary to obtain reparation before breaking the chain of violence? How does the society help one to forgive? The word “forgiveness” may sound inappropriate to some people. However, it is necessary to forgive in order to liberate the memory. Forgiveness can inaugurate a new life, a new history. One must not be forced to forgive. Forgiveness is a free act from a magnanimous heart. The notion of forgiveness could be a unique contribution of Christianity to the process of reconciliation in our societies.

CHRISTIAN PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

Christian practice of reconciliation can be illustrated first with Jesus’ practice and teaching and second with the experience from the Truth and Reconciliation commission in South Africa.

Jesus, the Image of the merciful God

No one can ignore Jesus’ plea on the cross on behalf of those who crucified him: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing.”(Lk 23, 34) This offer of forgiveness is in accordance with his life. In his life, Jesus revealed himself as the presence of God’s infinite mercy. In a touching way the Gospel of Matthew 26, 36-46 tells how Jesus handled the disciples who abandoned him. The
scene depicts the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is left alone to mourn. The chief priests and political leaders are tracking him. Most of his disciples disappeared. Peter who earlier pledged total allegiance to him (Matt 26, 30), finally disowned him (Matt 26, 69-75) In the garden of Gethsemane, Peter and the other disciples were totally asleep. According to human logic, Jesus could no longer count on them.

Nevertheless, the astonishing part of this story is that Jesus never lost confidence in his disciples. One would expect a man who suffered that much, to close up himself, or even look for a way to retaliate. But the Gospels says that Jesus kept coming back to his disciples seeking their solidarity, asking them to keep awake with him for at least one hour. He could not have done that, if he did not believe in the possibility of redemption. Jesus never reduces the worth of a man or woman to his or her sins and offences. Jesus gives the other the chance to repent and begin anew.

After the resurrection, Jesus took the initiative to forgive and rehabilitate Peter. In John 21,15-19, Peter was dumbfounded by Jesus’ humility and generous offer of forgiveness. Mindful of his denial, Peter no longer thought himself capable of loving Christ. When Jesus asked him twice, “Simon Iōannou agapās me” (“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”). Peter could only answer, “Yes, Lord; you know that I have some affection for you (philō se). Unfortunately, different Bible translations do not render the nuance between Jesus’ vocabulary and that of Peter. The former used the word Agape (total love, even unto death), while the later used the word, philō (simple affection that one has for a friend). The third time, Jesus abandoned his own word “agapē” and borrowed Peter’s word “philō”: “Peter...do you have some affection for me?” Then Peter said, “Lord, you know everything, you know that I have some affection for you”. What astonished Peter is the fact that Jesus was able to lower himself down to Peter’s level. Moreover Jesus’ gesture was accompanied with a renewal of his trust in Peter: “Feed my flock”.

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Jesus’ life is really the revelation of God’s humanity. When he says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5,44) he is not giving out mere theory, he is initiating his disciples into a new style of life that he practiced himself. The Gospel account shows that Peter finally gave all his life to the service of the Jesus’ message of Love. He even died as a martyr. That shows the power of forgiveness. One, who benefits from an unmerited love, becomes capable of unlimited love.

Only unlimited love can restore harmony in a wounded relationship. God wanted the harmony of His entire creation. This is evident in the creation account in the Book of Genesis (Gen 1). When Cain disrupted the harmony by slaughtering his brother, Abel. God intervened to teach humans how to break the cycle of violence. After rebuking Cain, God placed a hand on him and forbade anyone to threaten his life (Gen 4, 1-16)

No Future without Forgiveness

There is no doubt that Jesus’ teaching and practice influenced the experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Those who committed odious crimes under the apartheid regime were asked to confess their crimes and the offenders were asked to forgive. By doing so, South Africans saved their society from total chaos.

In The Burden of Memory Wole Soyinka distances himself from this process. One of reason he gave is that Forgiveness was offered before the proof in other that Truth might be revealed. By doing so, said Soyinka, the South African process excluded, a priori, the notion of criminality and thus responsibility. Soyinka contends that this practice of forgiveness is not enough to reconcile warring parties in a community. He sees in it, the influence of Christian theology (The truth shall set you free). But Truth, he said, is never enough to guarantee reconciliation. Restoration and reparation must accompany it.

While accepting Soyinka’s assertion about truth, I would not go to that extent as regards reparation. We can learn something from
The Role of Forgiveness in the Process of Reconciliation  

the South African experience. Archbishop Desmond Tutu and other Christians who supervised this commission preferred the logic of forgiveness to that of reparatory justice. In a wonderful account of his experience in this commission,12 Desmond Tutu’s key word was, “There is no future without forgiveness.” It is not easy to forgive, but the person who forgives takes a risk. It means accepting to renounce the right to revenge. But this renunciation sets one free.

Desmond Tutu pushes the reflection further. “Does the victim depend on the culprit’s contrition and confession as the precondition for being able to forgive?”13 His response is also grounded on the Gospel. Jesus did not wait for the confession of his offenders before forgiving them. He even went to the extent of finding an excuse on their behalf: “they do no know what they are doing”. Certainly, it is wonderful when the offender confesses with courage and true remorse. Moreover, the confession of the offender helps enormously one who wishes to forgive. But, for Desmond Tutu, it is not indispensable. Waiting for the offender’s confession would mean remaining his/her prisoner.

In his argument, against the South African practice of reconciliation, Wole Soyinka did not note that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not abandon the question of reparation. Apartheid was highly profitable to the White population. They got very rich to the detriment of the Blacks. The Commission established other commissions to make sure that infrastructures and primary facilities like water, electricity, are redistributed, so that Blacks have access to descent houses and medical care. Further research is needed to see how this is working out. However, it was necessary to break a cycle of violence.

Another question that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had to face was the issue of whether the survivors of victims have the right to forgive on behalf of the dead. This question, Desmond Tutu noted, nearly put an end to the whole process of reconciliation. At this juncture, Christians again, took a biblical position. Survivors can take the risk to forgive on behalf of the dead. This may seem pretentious but it is a witness to an understanding of the sense of
history and human community. There is real continuity between the past and the present; between both and the future. Refusing to forgive would be denying our predecessors the right to share in the glory of the present as we share their suffering and glory.

Finally, Christians believe that this way of living is a way of corresponding to God who loved us before we could think of loving Him. In his Epistle to the Romans Paul tells us that God’s Grace is illegal - that means that it surpasses human justice. It does not depend on our merits. It is given to us freely: “We were still helpless when at the appointed moment Christ died for sinful men. It is not easy to die even for a good man – though of course for someone really worthy, a man might be prepared to die – but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners”(Rom 5, 6-8).

MAKING LIFE POSSIBLE

If one could imagine a different ending to Ode echí, the movie I mentioned earlier, a traditional point of view would have the criminal, Odoechi go through the ordeals of confession and punishment. He could be sent to exile for some years and be readmitted into the society after some rituals of total purification. Social justice has to follow its course. Modern governments jail criminals for some years or for life. Sometimes the latter face capital punishment. In some cases some people prefer to die rather than go through the shame of being pointed at by everyone as the serial killer. Sometimes, previous victims may not be healed of the desire to revenge. The process of social justice is not enough to make life possible, liveable in a society. Some kind of forgiveness is necessary to give a second chance to the culprit.

Despite the weaknesses of the Christian faith that insists on forgiveness as a necessary ingredient for total individual and collective healing, it is a considerate approach towards breaking the cycle of violence and restoring a new life in a wounded society. As Desmond Tutu would put it “In the act of forgiveness we declare
The Role of Forgiveness in the Process of Reconciliation

our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of a wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that caused us the wrong....It is an act of faith that the wrongdoer can change".\textsuperscript{14} It is also a form of total therapy for the victim.

NOTES

1. In a wonderful reflection, \textit{The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Professor Wole Soyinka, addresses this question in relation to the Pan African Movement for Reparation that wants Western countries to pay for the damages caused by Slave Trade and Colonization. Soyinka critiqued what he calls "The Muse of Forgiveness" in the thinking of \textit{Negritude} which considers Forgiveness as naturally African. The Nobel Price Winner contends in an astonishing way that \textit{Negritude}'s muse of forgiveness is not part of African culture. It rather comes from Christian theology. The same Christian theology, said Soyinka, influenced the choice of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which, according to him, accorded cheap amnesty to the perpetrators of Apartheid. I will come back to this thesis.

2. Written and produced by Sunny Collins, directed by Nna JIUDE In the Umuleri dialect of the Igbo language, "Odo echi" means, "It will not happen" or "Your power will not have any effect on me".

