

## **Full-Cycle, Catholicism To Pentecostalism: Similarities Among Nigerian Churches As A Plus For Ecumenism**

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### **Abstract**

Church history shows that one of the major causes of the Reformation (and the other schisms that followed) is the numerous controversies on doctrinal and ritual practices of the Catholic Church at that time. A rejection of Catholic doctrine gave birth to the Protestant denominations, and in turn a rejection of the latter produced the Pentecostal Churches. Doctrinal disagreements also account for the large number of Christian denominations found around the world today. In Nigeria alone, there are hundreds of Churches, yet new ones keep sprouting out continually. While most of the founders of these Churches continue to present doctrinal differences as the reason for establishing their own places, a close examination of Nigerian churches reveals that having moved from Catholicism through Protestantism and Pentecostalism, history is repeating itself! Pentecostalism seems to be returning to Catholic ritual practices that have been rejected since the Reformation. Upon this observation, this paper employed the historical and analytical methods of inquiry to examine this most interesting phenomenon. The paper found that Pentecostal churches in Nigeria now use methods reminiscent of Catholic doctrine and paraphernalia in their activities. This evidence led to the conclusion that in Nigeria, Christianity has come full cycle. The paper interprets this as a good omen for ecumenism and recommends ways to consolidate the unity of the Church.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Christianity is a religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the New Testament. The Christian faith is essentially a belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and as Saviour and Lord. Almost all Christians believe in the Trinity, which teaches the unity of Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit as three persons in one Godhead. Most Christians can describe their faith with the Nicene Creed. As the religion of Byzantine Empire in the first millennium and of Western Europe during the time of colonization, Christianity has been propagated throughout the world. The main divisions of Christianity are, according to the number of adherents:

- Catholic Church, headed by the Pope in Rome, is a communion of the Western church and twenty-two Eastern Catholic churches.
- Protestantism separated from the Catholic Church in the 16th-century Reformation and split in many denominations.
- Eastern Christianity which includes Eastern Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodoxy and the Church of the East.
- Pentecostals, are independent Churches, most of which have emerged from the above three groups.

There are other smaller Christian groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Latter Day Saint movement, whose inclusion in Christianity is sometimes disputed. The period between Emperor Constantine's toleration to the Lutheran Reformation of the late Medieval era saw Catholicism at the peak of its monopoly of Christendom, after that the world witnessed the multiplicity of Christian sects and now there are several of them (as listed above).

One reason for the multiplicity of Christian sects is that the religion puts more emphasis on belief than other religions. The Church has throughout its history set out creeds that define correct belief for Christians and identify heresy. According to Luke Timothy Johnson (2003) "most religions put more emphasis on orthopraxy (right practice) than on orthodoxy (right belief)"; in contrast, Christianity places a peculiar emphasis on belief and has created ever more elaborate and official statements in its creeds. Thus emphasis on right belief (and controversies surrounding it) is the root of the several schisms in the Christian faith. It is also at the heart of the challenges facing the ecumenical movement. In Nigeria for example, constant bickering among churches over differences in doctrine and practice have all but thwarted efforts to provide the Church with a unified front to carry out its primary duty of providing succour to a world in need. At present, it is the opinion of this paper that if ecumenism were successful in Nigeria then there would not have been a need for duplicity of associations such as having the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) on one hand and then others like Tarrayar Ekklesiyoyin Kristi a Nigeria (TEKAN) and the Pentecostal Association of Nigeria on the other. Hence there is the need to search for a way of addressing the problem.

This search has led the paper to discovery of an interesting pattern which is observable in the practice of Christianity in Nigeria today. There is evidence suggesting strongly that Protestant and Pentecostal Churches seem to be reverting to those very ritual practices that were rejected as non-Biblical doctrines of Catholicism. The issues of practice and doctrine that sparked the Reformation have gradually being reintroduced in new forms! This is the main concern of this paper; it is aimed at showing the common grounds among the different groups in Nigeria, not merely as a repeat of history, but a possibility that the event is an opportunity for consolidation of the ecumenical movement in Nigeria and possibly elsewhere in the world.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In an exercise such as this, given the diversity in perspectives from which a conception of certain technical terms is possible, it has become imperative to present a platform that would enable a clearer understanding of the issues addressed within this paper. Hence, a conceptual clarification has been put forth with the aim of pinpointing the exact meaning of some words and concepts used in the discourse.

