

THE EARLY CHURCH CONTROVERSIES AND THE PROBLEM OF ECUMENISM IN NIGERIA

Rev. JOHN OKWUDIRI OBINECHE (PhD)
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt Nigeria

ABSTRACT

As in every religion, the history of Christianity is encapsulated in division as the fact remains that no religion is devoid of disagreement and oppositions that led to diversities of groups with different labels of identification. It was soon after the physical demise of Christ, the acclaimed founder of Christianity, that the Christian faith turned into shreds of beliefs that metamorphosed into denominations. This is known in history of the Christian church as the "church controversies". This topic: "the early church controversies and the problem of ecumenism in Nigeria" therefore examines the extent of the early church crisis (controversies) of the 4th to the 7th centuries from the historical perspective. It is observed that since 1910 when the call for ecumenism took a center stage in world Christian history, the need for Christianity in her multifarious denominations to present herself as a formidable force in defense of the basic tenets of her faith has remained the focus. This work therefore is not only poised to examine the relationship of the early church controversies with the contemporary Christianity, but also to investigate the extent at which ecumenism has helped the church in Nigeria to achieve the goal of unity. What are the possible factors militating against the success or otherwise the anticipated unity through the ecumenical bodies in Nigeria?

Keywords: Early Church, Controversies, Ecumenism, Nigeria, Catholic Church.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The church at its embryonic stage, here known as the early or "primitive" church was less concerned about doctrinal issues; it was rather an advocate of simplicity with its focus on the spread of the gospel. The worship pattern was simple; made up of prayer, singing of psalms and hymns, reading of the law and the prophets (the scriptures), words of exaltations or sermon and the breaking of bread from house to house (Acts 20:20 NIV). In fact, the primitive church had neither liturgical form nor ecclesiastical order, and was devoid of denominational identifications¹. Greater attention was devoted to the preaching of the resurrected Christ to those who were yet to know him and his resurrected power. Every possible non- confrontational step was taken to prevent any rancor that would truncate and

¹ Obineche, J.O., Iheanacho, N.N. & C.Mbonu (2013). *New Testament Studies Volume One: The Four Gospels* (Port Harcourt Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt Press), pp.130-138.

sideline the breakthroughs being recorded as the gospel was preached such as led in the appointment of the deacons in Acts 6:1-7. It was for this focus of spreading the gospel that there was no need to formulate any guiding principles for the community of faith since they were all Jews who knew and lived by the basic tenets of Judaism.

However, the early church Christianity took a new dimension with the introduction of Paul into the Christian faith as a game changer whose missionary endeavors were greeted with great exploits.² As a result of his missionary strategy, the Christian message found a receptive audience in the non-Jewish communities of the Roman Empire, including Greek,-speaking Gentiles who were trained in classical philosophy. This introduced the Greek intellectual culture into the heart of Christianity which led Christian leaders to explain the core Christian beliefs in line with their intellectual training. Consequently, theological controversies were launched out of the attempts to define and design the understanding of this "new" movement's faith foundation on such issues as the nature of God, Christ/incarnation, the Holy Spirit and their relationship (the trinity) in the God Head. As these controversies escalated in various degrees till the seventh century, Christianity is said to have come out, although in fragmented segments, but stronger in doctrinal practices and ecclesiastical forms and in classification of its standard of unity in diversity.

Nigeria is said to have over 40% of her population professing Christianity in its denominational forms. However, since the 1910 when the call for ecumenism took a new dimension in world Christian history, the need for Christian denominations to present themselves as a formidable force not just for the propagation of the gospel but also for proper defense of the basic tenets of Christianity has remained paramount. Therefore, the concern of this paper is an attempt to providing possible answers to the questions of ecumenism in contemporary Nigeria. This paper also seeks to explore into the origins of these theocratic concepts that grew out of the early church controversies which span up to about the first council of Nicaea in 325AD. Subsequent to these theological currents and waves, Christianity began to take a form and shape to what is known today as orthodoxy. Africa, being caught in the web of the controversies, served a breeding ground for the emergence of these heresies and the subsequent orthodoxy. In Nigeria, the gospel has come of age and as a result, beyond the denominationalism introduced by the western missionaries in the 19th century, the church in Nigeria seems to have realized the need for the unity of faith. Yet, it is observed that in the face of this anticipated unity advocated through the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the church in Nigeria is yet to stand stronger as was the case with the early church in the early controversies.