3. See a more complete presentation of the "Relational Notion of the Person", in Elochukwu Uzukwu, \textit{A listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches} (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), pp 35-46. The author proposes this notion of the Person in African traditions as a control to the exercise of the democracy and human rights in modern societies.


5. See Jean –Godefroy Bidima, \textit{La Palabre. Une juridiction de la parole} (Paris: Michalon, 1997). One must note that besides modern judiciary institutions, a good number of litigations are settled in the villages according to local customary laws.


8. Wole Soyinka is right. The "muse of forgiveness" is inspired by Christian theology. But instead of seeing it as negative, we need to welcome it as something human, noble and vital.

10. The same analysis is applicable to other gospel accounts of God’s Mercy: the parables of the lost sheep, the lost drachma, the prodigal son (Lk 15,3-32) See Heinz Zahrnt, *Jésus de Nazareth. Une vie*, Seuil, Paris, 1996, pp. 100-121.

11. Ibid. p. 31-34.


13. Ibid. p. 272.

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE NATION
A COMMUNIQUE

By

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN)
(Issued at the end of its First Plenary Meeting for the Year 2002)

1. PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, held our First Plenary Meeting for the year 2002 at the Pope John Paul II Catholic Centre, Abuja, from the 18th to 22nd February, 2002. The theme of our Conference was Healing the Wounds of the Nation. After prayerful deliberation on matters affecting the Church and society in our nation, we issue the following communiqué.

2. OUR BLESSINGS

God has been kind to our nation. He has blessed us with wonderful climate and abundant natural and human resources. He has blessed our nation with wonderful people, resilient, hard-working, and joyful. Our people are deeply religious and God-fearing. Our ethnic and cultural diversity is a blessing yet to be fully realized. The hunger of our people for true democracy has never been stronger, as was demonstrated recently in the opposition to the unfair and unjust provisions of the electoral law. The Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission (Oputa Panel), the first such body in the history of Nigeria, has increased the demand for accountability of public officials past and present. Our role and responsibility among the nations of Africa have been recognized, and our image among the nations of the world has improved. We have seen generous and selfless responses from our citizens to the various national emergencies and crises. In addition, there has been noticeable progress in infrastructural development and provision of social services. This can be seen in the improvement of roads, in more
constant supply of fuel, the granting of radio and television licenses to private owners, and the return of schools to the Church in some states.

3. OUR WOUNDS

These and other blessings do not, however, prevent us from taking a hard look at the many wounds – mostly of our own making – that fester in us and in our nation. These wounds are glaring, and we call attention to some of them under the following categories: physical, psychological/emotional, socio-political, economic, and spiritual/moral.

Physical

Many Nigerians are literally nursing physical wounds as a result of inter-communal and religious conflicts, bomb explosions in Lagos, armed robbery, outbreaks of fire, and road accidents. The AIDS pandemic decimates the Nigerian population and brings untold pain and sorrow to individuals and families. Some, indeed thousands, are no longer nursing wounds: they have died and are buried. May the Lord grant them eternal rest. We share in the agony of those who have suffered, and continue to extend a hand to those who are most in need of help.

Our fertile land and environment are being severely wounded. Rivers and streams are polluted, fish die, forests are despoiled, desertification spreads south. Refuse litters our streets because waste disposal services are practically non-existent. Oil spills and gas flares pollute and poison the environment in the Delta Region.

Psychological / Emotional

A pervasive sense of insecurity breeds fear that leads to violent reactions in place of dialogue and reconciliation. The value of human life has been eroded and violence is often seen as the
solution to problems. For the majority of our people, unmet needs, broken promises, unfulfilled expectations, and frustration with the democratic process becloud the horizon. In this atmosphere, lack of trust and mutual suspicion increase the credence given to rumours and the polarization of ethnic and religious groups.

_Socio-political_

Religion and ethnicity have been used and abused to achieve selfish, political ends. The Sharia problems has led in many cases to political, social, and personal violence. There is not only the temptation, but the reality of leaders, sometimes with the cooperation of the media, telling bare-faced lies to the people. The very identity and full citizenship rights of the Nigerian are denied when there is discrimination based upon state of origin, notwithstanding long domicile in a particular state. Vicious infighting within political parties has led to struggles for power that sometimes result in assassination. Those in power seem to be prepared to do everything imaginable to hold on to power till death. The situation is worsened by the recruitment and maintenance of private armies, even by some political office holders.

_Economic_

Corruption and the mismanagement of resources affect everyone in one way or another, but the poor and weak pay the highest price. We continue to embark on prestigious projects which make no sense and indeed bring more poverty to the slum dwellers and the forgotten people in the villages. Youths are wounded by the reality of massive unemployment and under-employment. Many workers, including even the Police, rightfully complain of inadequate salaries, and salaries not paid on time. The gap between the very poor and the very rich continues to widen, and the middle class seems to be rapidly wiped out.
Materialistic and worldly religion, preaching prosperity and promising healing and miracles, devoid of sacrifice and the cross, damages and even replaces authentic religion. Some religious leaders control the minds of their adherents, who are often ignorant and needy, exploiting them for selfish advantage. The “God” preached by some religious leaders seems not to be the God of justice and love, but an intolerant “God” who fosters hatred and division.

4. THE ROOT CAUSE OF OUR WOUNDS

Our seemingly incurable wounds are symptoms of a deeper and more chronic sickness, namely sin. This is manifested in our lack of love, lack of concern, and selfishness at individual and group levels. The pervasive presence of greed, selfishness, corruption, the culture of impunity, the politics of power rather than development, all contribute to a nation of wounded people. These vices prevent us from putting in place structures that heal and unify. While some have more responsibility than others for our wounds, no one is totally without blame. “If we say we are free from the guilt of sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 Jn. 1:8).

5. ACTION TO BE TAKEN

All of us Nigerians need first to admit that all is not well. Government at all levels should resist the temptation to tell lies to the people. One cannot deceive all the people all the time. The process of healing of wounds involves both short-term alleviation of pain, and long-term preventive steps. The process of healing receives its power and inspiration from God and then calls forth action and commitment on our part.
On the Part of Government

- We renew our call for a national conference that will examine the sources of conflict and propose measures to heal the divisions. To say “no” to dialogue is to say “yes” to violence.
- We call upon government to put in place qualitative and functional education at all levels, which should include sound moral and religious instruction. In this connection, we renew our demand for the return of schools to their legitimate owners.
- We reaffirm the secular nature of the Nigerian State as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- Government should initiate a frank discussion on the issue of Sharia rather than continue to wish and hope that it will disappear.
- We request that the report of the Oputa Panel be made public.
- Government should intensify efforts at creating job opportunities for the unemployed.
- Government should not only allow but foster the creation of more political parties so that more options are available to the public.
- Insecurity in the land is not solved by the proliferation of dubious vigilante groups. There is no civilized alternative to a well-trained, well-equipped, and well-paid Police Force.
- We call upon government to conduct its business in the open, and not as if it were a secret cult. People have the right to full knowledge of what programmes and plans are discussed in the halls of government.
- The war against corruption has so far proved ineffectual, partly because many of the principal actors in government are themselves not free from corruption. Good intentions
are not enough. An independent body should be given full power and authority to wage an effective war against corruption at all levels of government and business.

On the Part of the Church

- The Church as family of God not only suffers wounds in its body, but sometimes its members cause wounds to one another and to the larger society. And so in the spirit of Lent, we affirm the need for personal conversion.
- We urge all Christians to that conversion of hearts, minds, and attitudes to the way of Jesus, to the gospel values that he lived and died for. Without interior renewal and conversion, nothing can be achieved.
- We call on all Nigerians to shun violence and imbibe a culture of dialogue and non-violence.
- We reaffirm the indispensable role of the Justice, Development, and Peace Commissions/Committees (JDPC) at the parish, diocesan, provincial and national levels. These Commissions/Committees are not simply another group or society in the Church but are to oversee and take leadership responsibility in the struggle to heal the wounds of the nation.
- In accord with the Social Teaching of the Church, we encourage Catholics to enter the difficult world of politics. Through the Justice, Development and Peace Commissions/Committees and the Catholic Social Forum (CSF) the Church will provide political education and formation both for candidates vying for office and the electorate.
- Catechesis in parishes should include the Church’s teaching on the social dimension of sin and grace, and on how Catholics should be agents of healing and reconciliation, standing for non-violent action for justice and peace.
- The Church will continue and intensify its efforts to
complement the programmes of government in providing health care, education and other social services.