**Catholicism:** Catholicism is a broad concept employed in describing specific traditions in the Christian Churches in theology and doctrine, liturgy, ethics, and spirituality (McBrien 1994). There are several senses in which the term is used; its etymology reveals how it was first employed in scholarly discourse. Thurston (2013) avers that Catholicism derives from the English word Catholic and the Greek *katholikos* (which in turn comes from the root *katholou*) meaning ‘throughout the whole’ or ‘universal’; this was the sense in which it was first used by Classical writers (as is found in the works of Aristotle and Polybius); it was also in this primitive or non-ecclesiastical sense that it was used freely by the earlier Christian writers (like Justin Martyr, Tertulian, and Irenaeus).

The combination ‘the Catholic Church’ (*he katholike ekklesia*) is found for the first time in the letter of St Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans written about A.D. 110. In usage it is meant to refer to the Church in a universal (global) sense (the exact meaning of this usage of the term is a matter of debate though). Today, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (2005) states that Catholicism is sometimes employed in contrast to Protestantism. Connor (2001), in agreement, states further that this was the sense in which the Oxford Movement (the English wing of the reform movement) used the term. According to Schwarz and Staton (2010) Catholicism is also used to refer to “the beliefs, government, etc of the Roman Catholic Church”. In this sense Catholicism is distinguished from other forms of Christianity in its particular understanding and commitment to traditions, the sacraments, the mediation between God, communion, and the See of Rome (McBrien 1994). Within this paper therefore, Catholicism is used to mean the belief, government, liturgy, doctrine/teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

**Protestantism:** It is yet to be decided whether the term Protestantism originated from the French *protestant* or the German *protestant*, what is certain is that both languages derived the word from the Latin *protestantem*, which means ‘one who publicly declares/protests’. The term was initially used to designate the Reformers of the Medieval era but has now become an appellation for all groups that reject Roman Catholic orthodoxy. Further more, the term is sometimes used to refer to the teachings/doctrine of the body of Churches that are opposed to Roman Catholicism (“Protestantism”, [www.etymologyonline.com](http://www.etymologyonline.com)). Protestantism is one of the major divisions within Christianity, it a belief system that is characterized by the denial of several doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church including the universal authority of the Papacy, use of symbols in worship, celibacy of the priesthood (some also reject

infant Baptism). Most Protestant Churches affirm the principles of the Reformation like justification by grace through faith alone (*Sola Gratia* and *Sola Fide* respectively), the priesthood of all believers, and the primacy of the Bible as the source of revealed truth (*Sola Scriptura*) (“Protestantism”, <http://en.wikipedia.org>). Protestantism is a movement that is widely believed to have begun in Germany with the work of Martin Luther (*The Ninety-Five Theses*) written in 1517 in reaction to medieval doctrines and practices, particularly regarding salvation, justification, and ecclesiology. There are over 33, 000 Protestant denominations around the world (“Protestantism”, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/protestantism>). It is also very important to add that today, most Protestant Churches prefer to employ the term Evangelical because they are not comfortable with the somewhat negative connotations of the former term. The term Protestantism is used here to refer to the teachings of those Churches that begun with or after the Reformation (known as Protestants or Evangelicals) as a way of distinguishing them from those within the Pentecostal movement.