2.0 CONTROVERSIES AND THE EARLY CHURCH

The period of theological controversies which led to the formation of the early church councils was a fascinating era in Christian history. Just as the New Testament canon developed in response to the needs in the church, so did the creeds also developed. Prior to the formulation of the canon which came at the time when only few copies of the New Testament books were in circulation, the Christian church required some standards to keep them on the part of orthodoxy. There was also the need for a guide by which to checkmate

² Shelly, Bruce. *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson,2008). pp. 19-22.

heresies. This led to the formulation of the rule of faith between the 1st and 2nd centuries of Christianity which in turn, gave rise to the famous "apostles creed"; that Christ the son of God, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified and died, was buried, rose again, and ascended into heaven for the remission of sins.³ Subsequently, other creeds were later formulated in an effort to resolve the controversies that divided the church into opposing factions in the 4th century. It was hoped before then, that when "organized Christianity" gained the power to enforce its decisions, there would be an end to controversies. Unfortunately, never had controversies raged as fierce as in the fourth and subsequent centuries.⁴ But as the already existing parties came up with great increase of polemical energy, new parties emerged. Therefore, the time was now set for the church to clarify her position on basic doctrinal questions. The controversial issues were thoroughly debated in councils which were attended by the majority of church leaders from different theological perspectives. The decisions of these councils (especially the first four councils) popularly called the ecumenical councils were combined into creeds which are still accepted by the Christian church today.⁵

For the purpose of charity, these controversies and their resultants councils are here summarized into six periods according to Newman.⁶

- ❖ On ecclesiastical discipline- the Donatist controversy.
- ❖ On the relationship of the Godhead- the Arian controversy
- ❖ On the teachings of Origen- the Origenistic controversy
- ❖ On the doctrine of the person of Christ (Christology)- the Nestorian, Eutychian and Monothelite controversy.
- ❖ On anthropology (the nature of man)- the Pelagian and Semi-pelagian controversies.
- ❖ On controversies involving protests against the paganizing of Christianity- as practiced in Asceticism, the veneration of saints, relics and images – the Iconoclastic controversies.

It was these controversies that paved the way for the seven ecumenical council's, called as an attempt to settle the controversies. Such councils and their decisions according to Obineche and Vilawa.⁷ citing Boer,⁸ include:

- i. The council of Nicaea 325- which declared the son (Jesus) homoousios (of the same nature and substance with the father).
- ii. The first council of Constantinople in 381- confirmed the decision of the Nicaean council that concluded the Arian controversy.

³ Vos, Howard (1960) *Highlights of Church History*. Chicago: Moody Press. p.41.

⁴ Newman, Albert A.H. (1951). *A Manual of Church History*. Vol.1.(Los Angeles: Judson Press).p.320.

⁵ Renwick, A.M. & A.M. Harman (2009), *The Story of the Church, 3rd edition*. Inter-Varsity Press.p.53

⁶ Newman, Albert A.H. (1951). *A Manual of Church History*. Vol.1.(Los Angeles: Judson Press).pp.320 – 392

⁷ Obineche, & G.D. Vilawa (2017), "The Impact of the Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church on Christianity in Nigeria" *Insight Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol.13, June/December 2017. Ogun State, Nigeria: Babcock University, pp.134-135.

⁸ Boer H.R. (1976), *A Short History of the Early Church*. (Ibadan, Nigeria: Day Star Press). P.176.

- iii. The council of Ephesus in 431. This council rejected Nestorius and endorsed the Alexandrian view of the relationship between the two natures of Christ.
- iv. The council of Chalcedon in 451. This council finalized discussion on the relationship between the two natures of Christ with the words, unmixed, unchanged, unseparated and undivided.
- v. The council of Constantinople (2) in 552. This council rejected the three prominent Antiochian theologians (the three chapters), and endorsed the Cyrillian understanding of Chalcedon.
- vi. The council of Constantinople (3) in 680-681--- Accepted two wills in Christ.
- vii. The Nicaea council (2)-787. This council declared the veneration or reverencing of pictures, images, and pictures of divine realities as legitimate.

3.0 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE EARLY CONTROVERSIES

Jerusalem was the birth place of Christianity owing to the death of Jesus in the vicinity and the consequent Pentecost that followed. However, as the movement went farther from Jerusalem, the lesser the control of the centre on the outposts became. The lack of control does not represent an anomaly since the first century Christians were "tolerant of great diversity" and thus paid little attention to the uniformity of belief and practice that was characteristic of the second century. This tolerance may have been occasioned by the early Christians' belief that "they are in the world but not of the world." They may have been captured in the euphoria of this "world" that is neither of the Jews nor of the gentiles; but one's personal faith in the birth, death, son-ship of Jesus and the brotherhood of the community to which one belongs. This was characteristic of the apostolic age which came to end in c.75 CE, and was marked by a form of uniformity in faith and the leadership of charismatic preachers in the name of apostles. Administratively, the ground was prepared for the development of different ideologies, implantations and heretical errors soon after the apostles died.