- The Church commits itself to establishing centres of vocational, functional education that will lead to gainful employment.
- Working with government, we will put in place programmes to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic. These programmes will aim at creating AIDS awareness, arresting the spread of the virus, and extending pastoral care to infected individuals and their families.
- We remind all God’s people, and the laity in particular, that they are to be salt of the earth and light of the world. All Catholics must be seen to be part and parcel of the healing process of the nation.
- The Church will continue to set an example for the nation by renewed efforts to follow the example of Jesus by preaching the good news to the poor (cf. Lk. 4:18), and looking after those who are most neglected. If a nation cannot truly be great when it neglects the needs of its poorest members, how much more true is that of the Church, the family of God?

6. CONCLUSION

“By his wounds we are healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). Jesus Christ, the Wounded Healer, freely took upon himself the sins, the wounds of humankind. Through his death on the Cross, he gives us the power to be freed from our sins and wounds. Since many of our wounds are of our own making, then the solution and way forward are also within our reach. Empowered by the grace of God and following in the footsteps of Jesus, the process of healing and reconciliation will demand sacrifice for the common good and the spirit of forgiveness articulated so clearly by Pope John Paul II: “No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness” (World Day of Peace, 2002). Even as we move through Lent, we remain an Easter
people, a people of hope:

If my people, upon whom my name has been pronounced, humble themselves and pray, and seek my presence and turn from their evil ways, I will hear them from heaven and pardon their sins and heal their land (2 Chr. 7:14).

May Our Lady, Comforter of the Afflicted and Hope of Christians, so close to the wounded Jesus Christ on the Cross, intercede for us and assist us in our efforts to heal the wounds of our nation.

+Most Revd John Onaiyekan
President, CBCN
Archbishop of Abuja

+Most Revd Joseph Ajomo
Secretary, CBCN
Bishop of Lokoja
OUR CONCERN FOR OUR NATION
A COMMUNIQUE

By

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria (CBCN)
(Issued at the end of its Second Plenary Meeting for the year 2002)

1. PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, held our Second Plenary Meeting for the year 2002 at DRACC, Enugu, from the 9th to 13th September, 2002. Having prayerfully reflected on a number of happenings currently affecting the peace and progress of our nation, we issue the following communiqué.

2. OUR BLESSINGS

Since our last meeting in Abuja, February 2002, there have been some signs of progress in the nation. Some social services have improved in some areas of the nation. Three more political parties have been created and approved. We congratulate the Federal Government for some of its recent interventions condemning some aspects of the implementation of the Sharia. The Attorney General of the Federation has expressed in writing his view that extending Sharia Law to criminal matters is against the Nigerian Constitution.

The Catholic Church in Nigeria continues to grow in strength, as seen in the newly created Vicariate of Kontagora, and the ordination of His Lordship, Rt. Rev. Timothy Carroll, SMA, as its Vicar Apostolic.

Many dioceses and parishes have instituted programmes of Civic Education. The people are growing in the awareness of their rights and responsibilities. We have received reports of many commendable concrete actions against the spread of HIV/AIDS. Many dioceses and parishes have increased not only HIV/AIDS awareness, but pastoral care to families and individuals affected by
AIDS.

3. OUR CONCERNS

The political climate is cloudy and turbulent. With the postponement of local government elections, with the delay in the voters’ registration exercise, and the uncertainty surrounding the national identity card project, citizens are deeply concerned, and rightly so, about the forthcoming elections. Recourse to violence is often the way to settle political problems. We witness a disturbing rate of assassinations, and the use of paid thugs to settle political scores. The culture of violence, scheming, plotting, betraying, and lying to the people is still very much with us.

All this has generated an atmosphere of insecurity that seriously threatens our nascent democracy. Security on the roads, in the homes, even in parish houses and convents, has been eroded. As we previously warned, dubious vigilante groups and private armies are not the answer but indeed often part of the problem: they only lead to more violence.

Our concern extends to the judiciary. It should be the pillar of justice, the guarantor of human rights, and the last bastion of defence for the common man and woman. Its independence and credibility must be maintained at all costs.

The pursuit of government posts, whether elected or appointed, rather than hard work, is seen to be the way to money. This is partly due to excessive monetary reward, and unrestricted access to public funds by government officials. It is no wonder that almost all our elected office holders seem to be seeking a second term at all costs.

We observe that salaries once again are not being paid regularly in some states, even as the life style and cost of governance increase at an alarming rate. Construction work on many new roads and repairs of existing roads have also been halted, with no clear explanation of why funds are not available. In spite of our repeated calls, nothing effective seems to be done to create job opportunities or work incentives for our youths. Finally, there is glib talk
Our Concern for our Nation

concerning the beginnings of success in the War Against Corruption. But there is little to show in the courts of justice or the halls of government and business.

The crisis over the Sharia is deepening rather than being resolved. In general, ethnic and religious conflicts have continued unabated.

4. A CALL TO COMMITMENT

Nigeria offers a test case for the future of democracy, human rights and religious liberty in Africa. We cannot afford to fail our own citizens and the rest of Africa.

We continue to encourage our members “with a talent for the difficult yet noble art of politics...forgetting their own convenience and material interests, to engage in political activity” (Second Vatican Council, The Church in the Modern World, 75). We will support and vote for candidates whose qualities include these:

a) capacity to see politics as service and honest hard work, rather than a money-making venture;

b) respect for the sacredness of life and human dignity;

c) transparency, accountability and responsibility to the people, especially the poor. They must exhibit a willingness to sacrifice personal and parochial interests for the common good of the nation;

d) equitable distribution of goods and amenities, as against favouritism, clannishness, and ethnicism;

e) capacity to respect and promote law and order and maintain security. Candidates to be elected must be those who seek political power for the right reason: to contribute to the building of God’s kingdom of justice and peace in our nation.
We shall not hesitate to criticize all leaders, and in a special way, Catholic leaders, who do not live up to the democratic principles of justice, honesty, truthfulness, transparency and accountability. As we urge government to be transparent and accountable, we commit ourselves to that same ideal.

We urge all Catholics, and all citizens, to fulfill their civic and moral obligation to exercise the right to vote, and do so responsibly (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2240). We commend the efforts of Justice, Development and Peace Commissions/Committees in Civic Education at diocesan and parish levels, and urge them to assist citizens in registering to vote, and then in monitoring elections. The largely silent majority must not sit back and allow its legitimate aspirations to be frustrated by a few people, no matter how powerful. We urge all citizens to be vigilant over their rights, to vote wisely and prudently, and to resist election rigging and selling their vote. We reject any military coup. We have no option but to exercise patience, discipline and persistence in making a success of our fragile democratic system.

Government must pay particular attention to ensure the independence, neutrality and objectivity of the electoral commissions, security agencies, and the judiciary so as to guarantee that elections are free and fair. Where there have been cases of violence and bloodshed, we echo the principle of law that those who stand accused cannot be judges in their own case. So too, in the larger political arena, to be a contestant and an umpire in the same contest is against natural justice.

We urge our people to hold political parties accountable for the plans, promises, and programs that they set forth when they ask for our vote.

If the members of the National Assembly have reasons to impeach the President they must be sure that they are doing it in the interest of Nigerians and not for some selfish motives or with hidden agenda.
As in the past, we offer a hand of friendship and partnership to government at all levels, in providing health care, education, and other welfare and social services for our people.

While the report of The Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission (Oputa Panel) has been presented, we call upon government to make it public and implement its recommendations. We renew our call for a national conference that will examine the sources of conflict and violence, some of which may have their origins in the current Constitution.

5. SHARIA

We repeat our warning that the adoption of Sharia as state law and the extension of its scope to criminal matters are flagrant violations of the human rights of Nigerians. Our Constitution safeguards the human rights of its citizens. As it protects the legal rights of its citizens, it also limits the behaviour of individuals and groups that might infringe upon the rights of others.

We shall not be silent as long as the injustice and the anomaly of the Sharia continues. We shall at the same time continue to seek channels of dialogue for increased mutual understanding and cooperation between members of our Church and our compatriots of the Islamic faith in the solution of our problems, in accord with recent Church teaching, and the shining example of Pope John Paul II. We shall continue in our efforts to remind government leaders, and all people of good will of the obligation of every government to ensure that the equality of all citizens before the law is never violated for religious reasons, whether openly or covertly. As we see so vividly in Nigeria and in the world today, the alternative to dialogue is violence.