**Pentecostalism:** Cox (2003) notes that Pentecostalism is a revivalist movement which began in 1906 in the United States; it derives its name from the Greek word *Pentecost* which is used to designate the Jewish Feast of Weeks. For Christians this event commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus Christ, as narrated in Chapter Two of the Book of Acts. Ukpong (2008) avers that Pentecostalism is a modern sect of Christianity which (like other forms of evangelical Protestantism) adheres to a special emphasis on a direct and personal experience of God through the baptism of the Holy Ghost. They also reject the doctrine of Cessation of Charism which holds that the era of signs, wonders, and miracles has passed. Rather, Pentecostals teach that baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience separate from conversion that enables a Christian to live a Holy-Spirit-filled and empowered life. This empowerment includes the use of spiritual gifts (charisms) such as speaking in tongues and divine healing (some Pentecostal sects include the notion of a material prosperity as part of the evidence of a Holy-Ghost filled life). They are committed to Biblical authority, spiritual gifts, and the miraculous; and see their movement as a reflection of the same kind of spiritual power and teachings that were found in the Apostolic Age. For this reason, Pentecostal Churches are largely viewed as a renewal movement. It is also the above characteristics that distinguish this movement from other non-Catholic groups such as Protestants and Jehovah’s Witnesses. It is by reason of these distinguishing features that this paper separates Pentecostals from the rest of evangelical Protestants. Thus Pentecostalism as used within the paper refers to the teachings/doctrines and practices of the movement which began in 1906 and has spread all over the world. As a movement, it has influenced Protestants and Roman Catholics in many ways.

**Ecumenism:** The word Ecumenism comes from the Greek *oikoumene* meaning ‘the inhabited earth’. In a broad sense the word refers to the interfaith or intrafaith movement striving for greater mutual respect, toleration, and cooperation among the world religions or within different sects of the same religions. The aim of ecumenism is not so much as to cause full, organic unity with one another but simply to enhance relations (Tachin 2009). In a narrow sense however, Ecumenism, according to Hudson (1969) is the Christian international organizations put together to take care of the Church’s concerns within the political, social, and economic arena at the international level. Tachin (2009) states further that ecumenism may also be defined as the universal assembly of various Christian traditions or denominations with the primary aim of promoting the unity of the Church in spite of their confessional disagreements. In other words, Ecumenism provides a forum for interaction among different Christian denominations and Churches separated by doctrine, history, and practice.

The first major peace Ecumenical assembly was held at the Hague in 1907, though it may be recalled that prior to this meeting, the World Council of Churches held its first meeting in 1948 in the context of the world wars. The main aim of Ecumenism at that level was to provide a united platform of Churches upon which world governments would be influenced to seek mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence of nations (Tachin 2009).

Ecumenism originated from the Roman Catholic Church’s attempts to reconcile with Christians who had become separated over theological issues. This aim was later expanded to encompass the Church’s response to the devastation caused by World Wars I and II; so the World Council of Churches went forward with efforts to assist those in need (whether spiritual, physical, or emotional). From these activities, it dawned on Christian Churches around the world that in spite of their differences, they could join together and produce great change in the world. Thus several councils were formed that connected churches across continental lines (Kee *et al* 1998). Today, Ecumenism is often confused with non-denominational Christianity or inter-religious one-ness; however, the use of the term in this paper refers to the sense in which Christian Churches are striving to find unity in diversity and work toward touching the world positively.

### III. A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE REFORMATION

The Reformation (also known as the Magisterial Reformation) led by Martin Luther which took place in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was the culmination of several previous attempts at handling certain theological, doctrinal, liturgical, and administrative issues in the medieval teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. As early as the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, there were groups such as the Albigenses, and the Waldensians which began the campaign against issues like authority of the Pope and the use of indigenous languages in conducting Mass. By 14<sup>th</sup> Century, John Wycliffe (between 1276 and 1379) writing in Oxford, took a controversial position on many issues; he

attacked the Church's role in temporal matters, corruption of churchmen, and sought for Scriptures to be published in indigenous languages (rather than the approved Latin). He also denied the transubstantiation of the consecrated Host and Wine. He was responsible for the translation of the New Testament into English (finished in 1380). His work and teachings were condemned by the University; he was however allowed to retire to his parish at Lutterworth and remained unperturbed as a priest. In other lands he would surely have suffered martyrdom, but in England he was well protected, his translation of the Old Testament appeared in 1384, the year of his death (Hurlbut 1970). His work is thought to be among several sacrifices that prepared the way for the Reformation of Luther.