However, the Episcopal age tried to arrest the situation. The destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Roman Empire gave Judaism a new outlook. From a core temple religion, Judaism was reduced to a religion of the synagogue. Christianity towed along this same line. Each (Christian) synagogue was developed to the point that it could be described as a community under the office of an *episcopos*, bishop and overseer, who exerted as well a quasi-monarchical power over her subjects. It was during this period that communal rules like the *Didache* were composed to define the dos and don'ts of the communities and guide the behavior and development of both old and young Christians in matters like rules of faith and conduct, infanticide, divorce, idolatry, lying, stealing, etc.⁹ More so, the urge for uniformity of beliefs and practices must have created room for this development. Moreover, each bishop exercised his ecclesiastical power over his jurisdiction from the angle he defines a particular Christian belief and practice. Their development along this line of belief and practices that coexisted as various forms of Christianity in the bishoprics, as every community developed its rules and systems of mutual support. While some in these communities craved for a form of uniformity of beliefs and practices, some others attempted to search out some "hidden

⁹ Ibid 31-40

truth" in the Bible and life of the apostles. In almost every aspect, says Goodman, "it was possible to find some individuals who defined themselves as Christians and yet conducted themselves differently"¹⁰. Following these exclusive divergences in beliefs and practices, there came to be what was described latter as heresies by the various councils of the church. Consequently, Christianity was unguarded against the antics of even individuals who may have developed the ulterior quest for power and control.

The conquest of Alexander the great (334-326 B.C.) spread Greek as the official language of the empire far and wide. Greek became the best medium for the expression of philosophical and religious thoughts. When Rome took over ruler-ship, it established Latin as a language of the nobles through which the rich arts culture of the empire gained prominence. Cities such as Alexandria, Carthage, Egypt, Rome etc., became centers of learning for philosophy and theology; hence the influence of men like Plato resonated in the North African worldview. With this background, the influence of Greek philosophy and Latin culture on the Doctrinal development of Christianity became obvious. Against this backdrop and the outside war of persecutions faced by the Christians and Christianity also faced internally, the scourge of different teachings emanating from varying interpretations of the apostle's and biblical teachings. Persons of different philosophical and cultural inclinations, banking on one or another, assumed spiritual experience, or exegetical ability, came up at intervals with a form of 'revelation' about God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Salvation, Baptism, evil, etc.

It was the conversion of Paul and his subsequent ministration among the Gentile nations that added another colour to Christianity and a twist to its history. Christianity before the conversion of Paul was in a strict sense neo-Judaism. The first Christians were Jews who attended the temple at Jerusalem, read the Jewish scriptures, kept the Sabbath, and adhered to the Jewish dietary and religious practices. Hence, the first challenge that hit the 'new' religious movement was a matter of welfare which lacked any doctrinal undertone. Luke records it in Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7 that:

... In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report full of the Holy Ghost and Wisdom, who we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the numbers of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. (KJV Holy Bible).

Soon after this, Apostle Paul was converted through an encounter in which he 'met Christ', whom he claimed commissioned him to preach the gospel by the inspiration of the Holy

¹⁰ Goodman, Martin (1999)'Judaism, the Roman Empire and Jesus: The Emergence of the Church'. A World History of Christianity. Adrian Hasting (ed).UK: W.E. Eerdmans Publishing. p.13

Spirit. Because of his apparent rejection by his Jewish brethren (out of the fear created by his role against the persecution of the Christians before his conversion), Paul settled to preach the gospel among non-Jewish nations with the support of Barnabas. The conversion of Gentiles was greeted with troubles among the Jews as to what extent are the gentiles bound by the laws and ceremonies of Judaism? The Judaizers moved to enforce a strict adherence to circumcision and all the Jewish laws. A Christian therefore must first become a Jew before becoming a Christian. Some Christian converts resisted the move. Paul on his own side was accused of preaching against the Law of Moses, and was threatened with death. A council was therefore summoned in Jerusalem in 49 A.D., concerning the enforcement of the Law of Moses on the Gentile converts to Christianity. A conclusion on the matter was reached thus

...we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstained from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day. (Acts 15:19-21 KJV).