More specifically, we urge Christian politicians not to sit on the fence, but to take a firm stand against the injustice and anomaly of the Sharia in the current political negotiations. We condemn adultery and fornication as sinful behaviour against God’s commandments. But we abhor and condemn the sentencing
to death by stoning of persons accused of adultery or fornication. This widened application of Sharia law endangers especially the rights of the poor and women, and leaves unpunished the failings of the powerful and the wealthy. These sentences have brought great shame and opprobrium on our nation in the international community. President Obasanjo, in his goodwill address to us said that “we must end the dark night of falsehood and cruelty and usher in a new dawn of truth and mercy.” In the condemnation of Safiya Hussaini and Amina Lawal, we are convinced that neither truth nor mercy is being served.

6. EUCHARISTIC ETHIC

It is providential that at this time we are in the midst of preparations for the 1st National Pastoral Congress and 3rd National Eucharistic Congress to be held in Ibadan from November 11th-17th.

The Pastoral Congress is an occasion to take a comprehensive look at the overall mission of the Church in Nigeria. It will propose measures that will make for a more effective evangelization, a Church that is more vibrant and faithful to its mission in the new century. Certainly, it will address and respond to many of the concerns we have listed here.

The Eucharistic Congress will be an opportunity to storm heaven with prayers that God will bless our nation. It will also be an opportunity for Catholics at the parish, diocesan and national levels, to put into practice what Pope John Paul II has called “a Eucharistic ethic,” a Eucharistic way of life.

In the Eucharist, the great Christian themes of sharing and sacrifice, hospitality to all, old and young, rich and poor, forgiveness and reconciliation, gratitude and hope, prayer for the needs of our world and nation, service to the neighbour, building up of the Church as family, and commitment to justice in our world, are celebrated and imbibed.
7. CONCLUSION

In the prayer for the forthcoming Eucharistic Congress, we request: “May the same Holy Spirit empower us to become bread broken for the life of our brothers and sisters, of every tribe, colour and tongue.” We pray that the Holy Spirit that came upon Jesus, and comes down at every celebration of the Eucharist, will come upon us with power, and “dispose us henceforth to be willing to make sacrifices, promote justice and peace in our society.”

While here in Enugu, we recall the tragic events of March 7th at the Adoration Ground. We pray for the repose of the souls of the dead. We urge those responsible to repent and seek forgiveness, so that true peace and reconciliation may return to the State.

May Mary, Queen of Peace and Queen of Nigeria, guide our preparations, and help us carry out successfully our Pastoral and Eucharistic Congresses. With her intercession, we hope and pray that the Pastoral and Eucharistic Congresses will transform our families, parishes and dioceses, into the Eucharistic family of God on mission.

+Most.Revd. John Onaiyekan
President, CBCN
Archbishop of Abuja

+Most Revd. Joseph Ajomo
Secretary, CBCN
Bishop of Lokoja
In recent times, a good number of scholars have unanimously pointed to the loss of the traditional Igbo egalitarian political institutions, which accorded women a more integral profile in pre-colonial Nigeria than they have now. This indicates that the silencing of women’s voice and limiting of their exercise of leadership, as observed in many Igbo communities within and outside Nigeria today, are not intrinsic to primal Igbo culture. They are, rather, an aftermath of the introduction of medieval Western Christian notions of women’s inferiority into Nigeria by the British colonizers, in collaboration with their Christian missionary allies and the Nigerian male elite class that was favoured by the change.

Of particular interest are the works of two women—Nigerian (Ijaw) political scientist Toboulayefa Agara-Houessou-Adin and Judith Van Allen, Senior Fellow at the Institute for African Development at Cornell University—which try to recover Igbo women’s lost political institutions as a resource for women’s empowerment today.

Ironically, many of the present generation of Igbo have no memory of these empowering traditions. Consequently, they oppose change and wrongly accuse Igbo women who resist male oppression of not knowing their culture or of having lost it through exposure to the Euro-American women’s movement. They appeal to “our culture and tradition!” as an unchanging reality when it pertains to women, forgetting that women’s empowerment is integral to Igbo culture and not foreign, as some imagine. Incidentally, women's current participation in government both in society and in Catholic Church leadership in the more Moslem
northern Nigeria far surpasses and challenges the situation in the supposedly more Christian southeast of Nigeria, where women are thought to be freer.

This essay explores the seeds of gender equality in the egalitarian traditions of both pre-colonial/pre-Christian Igbo society and the early Jesus movement - before it assumed the shape of Western Christianity - as possible sources of women's emancipation today. It also demonstrates how Judeo-Christian biblical cultural myths reinforce current Igbo African cultural beliefs that control women and proposes ways of reconstructing these myths to facilitate change in inter-gender relationships towards real equality, mutuality and partnership. To this end, I first provide some background notes on the Igbo people and their historical egalitarian traditions, which fostered women's autonomy, and how this changed with the coming of political and religious colonization of the Igbo. Along the way, I give a contextual definition of the terms "subordination" and "marginalization" and also recommend some strategies for transcending women's subordination.

Women's Autonomy in pre-colonial egalitarian Igbo Society

The Igbo people are located in the southeastern part of Nigeria, West Africa. They are characterized by their religious spirit, industry and enterprise. Historically, this predisposed them to democratic and egalitarian social arrangements. Okorie is right to insist that “[t]he main credo of Igbo culture is the emphasis placed on individual achievement and initiatives, prestige and egalitarian leadership. All participate in community affairs, in decision-making, and development efforts.”

Women’s participation in the governance of their community was ensured through the ‘dual-sex political system’ .... “Each sex generally managed its own affairs and had its own kinship institutions, age grades, and secret and title societies” The dual-sex
political system ... allowed women and men to carry out their responsibility without infringing on the others' territory. This situation prevails despite the fact that elsewhere, where men rule and dominate. With the result that seeing the Igbo patriarchal framework, many observers misinterpreted the position of women in these societies and produced a distorted picture.  

Patrick K. Uchendu, a Catholic priest and lecturer in the Education Department at Abia State University (Nigeria), contrasts the pre-colonial status of women in Igboland with that of European and American women, who at that same period were treated as perpetual minors and "legal non-beings" whose identity merged into that of their husbands. "Igbo women," he maintains, "had distinct lives of their own." Women when necessary could take decisions independently of men, a fact that became known only after the Women's War of 1929. Uchendu also illustrates how, at that time, women were barred from certain professions in Europe and the United States on account of their gender, whereas women had no corresponding socio-economic restrictions in Igboland. Laws and attitudes in Europe and the United States have since changed considerably concerning women in the secular arena, though not much yet in the sacred arena.

In a commissioned study following the 1929 Women's War, anthropologist Margaret M. Green studied the power of women as custodians of morality in a village. In her findings, the "Otu Alutaradi," the Association of Wives – married to men of the same village – provided women collective bargaining power to safeguard themselves against any excesses of male dominance and collectively dealt with men who jeopardized women's interests or behaved abusively towards their wives. On the other hand, the daughters of the lineage, known as the "Umuada" – who were married and living elsewhere – had a big say in their families of origin, and in this capacity as "Umuada", these women's decisions, affecting both men and women in the village were "always final." In other words, women as daughters, sisters and aunts (Umuada) in their natal families had more power than they did as wives
(Alutaradi) in their marital families where they were more vulnerable. On the whole, the women’s associations protected not only women’s interest but also that of the entire community and ensured peace. In this way, there were checks and balances in the traditional society, which maintained a subtle balance of gender power before colonial policies upset the system and tilted it in favour of men and in the direction of Western Christian cultural inferiorization of women.

*Women’s Traditions of Empowerment: Curing Men of Insensitivity*

Nkiru Nzegwu (Associate Professor of Africana Studies at Binghamton University) provides the key to understanding the significance of Igbo women's empowering traditions, including the ability to impose sanctions ranging from “sitting on men who devalued women” to mass boycotts of funerals and other kinds of “activity in which inter-gender relationship was implicated; ... until their demands were met.”

There is, for example, the comic account of how women’s collective action in a certain town cured the men of insensitivity in leaving their livestock to destroy women’s crops. The women boycotted cooking and serving, leaving the men starving. Green draws out the political implication of this strategy in the traditional society, where eating out was frowned upon or was not even in vogue, and food was one of women’s powerful weapons for controlling men.

Irish missionary Bishop Joseph Shanahan, C.S.Sp. – the subject of Jordan’s biography – who founded the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary to promote the dignity of Igbo women, concluded that, “a society where women could stand up for their rights when the need arose ... was constructed neither loosely nor immorally. While the Igbo society did not give woman her rightful place, it made her neither slave nor chattel.” According to Nzegwu:

Women’s independence was fostered by cultural traditions that
placed a premium on female assertiveness and collectivity, and did not define power as socially deviant. If men usually capitulated and were or seemed ‘helpless’ before the collective strength of women, it is not because they were being passive or timid. It was more that they were accustomed to women being in positions of power and influence.\(^\text{17}\)

Accordingly, in their 1929 protest of women’s marginalization by the colonial powers, Igbo women applied their traditional method for settling their grievances with men to the British colonial officers.