John Huss (1369 – 1415) was another person whose work contributed immensely to the Reformation. Influenced by Wycliffe's writings, he preached his doctrines (especially against Papal authority). He was made Rector of the University of Prague and for a time garnered influence throughout Bohemia. For his work he was excommunicated by the Pope and the city of Prague was placed under an interdict while he remained there. Huss retired and went into hiding where he wrote and sent out letters reaffirming his views. Two years later he consented to go before the Council of the Roman Catholic Church at Constance, in Baden on the Border of Switzerland, having received a pledge of safe conduct from Emperor Sigismund. But the pledge was later violated upon the principle that "faith was not to be kept with heretics". Huss was condemned and burned at the stake in 1415. His death aroused the reforming element in his native land and influenced Bohemia for centuries (Hurlbut 1970).

Jerome Savonarola (born 1452), a monk of the Dominican order at Florence in Italy, and Prior of the Monastery of St. Mark, was another reformer who campaigned against the social, ecclesiastical, and political evil of his day. His cathedral was filled to overflowing with multitudes eager to not only listen but obey his teachings. He soon became quite literally, the practical dictator of Florence. He was soon excommunicated by the Pope, imprisoned, condemned, hanged, and his body burned in the square of Florence. His martyrdom (in 1498) was nineteen years before Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the Cathedral door at Wittenberg.

The above examples demonstrate that Martin Luther's Reformation did not happen all of a sudden, it was rather the result of centuries of sacrificial attempts to correct the corruption of the medieval church. Hurlbut (1970) has observed that the Renaissance, the invention of printing, nationalism, and other socio-political factors also contributed to the success of the Reformation. To follow this line of thinking is to imply that previous efforts culminated in the work of Luther; thus it was not Luther's work alone that produced such a devastating impact but an aggregate of forces. However, the fact remains that it was during Luther's activity that schisms erupted beyond the control of the Papacy and the era of multiplicity of Churches was born. The following section takes a closer look at Luther's Reformation.

**Luther's Reformation:** Martin Luther was a German, a monk and Professor in the University of Wittenberg. Aside from the previously noted issues that other reformers had with the Roman Catholic Church, certain incidents fired-up Luther's spirit to press for reforms. The first was the fund-raising campaign put forth by the reigning pope Leo X. Needing large sums of money for completion of St. Peter's Church at Rome, he permitted an agent known as John Tetzel to go through Germany selling certificates (also known as Indulgences) signed by the Pope himself, purporting to bestow pardon of all sins, not only upon the holders of the certificates, but upon friends and family (living or dead) in whose behalf they were purchased. Tetzel was a showman, preaching to gullible crowds in German towns, he went far beyond the official doctrine of Indulgences and promised the immediate release of souls of loved ones from the pain of Purgatory as soon as a purchase was made; he even put up a catchy jingle to make his point, "As soon as the coin in coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory springs" ("History of Reformation", [www.historyworld.net](http://www.historyworld.net)). Luther preached against Tetzel and his sale of pardons, denouncing his teaching in no measured terms.

Another issue which irked Luther was the corruption of the leaders of the Church, in hind sight, it could be recalled amidst several other incidents of corruption that, Pope Alexander IV (1492 – 1503) was one of the most controversial of the Renaissance Popes; he had fathered seven children, including Lucrezia and Cesare Borgia, by at least two mistresses. Fourteen years after his death, the corruption of the papacy had grown so much that in order to stop it and address the other issues of doctrine; Martin Luther (on the morning of 31 October 1517) nailed to the oaken door of Wittenberg Cathedral a parchment containing ninety-five theses or statements, which criticized several and various aspects of the Church's teachings and impliedly touched on the authority of the Pope and the priesthood as well. The theses also displayed his opposition to doctrines and practices not countenanced by Holy Scripture ("Protestant Reformation", <http://en.wikipedia.org>).

Parallel to events in Germany, a movement began in Switzerland under the leadership of Ulrich Zwingli. These two movements quickly agreed on most issues, but some unresolved differences kept them separate. Some followers of Zwingli believed that the Reformation was too conservative, and moved independently toward more radical positions (such as forbidding the use of images and other paraphernalia in worship), some of which survive among modern day Anabaptists. Other Protestant movements grew up along lines of mysticism or humanism, sometimes breaking from Rome or from the Protestants, or forming outside of the churches (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2012).

