

Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology—Volume 19 (2007)
Twenty Years of Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology:

Editorial

The founding of the Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians—publishers of *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*—was fortuitous. The founding members that assembled in Onitsha in 1986, at the Pastoral Centre, responded to calls for an articulate Christian response to the insertion of Nigeria into the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) by the then head of the military junta, Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. The measured critique of the instrumentalization of religion—Islam and Christianity—by military and civilian politicians has occupied considerable space in the different volumes of *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*. The lead article in this volume, by Chukwuka Celestine Okonkwo, tackles the same issue—the ideology of political Islam in Nigeria as being unfaithful to the ideal of Islamic spirituality.

Nigerian Christian theologians who responded to calls to put heads together over the OIC debacle came from Jos University (Ibrahim Musa Ahmadu and the late Emefie Ikenga-Metuh), Awka College of Education (Emmanuel Ekpunobi), Nsukka University (Johnson Orjiako), College of Education Nsugbe (Christopher Ejizu). Our host was the late Godwin Ikeobi (director of the Pastoral Centre). Discussions raised the issue of whether the nascent group could provide the Christian Association of Nigeria with a research-publication base to enable it respond credibly to religion-provoked crises in the polity. No agreement was reached. Since membership is free it was agreed that results of meetings and discussions be published as frequently as possible, engage in discussions based on prior research and publish the *Bulletin—Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*. The decision to diversify participation and create wider awareness of the ecumenical association through moving meetings to various university campuses and institutes could not be sustained. The economic crunch affected academics as other Nigerians. Conference style

meetings were held only in the universities of Jos, Ekpoma and Ife; and in the Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace, Enugu. Despite the inability to hold the periodic meetings, the publication of the Bulletin was maintained—the editor and deputy editor continued to hold meetings, kept in touch with contacts, and ensured that the articles published maintained the ethos and vision of the founding group.

The articles published in this issue capture the various aspects of the focus of the Bulletin. First, the preoccupation with how the religions of Nigerian peoples should enhance rather than diminish wellbeing is covered by the lead article. Second, the pathetic condition of distress continental and diasporic Africans undergo—from slavery through to the present day—and the ambiguous position of the Christian church are explored. This is approached from three perspectives, namely, African American and continental African. The African American perspective—a historical approach—is the focus of the paper by Jamie T. Phelps. She highlights the joys and the sorrows of being Black and Catholic starting from the patristic period, through slavery, to the racism that is part and parcel of contemporary America. The African perspective is historically and theologically analysed by Charles Ebelebe and Patrick Roe. Ebelebe critically assesses the Irish missionary enterprise in Igboland as it relates to inculturation. Roe presents a review article of Paul V. Kollman's *The Evangelization of Slaves and Catholic Origins in Eastern Africa*, in which he drew attention to the illusion of theocratic Christian community—the Christian villages or reductions. The final entry by Humphrey Anameje explores the position of some contemporary theologians and their interpretation of Vatican II council on laypeople in the church; the exploration leads him to argue persuasively for an integral notion of ministry and mission in the church—encompassing the ministry of the laity and the clergy. To commemorate the twenty years of *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, we provide author's index to volumes 2-19.

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