*Protesting British Marginalization of Women*

The Western system of government, commerce and education introduced by the British marginalized women and favoured men. This is better understood in light of Agbasiere’s observation that “on an economic level, the woman, not the man [was] the main provider.”\(^\text{18}\) When the British colonial and missionary policies, following European customs, turned things around by treating men as “the main provider” and women as housewives and dependants, they took away women’s power, and, along with it, men’s respect for women! This marginalization of women was the main reason for the protest, although the issue of taxing the women without consulting them was the “last straw” that precipitated the crisis. The resistance took the colonial administration totally unawares. The women vehemently protested their marginalization through a series of demonstrations variously known as “the Women’s Riots of 1929”\(^\text{19}\) or “the Aba Riots,” but more correctly, “*Ogu Umunwanyi, the Women’s War.*”\(^\text{20}\)

The strategy employed by the women was only one of their political conflict-resolution schemes included in the concept of “sitting on a man,”\(^\text{21}\) which was geared simply to bringing the other party to a point of negotiation. The colonial officials panicked at their sheer numbers and called in armed police and troops, who
fired at the women. "Officially, 50 of the women were killed and another 50 wounded." Their heavy casualties notwithstanding, the women continued their protests and their demand to be represented in the government.

As Nzegwu rightly concludes, "the significance of the women’s war was not just a matter of courage on the part of the Igbo and Ibibio women who protested their marginalization. It is ultimate proof that women’s independence in pre-colonial Nigeria was an established fact; and that these traditions could still be called upon to empower women" today.

Van Allen correctly assesses women’s stature in pre-colonial Igbo society:

Conventional Western influence has been seen as ‘emancipating’ African women ... What has not been seen by Westerners is that for some African women - and the Igbo women are a striking example - actual or potential autonomy, economic independence and political power did not grow out of Western influences but existed already in traditional ‘tribal’ life.

Philomena Okeke, Toboulayefa Agara-Houessou-Adin, and others have lamented the lasting damage done to Igbo women’s status through the structural gender inequalities introduced by the British system of education, commerce and wage employment with the collaboration of the Christian missionaries. The overall result is that in spite of the women’s relative gains through formal education and Western Christian civilization, Igbo women are comparatively in a worse place than their foremothers who marched in the Women’s War of 1929, as far as gender parity is concerned.

*Western Christianity’s Role in the Inferiorization of Igbo Women*

The Christian missionaries, through their control of the educational system, transmitted, perhaps [unwittingly and] unconsciously,
female inferiority and sexual discrimination in the Nigerian economic and political affairs as part of Western civilization, which lowered the social status of women at that time.26

The educational system that the British introduced did not prepare women for the labour market. Rather, it prepared them only for domestic roles in marriage, as defined by Western norms for housewives—a notion entirely foreign to Igboland, where women operated equally in the public as well as private spheres.27

On the whole, Western Christianity’s role in dis-empowering Igbo women was fourfold. First, the educational system and labour market entrenched gender stratification. Second, a pre-ecumenical spirit which forbade Christians to associate with traditional worshippers and Christians of other denominations (a legacy of a divided Christianity from Europe) divided the Igbo women and weakened their former solidarity. Third, Western cultural provisions of marriage submerged the woman’s identity under the man’s. And finally, Western cultural myths of female evil that have been projected on Eve and all women activated and reinforced pre-existing latent seeds of gender bias in Igbo culture.28 Formerly, Igbo women could at least protest their marginalization, as evidenced in the Women's War; but now, they have been tamed into accepting and submitting to injustice without protest as a mark of Christian piety!29

The Challenge of Women’s cultural Subordination

Despite the relatively positive status of women in Igbo society past and present, there is cultural subordination of women in Igbo culture as in all other cultures of the world. By “cultural subordination” I refer to the situation whereby male human beings are taken as “number one” and females as “number two,” and it plays out mostly in the cultural and religious aspects of everyday life. It differs from “marginalization,” which is an offshoot of subordination, and is experienced as being left out, rejected and discriminated against in the political, economic and social spheres
of life. Cultural subordination can be found in myths, proverbs and casual remarks – in conflict situations – such as: “Imagine, a woman for that matter!” “Don’t talk to me like that. Am I a woman?” “Don’t you know I am a man?”

Cultural subordination also plays out in male-child preference; rigid gender-specific roles; certain marriage and burial customs, including harmful widowhood practices; and exclusion from certain privileges, inheritance entitlements, and rituals such as the Kolanut blessing. The Kolanut is a seed about the size of a chestnut, which grows in a pod on the trees of *Cola acuminata* and *Cola nitida*\(^30\) and is usually presented to visitors as a sign of welcome, hospitality and unity. It is solemnly blessed, broken, shared and eaten as an act of prayer and communion. Just as in the Catholic Eucharist, women are excluded from officiating at the blessing and breaking of the Kolanut especially in mixed-gender gatherings. This exclusion—in both settings—is the ultimate symbol of women’s subordination, which also holds the key to its undoing!

Beneath all the reasons given for excluding women from presiding over the Eucharistic and Kolanut blessings are deep-seated negatively operating cultural and biblical myths about women and which need to be explored to create the possibility of change in women’s assigned secondary status.

_Biblical and cultural Myths about Women, and the Challenge of Hermeneutics_

Myths are stories, which shape a people’s consciousness and world view and also forge their collective sense of identity. They explain the why of things such as the origins of the world and its inhabitants; human beings, male and female relationships, suffering and death; good and evil and their possible consequences. Naturally, the gender biases of every culture are also reflected in its myths of origins and are ascribed to the creating deities. African cultures are replete with myths of origins. According to Abanuka\(^31\), the (Igbo) Nri Myth of origin explains the origins of yams as men’s
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crop and cocoyam as women's crop, which sprouted from the grave of the son and daughter of Eri (the Igbo ancestor) who had been sacrificed to Chukwu, the creating deity.

The Hebrew creation myths in Genesis, or rather their male-centered interpretations over the years, similarly display a gender bias that has become very deeply embedded in the human psyche. The most detrimental of such misogynist myths that derive from a literal, factual, historical reading of Genesis chapter 2 is that women were created second as an afterthought by God and therefore occupy a secondary position in the order of creation. From this follow the others: that men are the normative human beings while women are derivatives, men's "helpers," existing only to serve men's needs and desires; women are to blame for the world's evils; and women's subordination is willed by God. Unless these myths are consciously deconstructed and re-constructed, they will continue to manipulate women unconsciously into accepting and maintaining their oppression and devaluation as God's will and resisting efforts aimed at changing their situation.

A way to address this problem is by reviewing the biblical creation myths in relation to other cultural myths such as the African and Mesopotamian myths as well as the scientific evolutionary myths of origins. To get beyond the impasse created by the long accustomed literal use of conclusions derived from the Adam and Eve story, I propose an African cultural symbolic hermeneutics. It is much closer and, therefore, more hospitable to the biblical oriental symbolic imagination than the Euro-American literal, historical, factual approach that has been in use until the present.

An African cultural symbolic hermeneutics evokes the African concept of story and symbols as found in many animal stories such as those of Mbe, the tortoise, which are familiar to many Africans. One such story goes as follows:

Once upon a time, all the birds had a party on a tree high up in the sky and, the tortoise, being chief of all the animals, naturally
invited himself and got to the venue by great ingenuity. Not having wings, he fitted himself out with feathers borrowed from each of the birds. On arrival, he suggested that all take titles and he was to be addressed as “All of You.” No sooner had the host/ess presented Kolanuts than the tortoise claimed them all for himself since it was surely for “All of You;” and so went all the food and drinks the way of “All of You.” All the birds grew very angry and disappointed and each took back their feathers, leaving the tortoise stranded up in the sky. The tortoise sent down a message to his wife through one of the returning birds to lay out all the soft materials available in his house so he could, without wings, let himself go and land on padded up material. In anger, the little bird gave the opposite message to Mrs tortoise and so she brought out all the sharp and hard objects from the house and poor tortoise came crashing on to the whole thing and badly hurting his back. Upon seeing a snail passing by, he beckoned her to kindly go over his back and seal up the cracks. This, the snail kindly obliged; and this is why, till today, the tortoise has a patched-up shell.