In 1520, Luther publicly burnt a papal bull (from *bull*a in Latin meaning 'seal') summoning him to appear for trial and punishment together with some copies of canons or laws enacted by the Roman authorities at the gates of Wittenberg University. This act was seen as a Luther formal renunciation of the Roman Catholic Church. In reaction, the Pope excommunicated him. In 1521 he

was summoned before the Diet of Worms on the Rhine. The new emperor Charles V gave him the promise of safe conduct. In spite of concerns by his associates that he could face the same fate as John Huss, he appeared before the Diet on 17 April 1521; the emperor was presiding. He refused to retract his views, and in spite of mounting pressure to arrest him, the emperor allowed him to leave Worms. On his way home he was taken by soldiers (sent by Frederick the Wise) who took him to the Castle of Wartburg and held him for his safety. While there, for a period of a year and living in disguise, storms of war and revolt were raging in the empire. Luther kept himself busy all through, he made his translation of the New Testament into pithy German (a work regarded as the foundation of the German written language (Hurlbut 1970). When the danger to his life appeared less severe, he returned to Wittenberg and resumed leadership of the movement for a Reformed Church, just in time to save it from extravagant excesses.

Hurlbut (1970) reports that the division of the German states into the reformed and Roman branches was between the North and South; the North followed Luther while the Southern princes, led by Austria, remained loyal to Rome. A Diet was held at Spires in 1529 in the hope of reconciling the two parties. It was a vain exercise; the Roman rulers, who were in majority, condemned the Lutheran doctrines while the Northern princes upheld them. The teaching of Luther's doctrines was forbidden in the South and Northern states were required to allow Catholics to practice their faith. Hurlbut (1970) states further that the Lutheran princes made a formal protest to this unequal ruling, and from then on they were known as Protestants and their doctrines as the Protestant religion. This is the origin of the name Protestant.

Following Luther's break from the Roman Catholic Church, the wind of Reformation spread to other lands like Switzerland, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, England, and Scotland.

**A Recap of Reasons/Causes of the Reformation:** In summary, the Reformation was a result of the following reasons:-

- The Church hierarchy failed to give spiritual direction to its flock; rather it was corrupt and more concerned with enriching themselves and their allies. The false doctrine behind the sale of indulgences is an example of the Church's desperate measures to amass wealth at the expense of the masses.
- The Church's leadership was preoccupied with political power and its privileges rather than providing spiritual leadership and guidance.
- The sale and use of images, relics, and symbols which were used in worship was seen as a doctrinal anomaly. Some reformers viewed the use of images in worship as idolatry (citing passages in the Bible (such as Ex 20:4 and Lev 26:1) which forbid creation or worship of idols and images) and forbade them in their gatherings.
- The doctrine on the Eucharist was another controversial issue. While the Church taught transubstantiation (the notion that the bread and wine at Mass

*change in substance* to become the blood and body of Christ), the reformers taught that this was not the case; they proposed consubstantiation (the argument that in the communion, the body and blood of Christ, and the bread and wine *coexist* in union with each other). The manner of celebrating the Mass was another issue, whilst the Church taught that only the priest could partake of the wine at the Eucharist, thereby making only the Host available to the rest of the congregation; the reformers taught that both the bread and wine should be given to the whole congregation.

- The use of Latin instead of the people's indigenous languages in Mass was also a major concern.
- The Roman Catholic Church also forbade the lay people from having direct access to the Bible; it rather approved the distribution of Church official's interpretations of it.
- Issues like praying to the Saints and to Mary (the Virgin Mary) and confession of sins to priests to obtain forgiveness were also opposed by the reform movement. Luther for instance taught that all believers were priests and needed no priests or saints to approach God.