If ecumenism entails the demonstration of the unity in diversity, this gathering deserves to be accepted as the first Ecumenical Council in the history of Christianity, chaired by Apostles Peter and James the Elder. It was the first kind to be concerned with doctrinal issue. After this, came pockets of inside 'challenges for the church, such as the trouble from the Nazarenes and Ebionites. With the besieging and invasion of Jerusalem and the subsequent disorganization of the temple structure and rituals; Christianity followed and developed along the trails of Jewish synagogues. Apart from the Arian controversy, other controversies appeared which did not attract councils nor persecution.

There followed other controversies which, apart from the Arian controversy, must be stated, did not attract an ecumenical gathering of the 'fathers' of the church for consensus decision. The bishops of different churches as located in different cities rose to quell the fire of the supposed heresies. Below are some of the controversies that hit the early church and the attempt to deal decisively with them.

4.0 GNOSTICISM

Gnosticism was one of the philosophies that flourished because the world into which Christianity came was deeply concerned with redemption even though it lacked the essential Christian content. Since philosophy could only satisfy the minds of the intellectuals but had no message for the masses, state religion possessed more patriotic elements than religious character, and nature religion could not measure up with the developing civilization in the empire. As a result, mystery religions like Gnosticism became popular.¹¹ With its origin from the east India, Babylonia, Persian and Egyptian mythologies, Gnosticism claimed to provide the true but secret knowledge (gnosis) about the divine, man and redemption. As the name "Gnostic" came from the Greek word for knowledge, Gnosticism claimed to be the ones endowed with all knowledge that allows man to transcend his mortal, material bodies to return to the heavenly original realm.¹² They taught that this world of matter was not created

¹¹ Boer H.R. (1976:55)

¹² Crabtree, V.(2013) "Gnosticism(1st—7th century).The Birth of Christianity".

<http://www.humanreligions.info/gnosticism.html>

by the one true God, but by inferior, lower and often ignorant deities who designed this world as a place of entrapments for elements of the divine.¹³

Their theology hinged on the believe in two gods - the God of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. While the former was described as "God of the Jews" with its tough and harsh covenant, punitive and hateful nature which made him the inferior creator- god of this world; Jesus was seen as the manifestation of the God of the new testament who neither died nor resurrected¹⁴ but rather appeared to have died. They taught that Jesus was only sent to provide knowledge required to break free from this world. They practiced mystery cults based on the idea of "knowing" the divine with entirely different theology about God, salvation and evil. However, Gnosticism reached its peak in the second half of the second century, but declined greatly afterwards. This decline was led by two major factors; the church bishops rejected Gnosticism and its teachings while the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian were strongly against them.¹⁵

5.0 MONTANISM

Montanism was a second century apocalyptic movement that originated by Montanus, a native of Ardabau in Mysia. He began his preaching in phrygia between 154 and 172 AD. He was associated with two women, Prisca and Maximilla all of whom expected a speedy out pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church.¹⁶ This movement began with a Christian character as if to revive the church from its spiritual coldness and against the teachings of Gnosticism. Although it believed in God as creator, and Jesus as the redeemer, the church did not accept it as a Christian movement because of its hyper ecstatic view about the work of the Holy Spirit, prophecy, and the spiritual gifts.¹⁷ Moreover, it is said that their emphasis on prophecy and spiritual gifts made many who did not have them wonder if they were Christians. They taught that forgiveness of sin could only be done by the three leaders of the movement (Montanus and the two women); and by (if possible) others who possessed the Holy spirit in a marked way. In their teaching on total separation from the world, Montanists presented themselves to be the custodians of church discipline. For these reasons, the church leaders opposed them, especially the bishops.

Inspite the opposition, however, Montanism spread like wildfire beyond Asia Minor, to Europe and North Africa. While some embraced this movement as a sign of the end-time, others accepted it at a time when the church was becoming more worldly than spiritual. To such adherents, the movement was a symbol of revival and a return to the strictness of the early Christian community. Prominent among the converts was Tertullian, the great North African theologian, who became a Montanist in about 207.¹⁸ in summary, Montanaus and his prophetesses professed the authority to impose stricter discipline on the church, encouraged martyrdom, condemned concealment or flight in persecution as a denial of Christ and his

¹³ Renwick, A.M. & A.M. Harman. pp 32 – 34.

¹⁴ ¹⁴ Leeming, David (2004), *Jealous Gods and Chosen People: The Mythology of the Middle East*. NY: OPU.