At the end of stories like this, no one tries to analyse it or take it literally as if it were factual or historic. Everyone gets the moral lessons in it; for instance, that greed is evil and has disastrous consequences. In a similar way, the stories in Genesis chapters 1 to 3 could be read and interpreted with this symbolic, holistic, non-literal mindset; especially that of Adam-and-Eve, which is chiefly invoked to legitimise women’s subordination.

It is worth noting that Israel’s neighbours equally had their own cultural myths of origins – such as the Enuma Elish and the Gilgamesh Epic – which show some affinity to the Hebrew creation myths in the book of Genesis. The Enuma Elish, for example, has one gang of gods under Tiamat waging war against another gang under Marduk, with the latter destroying the other gang, and using their remains to form the universe. Many scholars now agree that – much as the Genesis stories have many definite
religious lessons to teach about the relationship between God and humans, the world, and the worshipping community, the authors of Genesis must have known these competing stories. As such, they did not get their material from a special vision of the primal events. Rather, they drew from some of these prevailing stories, critiquing, modifying and transcending them. For instance, the writers emphasized the effortlessness of the creative act of the Most High by mere word of mouth, in contrast to warring gods, and condemned their neighbours’ worship of heavenly bodies by highlighting the creaturely status of these.

Furthermore, the scientific story of origins (the theory of evolution) holds that: the world and its inhabitants have resulted from a process of unfolding, which began billions of years ago in a cosmic explosion known as the Big Bang, and which set in motion a subsequent process of change and development from the simplest and lowest organisms to the highest and most complex, including human beings. Instead of evolving any further species higher than human beings, the evolutionary process has taken an inner course, developing consciousness, interiority and spirituality in human beings; and it is just so awe-inspiring!

Pope Pius XII showed the green light to Catholic intellectuals with his great Encyclical, Humani Generis, which leaves the doctrine of Evolution an open question. His Divino Afflante Spiritu of 1943 warns that “the interpreter [of bible texts] must, as it were, go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East and with the aid of history, archaeology, and other sciences, accurately determine what modes of writing, so to speak, the author of that ancient period would be likely to use, and in fact did use”.

Therefore, one can venture to say that Genesis chapter 2 sees the human race as originating from a first couple, Adam and Eve, denoting monogenesis. Genesis chapter 1:1-24, however, does not specify the number of human beings made at the beginning but insisted that they were of both sexes, meaning, they were more than one. In face of the mounting evidence in favour of the evolutionary theory [the oppositions not withstanding], a number of questions
arise: Is polygenesis – descent of the human race from more than one couple – admissible? If so what is its significance for fresh biblical interpretation? What are the implications of an evolutionary worldview for social and gender justice? That is to say: “What are the challenges, if one accepts that the world and its contents came to be through the creative act of God in the process of evolution over billions and billions of years [and is not yet finished]? This is in contrast to the Genesis story, which reports that it was all finished in six days?” If one accepts with Galileo and Copernicus, respectively, that the earth is spherical and not flat, as once believed on the strength of the Bible, and is not the centre of the universe either; what are the implications. How can we reverse the old conception of the universe as an inverted bowl [sky] resting on a flat disc [earth], which, in turn, informed the notion of chain of being – the hierarchical model of relations in the universe, ranging from the most heavenly and sublime beings to the most mundane and material? Knowing that this is still operative in many people’s idea of women’s place as lower than men’s? How should we re-interpret the biblical cultural myths about women? Does attention to the scientific myth of creation not warrant that Eve and Adam be viewed as symbols of the whole human race rather than as actual, individual, historical figures? Will this symbolic interpretation not more surely transform the negative human imagination worldwide about women and Eve? I really think it will.

This evolutionary world view is quite compatible with belief in the Creator God. In fact, the entire universe story of an ever expanding reality – as attested by on-going scientific research – bears the mark of a Supreme Intelligence and a Loving Dynamism acting not from without but from within the universe. The splendour of such a universe as ours surely far surpasses that of a once for all finished creation, a product of six days’ activity. Contemporary biblical interpretation must adequately take into account the new scientific information about the origins as well as spherical nature of the earth – and a consequent change in human consciousness about the social order – such information that was not available to
the human authors of Genesis chapters 1-3. The intentions of the sacred authors – which were couched in pre-scientific concepts and worldview limited by their times and culture – must be re-discovered and expressed today in ways that are more just and more life-giving for all of creation, for everybody and for women, in particular. This should pave the way for a possible critical approach to inculturation.

Towards liberative Inculturation

Inculturation must go hand in hand with a consciousness of gender and social justice. The theological rationale for this derives from humanity’s growing social consciousness about issues of social justice, as reflected in the Catholic Social Teachings. This is a long departure from Ephesians chapter 5: 21-6: 9 and Colossians 3: 18-4: 1, which following a cosmology of a hierarchical social order – symbolized by the firmament resting on a flat earth – had urged the subordination of women, and some men [slaves] and children, as a way of pleasing Christ. Today, with a different cosmology of a spherical earth in an ever expanding universe, engendering a different social consciousness of equality of opportunities, mutuality and partnerships, slavery and its attendant racism have since been outlawed [though their repercussions still remain], and child abuse is increasingly gaining attention for condemnation. Reputable Christian teachers once justified and defended slavery on the strength of the Bible and now that has changed. Yet women’s subordination urged in the same biblical light has remained unchanged.

Accordingly, one observes that when some male theologians write and speak about inculturation they do not address the deeper cultural issues of subordination that impinge heavily on women. They preach and write gloriously about women. Yet, when it comes to making real changes to implement women’s equality with men, some of them walk out, and others resort to an ethic of “dignity and role” of women, which to my mind, betrays a functional approach
to women and downplays the primary fact of women’s humanity. The men who act this way condone structures of male domination in the name of an unchanging tradition and are not critical (enough) of the oppressive structures in Church and in society. Consequently, they appear to me to be insensitive to women’s actual experiences of violence and devaluation, which are crying out to heaven. Their approach to women’s issues, therefore, seems to be theoretical rather than practical for concrete change; and alleviation rather than eradication of the evil that is women’s subordination.

In light of the sinful social structures built into all human societies, and the general tendency to tolerate and rationalize women’s oppression by invoking proof-texts from the Bible, it is important to establish the criteria for deciding which biblical claim corresponds to the Good News of Christ and which does not. This is in contrast to the received Christian message with its cultural coatings from the Judaic, Greek, Roman, Irish/British and Igbo cultures. Since sacred scriptures are tinged with cultural elements\(^\text{38}\) that also happen to be largely male-cantered and patriarchal in favouring men and disadvantaging women, there is a need to process them in order to get at the real Good News of God in them. This we can work with. What is not Good News is to be discarded or transformed to be in line with it. The Good News, in my view, is that which is liberating and life-giving for both women and men, and not for men only. In this sense of inculturation, all customs, traditions and cultures, sacred or secular, biblical or otherwise, are to be sifted in the light of Christ’s Good News, which liberates all men and women from “all oppressive situations.”\(^\text{39}\)

NOTES


2 Uchem, p. 46.


The term is used to describe the group of travelling Jewish Christian preachers and prophets—women and men—that emerged after the death of Jesus and tried to explain the meaning of his life, death, and resurrection.


9. This war, also known as the Aba uprising, was led by women in opposition to colonial policies such as taxation, licensing fees, and a system of indirect, absolute rule by favoured ethnic groups that was inconsistent with the traditional political system of the people of Southern Nigeria.


12. See Uchem, p. 54.


20 Van Allen, *op.cit.*
22 *Aba Commission of Inquiry Report 1930,* p. 263. See also Nzegwu, 449.
23 Nzegwu, 450
24 Van Allen, 62.
26 Uchendu, 25.
27 Agara-Houessou-Adin, *op.cit.*
28 Uchem, 113-115.
29 See Uchem, 116-118.
30 Okorie, 9.
31 Bartholomew Abanuka, CSSp. Lecturer, Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isienu, Nsukka, Nigeria, *Myth and The African Universe* (Spiritan Publications, Onitsha, Nigeria, 1999), 77-79
34 See Uchem, 174, 179-190.
36 Carsten Bresch, “Evolution and creation faith.” *Theology Digest* (34. No. 2. Summer, 1987), 139-144.
38 See Vatican II *Dei Verbum,* no. 12.
BOOK REVIEW


I approach the review of this published dissertation with caution. The author herself is sceptical over the contribution of Igbo ‘men’ to Igbo ‘women’s reality’. She declares, “In spite of their goodwill, there is a limit to how much good men can ever do to represent Igbo women’s reality accurately enough and with critical consciousness of gender justice” (p.72). I therefore begin with the disclaimer that as ‘male’ and consequently benefiting from the till of ‘women subordination’, and even knowingly or unknowingly active participant in their subordination, one has to take what I say with a pinch of salt. I consider Uchem’s thesis such an important contribution to theology in Nigeria that I take the risk of engaging her in discussion in the theological areopagus. In this review article, I try to critique the internal logic or argument of the book and draw from studies by Africans that have competence in the same field to suggest other ways of carrying the author’s intention forward.