Most of these issues are doctrinal; some are administrative, while others have political undertones. On the overall however, the quest for reforms was intended to revive a Church that had become almost overwhelmed in false doctrines and the vanity of the world. The inability of the Church to appropriately respond to these calls for reform led to the schisms in the Roman Catholic Church and the various Churches that have emerged since then. It is interesting to note that after the Reformation, the controversies in doctrine and practice continued and so also the fragmentation of the Churches. Today, the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2013) states that in the Protestant inclination alone, there are over 33,000 denominations around the world.

#### **IV. INDICATORS THAT THE CHURCH IN NIGERIA HAS COME FULL CYCLE**

Nigeria has hundreds of Christian groups within its territory all of which claim allegiance to different ideological inclinations, but they can all be grouped into three: Catholics, Protestants, and Pentecostals. Evidence in the practice and doctrine of some Churches within Nigeria suggests that some of the controversial practices of the Catholic Church have returned in new forms. This is the preoccupation of the following sections.

**Use of Charism:** Charism is a term with origin in the Greek *Carisma* which depending on context could mean any of free gift, help, goodwill, favour, and grace. It is also linked in meaning to the Greek verb *Cariszeqai* which means 'to bestow a gift or favour' as a free gift, a spiritual capacity resulting from *Carij* (that is God's grace). Therefore, the verbal noun *Carisma* points to the notion of a total gift of salvation received by all believers or the result of activity or action. It also means

work of grace, gracious activity, operation of grace, or gift of grace (Anagwo 2010). Charism is also understood to refer to the spiritual gifts that enable miraculous deeds and wonders (as experienced during the Pentecost) such as healings, exorcism, prophecy (extra-Biblical revelation), and speaking in tongues. As far as the period prior to the Reformation, medieval Catholicism was given to the use of charisms (especially in exorcisms, and faith healing) though some within the Church opposed it (Achinuke 2004). But the reformers who founded the Protestant movement preached against this and argued for the doctrine of cessation of charism (which claims that the era of miracles and wonders is gone).

Today however, Pentecostalism has revived the use of charisms which have been re-embraced in both Protestant and Catholic Churches in Nigeria; Protestant and Evangelical Churches like Methodist, ECWA, as well as Protestant Churches are all involved at various degrees in the practice of charisms. In almost all Pentecostal Churches within Nigeria, the use of relics and other paraphernalia in charismatic activities is rife; prior to now, this was a sole preserve of the Catholic Church. They now employ the use of articles like consecrated salt, water, olive oil, incense, handkerchiefs, necklaces with pendants, even messages on audio tapes and video recordings are believed to produce charisma (Igbum 2010). Popular Pentecostal Churches involved in the use of these items include Assemblies of God Nigeria, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Living Faith Church, Deeper Life Bible Church (Ukpong 2008); others are Dunamis International Gospel Centre, Christ Embassy, Synagogue Church of all Nations; while Protestant Churches like ECWA, Methodist, Baptist, and NKST have both clergy and lay members who subscribe to these charismatic activities and engage in them (at least clandestinely because some churches are yet to openly admit charisms). Thus, in the use of charisms, it can be said that what was cast aside is being reinstated again.

**Controversial of Doctrines:** There are several doctrinal issues that led to the Reformation, but here the paper picks on just one for the purpose of argument; that is the issue of the authority of the Bible as the source of God's will. While the Catholic Church taught (and still teaches) that in order to understand the Bible as God's will, it is important to employ external sources such as traditions; the reform movement disagreed and presented the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* (a Latin concept meaning 'by scripture alone') by which they argued that only what is contained in the Bible is fit as sufficient and supreme authority in matters of faith and morals. Hence within the Protestant fold, non-Biblical sources (like traditions and charismatic extra-Biblical revelations) were out-rightly rejected ("Protestantism", <http://en.wikipedia.org>). It is quite interesting to note that with Pentecostalism, the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* has been technically cast aside. By permitting extra-Biblical revelations, Pentecostal doctrine (in spite of claims to the *Sola Scriptura* tradition) has unwittingly given vent to other sources of understanding the Bible. It is very important at this point to make it very clear that the paper is not trying to establish the theological basis of the doctrines mentioned here, the point of

highlighting them is to show that modern day doctrines are as controversial as those of the past historical epochs; this is their common ground, no single denomination of Christianity has doctrine that is not faulted or draws controversy.