I begin on the optimistic note that through this book the ‘voices of the victims’ are being heard. In this book, the issue of marginalization or subordination of women is confronted by those who wear the shoes and know where it hurts. It is a provocative presentation of the conflictual dynamics of interrelationship between men and women—an engaging male-female field of conflict in Africa that French male sociologist Georges Balandier described as a tango of “the dangerous half”. Instead of imaging conflict in only negative terms, it is important to insist that this tango in Africa had produced and still possesses the energy to produce dynamic humane living. To the best of my knowledge Uchem’s work is the first forceful and passionate theological presentation of the seedbed of conflict between this dangerous half in Igboland.

The original title of the PhD dissertation submitted to the
in Igboland.

The original title of the PhD dissertation submitted to the Graduate Theological Foundation Indiana, states clearly the purpose of the work: “Overcoming Women’s subordination – in the Igbo African culture and in the Catholic Church: Envisioning an inclusive Theology with reference to Women”. The situation of ‘women’s subordination’ in Igboland, sharply fuelled by colonialism and Christianity, is not “good news”. And in both church and society this is a source of outrage for women. The author captures the overriding symbols of women’s subordination in the male controlled ecclesiastical and Igbo social order in the following sentence: “A three-year old ‘man’ is accorded precedence over a mature woman (Igbo kola nut ritual); a young seminarian is set above a fifty-year old woman religious who might have taught him in school; and a theologically competent woman is deemed unsuitable to image an unseen ‘male God’”[denial of ordination to women in the Catholic church], (p. 121). In clear non-diplomatic terms Uchem proposes the overarching symbol of “overcoming women’s subordination”: “The dissertation argues that only a change in the Catholic Church’s stand on women’s ordination will send out a message strong enough to initiate the kind of conversion and transformation required by a new evangelization in Africa and in Igbo society”. (p.12) So the book has the wider vision of a ‘new evangelization’ in Africa and in Igbo society symbolically mediated on the one hand by women’s ordination so that women could preside at Christian Eucharistic assemblies. On the other hand the symbolic act of women’s ordination will challenge Igbo social order to the point of including women in the breaking of the kola nut.

Uchem demonstrates that her project is not mere academic exercise by devoting her concluding chapter (chapter 10) to models of women ministry. In that chapter she narrates not only how she presided over the kola nut ritual with approval in the presence of men but also how she and members of her religious community effectively headed a basic community in Kaduna (Nigeria) and did chaplaincy ministry to the admiration of the faithful. She is well
aware however that both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches consider the ordination of women a no-go area. The Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith in an opinion expressed 19 November, 1995 considered the “definitive” Apostolic letter of John Paul II against women ordination (*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 1994 art. 4) as a teaching “infallibly” proposed by both the ordinary and universal magisterium of the Church. Also considering that Catholics do not constitute a majority among the over 15 million Igbo, it could be ‘great expectations’ to believe that change in the Catholic position on ordination would automatically convince Igbo to change their “patrilineal” system of kinship classification that kola hospitality is purported to embody. But the author correctly insists that inculturation that embodies ethical justice must be counter-cultural.

Uchem deploys important resources to argue her case about ‘overcoming women’s subordination’: [1] Igbo socio-cultural heritage of “egalitarianism” that in the context of women’s rights carries internal contradictions; [2] the social teachings of the Church that from the behaviour within the Church also contains internal contradictions; and [3] the Gospel and actions of Jesus considered as a whole. The privileged sections of the Jesus story highlighted are the parables and the unconventional or subversive wisdom teachings of Jesus. Furthermore the author lucidly argues that the resurrection of Jesus introduced new sets of values and understanding of the person of Jesus as the Christ and consequently pushes theological discourse and ministerial vocation well beyond the narrow confines of sexual or ethnic configurations.

The author divides her book into three parts. Part one is devoted to ‘social history’ of the Igbo, the subordination and marginalization of women worldwide and particularly in Igbo society. The author prefers using evidence from diaspora Igbo Catholics living in America as sample of women’s subordination among the Igbo. Part two highlights the subordination of women in the Church, the cultural reality and the psychological underpinnings of this systemic evil, drawing generously from Jungian
psychological theories. Finally part three presents excellent survey of feminist discourse in theology especially the reinterpretation of biblical myths about women, women ministry in the New Testament, and a Christology that goes beyond Jesus’ maleness to emphasise his humanity shared by both men and women.

Part one opens with a chronicle of the tragic historical subordination of women all over the world using among other resources UN reports and work by African women theologians. Statistics show that Africa instead of being the stranglehold of women’s subordination is well ahead of other parts of the world in encouraging women participation in public life. The author draws attention to the ‘head start’ that Igbo egalitarian ideology demonstrates on gender issues providing what she calls ‘the seeds of gender equality and complementarity inherently present in the egalitarian tradition of the Igbo people’. Indeed she indicates the importance of this ‘head start’ for her thesis: “women’s past tradition of agency within the Igbo egalitarian heritage together with the Jesus’ tradition are sources of an inclusive theology and praxis in Christian communities” (p.27). Unfortunately throughout the thesis one searches in vain for a radical retrieval of Igbo ‘gender diarchy’ for a new theological discourse. The author bemoans the setback to Igbo dual-gender ideology caused by colonial and Christian interest. But she suggests that the fact that modern (postcolonial) Igbo cash in on patriarchal dominance (as evidenced by the control group of Makera community in USA, despite the giant steps taken to bridge the male-female gap in USA), leads one to believe that the seeds of marginalization and subordination of women have cultural underpinnings in the Igbo tradition.

The rest of part one is a literature survey that focuses on women’s subordination. Uchem sets aside the colonial-racialist and Eurocentric assessment of Igbo and African women and stresses the difference between the social histories of Europe and Africa on gender issues. She correctly highlights the economic, social and political agency and resourcefulness of women as demonstrated by the 1929 southeastern Nigerian “Women War” that colonials
inaccurately called the “Aba riots”. Anthropological studies that carry inaccurate assessments of Igbo women are post-Women War, and therefore colonial (e.g. Margaret Mead Green’s study of Agbaja, 19472; and Sylvia Leith-Ross’ study of Urualla, 19393). The seminal article of K. Okonjo4 on the dual-sex political system operative in pre-colonial Igboland is evoked by the author. Sometimes Uchem quotes Okonjo at others she quotes from Uchendu5 making one wonder whether she read and assessed Okonjo’s article. The author uses Uchendu abundantly because of his interest in women education. Colonial-Christian education empowered men to the disadvantage of women in social, economic, political and ritual areas of life. Therese Agbasiere’s Women In Igbo Life and Thought6, surprisingly did not attract the attention one would expect in this kind of study – especially her refreshing analysis of Igbo kinship structure and terminology that show Igbo as matricentric, and Agbasiere’s emphasis on marriage as peak of women’s initiation into life – the source of the woman’s honour and dignity (the focus of the good life among the Igbo). Rather Uchem rejects as Eurocentric Agbasiere’s field finding that in ‘purely political’ affairs Igbo women have ‘consultative’ as opposed to ‘active’ voice. She equally criticises Onwurah7, used extensively in her thesis, for his views on marriage without providing a type of refreshing alternative that one finds in the work of Agbasiere.