**Church Administration:** One of the key arguments for the Reformation was the spiritual authority and also the jurisdictional power (*plenitudo potestatis*) of the Papacy; reformers unanimously opposed the authority of the Pope (spiritually as the earthly representative of St Peter, legally as the overall judge of mankind, and administratively as the head of the Church). It could be said that the rejection of the Papacy was not so much due to the personalities of those who occupied the office but a renunciation of the centralized authority (or political monopoly) which the institution and the Holy See held. Thus Protestant Churches set out with administrative hierarchies that did not have a single figure (like the Pope) at the top, rather most adopted other systems of administration. Some had councils of bishops (a form of reformed Episcopal system like the type used in the Anglican Communion), others chose Congregational leadership, and some chose Presbyterian systems.

On the surface, it appears Protestant and Pentecostal churches have a different system of leadership than that of the Catholics; again, on the surface, it appears like these other major denominations have extricated themselves from the grip of the Holy See (both doctrinally and administratively); but a closer (and less theological) appraisal suggests otherwise. The fact is that the leaders of all churches invariably assume the same authority which the Pope has in the Catholic Church; their decisions (whether as Congregations or individual bishops) on doctrinal, quasi-judicial, and administrative matters are final; and their followers take their word as the unquestionable verdict of God. Thus, almost all Protestant churches, regardless of their system of administration, still find themselves under the tight grip of their leaders who aside from administration, impose and enforce all doctrinal rules. The same thing obtains in the case of Pentecostal churches, most of which are run by their founders (or the founder's successors) who double as single, overbearing, and unquestionable spiritual and administrative authorities. In Nigeria for instance, Enoch Adeboye (the successor of the initial founder) is at the peak of the hierarchy of The Redeemed Christian Church of God, William Kumuyi is in charge of Deeper Life Bible Church, Christian Oyahkilome is in charge of Christ Embassy, T.B. Joshua is in charge of Synagogue Church of Christ. Most of these founder-leaders are assisted by their spouses (who are technically second in command); and their word on all issues (even outside the realm of their Churches affairs) are revered. What all these facts sums up to is that whether one is under the authority of the Pope, or that of the leadership of another church, the unquestionableness of the leader (in almost all matters) is a common denominator in all Christian denominations. In this way too, history has only taken Christians back and forth; at least technically, they are still in the same place they were before the Reformation!

**Fund Raising Methods:** The nature of fund-raising methods in Nigerian churches is quite reminiscent of the questionable practices witnessed during medieval Catholicism. Just like certain doctrines were created at that time to support practices like the sale of Indulgences prior to the Reformation, so also are most leaders of Churches in Nigeria employing any means (with Biblical basis or not) to amass wealth for themselves. Particularly interesting are the emphasis on payment of tithes and ‘sowing of seeds’ as means of getting God to make the believer prosperous. On the doctrine of tithes, after threatening the followers with God’s wrath and making them to pay tithes regardless of whether they earn legitimately or not; most of the Church leaders do not on their own give out the one-tenth of the tithes as required by scripture. The sowing of seeds doctrine goes that when an individual who is suffering from sickness, poverty, unemployment, etc strives hard and raises a substantial amount of money and gives it to the Church, such a person would get God to listen to his/her prayers and reward him/her in due course. Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria use this tactic to draw huge sums of money from poor people who sometimes (like the gullible Germans of Luther’s era who bought Indulgences) sale their valuable properties and pay the money to Church with the hope of getting back tenfold or more. Such monies are not open to probe by anyone; preachers even warn their members against inquiring about such funds to avoid incurring God’s wrath.

Another means of generating money being employed in most Nigerian Churches is through the sale of relics and paraphernalia at exorbitant rates. For example, the researcher found that a small bottle of anointing oil costs as much as Five Thousand Naira (an equivalent of USD 32) at T.B. Joshua’s Synagogue Church while the same item costs Two Hundred and Fifty Naira (about USD 1.5) on the open market. These and several other questionable means of generating funds in Nigerian Churches have shown that human frailty is not only a feature of the Catholic Church; it is an unfortunate negative trait in human nature. Thus even on this negative issue, all facets of the Nigerian Christianity are guilty (in varying degrees though).