From the project of the dissertation, “envisioning an inclusive theology with reference to women”, it appears to me that the first part of this thesis (Igbo social history) is even more important than the third part that tries to provide an alternative theological language. It is from the fundamental strengths and weaknesses of the Igbo social history that creative or radical retrieval of the language of theological discourse could emerge. “Colonial anthropology” cannot provide this language because it sets out from the “monarchical” masculinized or single-sex/gender ideology as opposed to the complementary African “gender diarchy”. The gender diarchy could have been retrieved as potent tool to deconstruct postcolonial and post-missionary Igbo men’s
exploitation of their position of privilege; it is a potent tool to critique misogynist biblical myths about woman very well analysed in Part three. In chapter four, the most lengthy chapter in part one, Uchem narrates and comments on the frustrations of Igbo women living in America, and the views of “conservative” as well as “progressive” Igbo men on gender issues, culture and church. Studies of diaspora Africans are valuable for a useful critique of the homeland in Africa. But it can never replace the skin-to-skin reality on the continent. Uchem is correct that many who claim, “it is our culture, it is our culture”, are often ignorant of Igbo culture. And while Igbo culture in the continent has dynamically moved ahead on aspects of gender issues, diaspora Igbo men cling to those aspects that benefit them to the frustration of women. [One can compare the Igbo case with the cultural conservatism of French Canadians and Irish Americans]. However, in my view only a retrieval of the key anthropological strengths of the culture could generate the force to combat women’s subordination. For example, one of Uchem’s respondents expressed the desire for a ‘women’s forum’ even in the USA as is normal in Igboland. However, this aspect of the dual-gender ideology played no critical role in Uchem’s perception of inclusive theology and ministry. Only in her conclusion did she draw attention to the importance of women’s forum as dictated by the dual-sex political ideology of traditional Igboland. It did not actually engage the typical single-sex masculinized social-political order of the church and state in the West that constitutes the takeoff and landing point of Western feminist discourse. Consequently, despite her critique of Western feminism Uchem has not successfully disentangled herself from its project and language.

Furthermore, Uchem’s literature review omitted critical studies on African women’s economic, social, political, and ritual power base in pre-colonial Africa and Igboland. This would have buttressed her dismissal of Eurocentric views and provided stronger socio-historical tools for the development of ‘inclusive’ theological language. For example, there is no mention of the extensive study
by Cheikh Anta Diop of African origins and social history based on pristine socio-political and economic ideology of matriarchy.\(^8\) And I find inexplicable the absence of the highly commended works of the Igbo feminist scholar Ifi Amadiume — especially her *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* that was selected among the 100 best books by African authors in the 20th century.\(^9\) I refer to these two key authors that are not used because I share their views that the ideology of ‘patriarchy’ is a social construct based on economic and political realities; just as the pristine experience of matriarchy — Queens, Matriarchs who actually ruled Africa and Igboland — was a social construct based on economic and political reasons. A radical retrieval of Igbo social history would enhance the *deconstruction* of the discourse on and agenda of ‘women’s subordination’ to ‘include’ foundational sources of ‘women’s power’: motherhood — the core of matricentric ideology that tempers male ‘headship’; child-bearing that should in no way be minimized as it combines psychological, social, economic and spiritual security; women in ritual (divination and priesthood); the dominance of female deities in Igbo society; and the aesthetics or ethics of rebellion and revolution that radically excludes bloodshed sanctioned by female deities, etc. Also this kind of study should not omit the flexibility in Igbo social structure particularly Igbo ambivalence of ‘headship’ that is not synonymous with ‘male’ in contradistinction to the androcentric biblical myths the author criticised. For example “headship” of families among the Igbo is not automatically male: di-bu-uno (to be rendered ‘head of household’ instead of ‘husband of household’) is basically neuter since a man or woman can head the family, as Amadiume persuasively argued. Indeed *di* or *husband* is neuter.

In the second part of the book the author explored the historical and psychological dimensions of women subordination, inferiorization and marginalization through Christianity. Against the Western experience Uchem shows that though Igbo women may be culturally and ritually subordinated they were neither inferiorized
nor marginalized. But the combined forces of the colonial machine and western Christian prejudice transmitted through education and Canon Law of marriage made Igbo women bearers of the dual burden of the traditional subordination and western inferiorization. Today, women are struggling to catch up but at great cost. Uchem delves into stimulating literature review of the seedbed of marginalization and oppression of women from the Graeco-Roman world and Church. The great names in Patristic and Medieval theology were architects of the women’s inferiorization and subordination. In the West, from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas the inferiorization of women was taught and internalised. The distortion of the Bible data by androcentric interpretation that played down female ministries (like the ‘deacon’ Phoebe), and the egalitarianism deriving from Baptism (especially Gal 3:26-28 – quoted or cited over a dozen times in the book), were highlighted. But the argument, from one isolated archaeological evidence, of possible female bishops in Rome, appears rather thin; also the claim that women were present at the Last Supper could be placed on the lower rung of possibility since no text supports such presence. The western church from patristic times to the present is negatively disposed towards women ministries. Uchem could add to the list of complaints that deaconesses, where they existed in the West, were not appointed with imposition of hands as was the practice in the East; that there is no order of widows in the West as was the case in the East especially in the Syriac church where widows wielded much power. Uchem concludes part two with an exploration of the mental construct that is productive of the sexist and androcentric pattern of thinking using Jungian archetypal process. In addition to exploring the archetypes as basis for prejudice, Uchem adopts Jung’s male-female (animus/animia) principle and also the theory of the ‘shadow self’ that one has to uncover for self-liberation. The ‘shadow self’ she claims is responsible for men blaming their inadequacies on women. In my view, the Jungian psychological construct is an interesting reproduction of fundamental anthropology (doctrine of humans) in West African societies where
twinness (male-female) is not only fundamental to the definition of
the person but the person is fundamentally plurality of relationship.

In part three Uchem explores with the aid of both male and
female scholars the reinterpretation of the Adamic myth proposing
a symbolic as opposed to the literal interpretation of the texts. The
Adamic myth has had enormous impact on theological, ministerial,
and gender issues in both church and state. Her excellent treatment
of the a new Christology is quite refreshing and shows what
happens when alternative sets of assumptions are applied to
searching the scriptures. She evokes soteriological issues but leaves
them for later research. Concentrating on ministry Uchem insists
that the new inclusive Christology and the egalitarian ethos of Gal
3: 26-28 make it possible for females as well as males to
sacramentally represent the resurrected Christ. Furthermore, the
notion of the Twelve cannot be the basis of denying ordination to
women, for the Twelve are not coterminous with Apostles; and
there were women Apostles and ministers in the New Testament
and early church. Her concluding chapter draws from her own
personal experience of alternative and inclusive ministry that men
and women find interesting and even liberating.

I find the second and third parts of this book very informative.
Uchem covers wide-ranging literature and gives a good account of
the discourse of feminist theology. It is a genuine contribution to
Christian theology, and stands alongside similar women’s
contributions in Third World and African theologies.

My overall view is that Uchem makes a very important
contribution to theology among the Igbo and in Africa from the
feminist perspective. Her rhetorical or polemical style is
inescapable. I suggest that her style falls within what, in African
literature, Chinweizu and others call ‘resistance polemics” or
“bolekaja” criticism” (challenging a pretentious patriarchal
ideology to “come down, let’s fight”). This is the kind of writing
that Ifi Amadiume christens Nzagwali (Igbo for “answering back”;
but with the “devastating power of the ‘mouth’ or the hard-hitting
accuracy of the ‘pen’”). At times the polemicist gives the
impression that ‘men’ are irredeemable. Further on in the book she does distinguish between systemic evil of male oppression as opposed to opinions and actions of individual men.

Second, Uchem is a nun deeply interested and involved in her church. But it is a church dominated by men, in which she wants to minister, and which she wants to see converted. This makes direct her focus only on the Roman Catholic Church. The emerging African indigenous churches (or African independent churches) that have wide-ranging female ministries, structural inclusion of women, and novel biblical exegesis, do not figure in the book at all. Also Protestant churches that practice women ordination are not mentioned. This is a great pity because these Christian churches indicate creative ways of developing inclusive ministry. The Roman Catholic Church has no experience of this. The Western world had no experience of matriarchy and is not matricentric. Western feminist rhetoric is crudely restricted and even trapped within the struggle for male power as defined by males. I agree that Uchem’s concern over ordained ministry in a male dictated Catholic Church should preoccupy Catholic theology and ministry. But I wonder whether attention should not be directed first to re-examining the fundamentals of ecclesiology deriving from a deconstructed Jesus’ story and humane African social history in order to set aside a masculinized church order and then to revisit vocation to ministry within the church. This deconstruction that precedes reconstruction could then encourage an inclusiveness that would make female and male vocation to ministry beneficial to church and society. The dual-sex, dual-gender ideology of African societies, if creatively brought into the debate on ministry, ensures checks and balances in resolving the normal conflict between the sexes in the construction of society or Church. There could even be exclusive areas, while maintaining flexibility. It is not everything that a woman can do that a man does, just as it is not everything that a man can do that a woman does. And both cooperate to construct a humane society.

Finally, I agree with Uchem that inculturation theology must have social justice agenda. But I also maintain that critical
evaluation of African social history is the primary condition for all discourse on inculturation and liberation. Uchem’s book is an important voice of African women doing theology in context.

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NOTES

1 See V. C. Uchendu, "‘Kola Hospitality’ and Igbo Lineage Structure” Man (64: 1964), 47-50.
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