## **V. TOWARD ECUMENISM**

As stated earlier, ecumenism is not aimed at creating an organic and harmonious unity in Christianity, it is rather a movement geared toward ensuring a form of unity in diversity by which Christian Churches can find a front to confront the challenges of bringing God’s love to humanity at various levels of a heterogeneous and sophisticated world. The above common grounds (both positive and negative) have been highlighted, not to discredit the Church but to show that Christian Churches have much more in common than most people believe. In Nigeria particularly, where there is so much religious tension and acrimony (even among Christian groups), the issues raised above are meant to enhance cooperation, understanding, and mutual respect. Thus within this framework, the various challenges facing proper ecumenism in Nigeria may be addressed so as to enhance higher synergy in

the efforts of bodies like the Christian Association of Nigeria to achieve its goals more effectively. The way forward is cooperation by which the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of the world could be met, not competition over territories, political power, and material wealth.

Having proposed that cooperation is the most important element in ensuring ecumenism in Nigeria; it is important to pinpoint other practical ways of ensuring the success of this movement in Nigeria. Firstly, there should be at least a quasi-legal framework (perhaps in the form of a document) guiding the establishment and ratification of Churches in Nigeria. Such a document will set minimum standards of what constitutes a church and safeguard against the embarrassing proliferation of all kinds of structures that claim to be churches.

Secondly, religious leaders should teach ecumenism to their followers; if possible, it should be added to catechisms of the various churches. Most Christians are not aware of the ecumenical movement and so they go about fanning the fires of discord and rivalry. Inclusion of ecumenism in the churches' teaching will thus enlighten most followers and engender cooperation rather than acrimony.

Thirdly, Christians who support and believe in ecumenism should teach their children at home; this would be a very practical way of consolidating the ecumenical movement. Often than not, rivalry among churches is ingrained into children in the home (where attitudes and opinions against other Christian groups are usually displayed). The home is therefore a very important place where cooperation among churches can be taught and consolidated. At this point the researcher applauds the bravery of those families who allow their members to attend separate churches (in other homes such family members face persecution). Although this could appear extreme to those who have reservations about ecumenism, it may be suggested as a means of practically demonstrating ecumenism within any home.

Finally, Christian groups and churches in Nigeria must avoid discriminatory practices against one another and work towards cooperation in spite of their perceived differences. Leaders in Nigerian Churches contradict themselves when they preach ecumenism (to the extent of forming ecumenical associations) and then openly instruct their members against meeting together. For example, baptized members (especially the females) of the NKST Church are forbidden from marrying outside the NKST (and those who do so are excommunicated) yet the NKST is an active member of the Christian Association of Nigeria! This is just one of many examples of the contradictions between the preaching and practice of ecumenism within Nigeria. And the argument here is that churches need to address such problems in order to guarantee success of ecumenism in Nigeria.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The preceding parts of this paper have been engaged in defence of the thesis that in Nigeria, Christianity has come full cycle. Thus after a conceptual framework and a historical background of the Reformation (which produced schism in the Roman

Catholic Church and subsequent multiplicity of Churches around the world); the evidence to show how Protestant and Pentecostal churches in Nigeria have reverted to hitherto condemned Catholic practices was adduced. It has been found that Christianity is not so diverse after all. This is a ground upon which to press a case for greater cooperation of the Churches of Christ in Nigeria and around the world. In a world as complex and sophisticated as we have today, Christian Churches can not afford constant bickering, competition, and animosity. To succumb to such temptations is to invite unnecessary distractions from the job of winning the world to God. It is time for the churches to heed the call of the Apostle Paul (contained in 1 Cor 1:11-19) by which he preaches against constant quarrels over divisions in the Church. The concern of the Churches should be to reach out to the world with the touch of Christ and be the salt that it is meant to be.

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