¹⁵ Boer H.R. p. 60

¹⁶ Livingstone, E.A. (1977), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ Boer H.R. p. 63

¹⁸ Ibid 64

cross, promoted fanatical severity in asceticism and church discipline, stood against second marriage, taught the superiority of the celibate to the married, and asserted the universal priesthood of Christians, even of both males and females. They proclaimed the eminent approach of the age of the Holy Spirit and of the millennial reign in Pepuza, a small village of Phrygia, upon which the expected New Jerusalem was to be realized. Montanists emphasized the possession of the spiritual gift as a mark of a true Christian and the qualification for appointment into the office of a teacher. By this, they stood against the principle of ordination as the formula for succession into the episcopate.¹⁹

On its influence on the church and its ecumenism, Boer reiterated that like other movements (Gnosticism and Marcionism), Montanism had some lasting influence on the Catholic Church; although the church opposed it, but accepted church discipline as the prerogative of the bishops. The scripture became more fixed, and a yardstick by which the Church lived and judged all new movements within itself. On the other hand, Montanism became a deterrent against the abuse of spiritual gifts and fanaticism in the church as a wakeup call to the church to allow the spiritual freedom for the expression of leadership of the Holy Spirit in the church.²⁰

6.0 NEO-PLATONISM

Neo-Platonism was a philosophical idea of a man called Plotinus (c.205-270) and his successors; Prophyry, Lamblichus and Proclus(410-485). They sought to provide a sound intellectual basis for religious and moral life.²¹ It was seen as the grand synthesis for progressive Christian and Gnostic ideas with the traditional platonic philosophy as a modern construct or ideology. This movement was founded by Saccas in 245, in response to the challenge of accounting for the emergence of a seemingly inferior and flawed cosmos from the perfect mind of the divinity by declaring strictly that all objective existence is but the external self-expression of an inherently contemplative deity known as the one (*to hen*), or the good (*ta Kalon*).²² Neo-Platonism taught that God was a simple, absolute, perfect existence from whom the lower existence emanated. That salvation is obtained in the rising of the soul in mystic contemplation to God.²³ The cosmos, according to Plotinus, is not a created order, planned by a deity on whom we can pass the charge of begetting evil: for the cosmos is the self-expression of the soul which corresponds roughly to Philo's *logos prophorikos*, the *logos endiathetos* of which is the intelligence (*nous*). Rather, the cosmos in Platonian taught, is to be understood as the concrete result or product of the soul's experience of its own mind (*nous*). Although Neo-Platonism had some influence on the church, it could not attract the expected followership by many.²⁴

7.0 DONATISM

¹⁹ Montanism. <http://earlychurch.com/montanism.php>.

²⁰ Boer. p.65

²¹ Livingstone. p. 353

²² Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. www.iep.utm.edu/neoplato

²³ Falk, P. (1997). *The Growth of the Church in Africa*. Pleateau Nigeria: ACTS Pulication.

²⁴ Duchense, L.M.O.(1965) *Early History of the Christian Church: From its Foundation to the end of the Fifth century*. Translated by C..Jenkins(1st.ed.1912). London: Murray.

As the reign of Diocletian the Roman emperor from 284 brought peace and stability in Christendom after the era of persecutions, internal strife engulfed the community of faith. With the recognition of Christianity by the edict of Milan (313), the North African church had to deal with the problem of the restoration or otherwise, of the lapsed (those who denied the faith during persecution). This divided the Christian church (Christianity) into two opposing views; while some Christians felt they should be restored upon the confession of repentance, others thought they should be rebaptized before they could be readmitted.²⁵ It was in this that the North African schism arose over the consecration of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage in 311 by Felix, who was accused of having surrendered copies of the scriptures to the civil authorities during the persecution. This led to the subsequent consecration of Majorinus and Donatus by two opposing bishops. To Bettenson, Donatism was a schism rather than a heresy. Donatism raised the question whether the validity of the sacraments, as distinct from their effectiveness, depended on the worthiness of ministers or recipient. It was for this that Donatism arose, though orthodox in their teaching, but did not recognize the Catholic Church.²⁶ The Donatists claimed that the sacraments administered by an unworthy priest or by one who was consecrated/ordained in an unworthy manner were invalidated.²⁷ However, St. Augustine refuted this view in his taught that the power of the sacraments does not reside in the character of the priest but in the character of the church. Although Augustine did not approve of an immoral or unspiritual ministry, he did prepare the way for the rise of a ministry in which moral and spiritual worth was in danger of becoming less important than it ought to be.²⁸

8.0 THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY

The Arian controversy was led by Arius (c 250-336), a Christian presbyter, ascetic of Berber origin, and priest in Baucalis Alexandria, Egypt. His views on the nature of the Godhead, emphasized the divinity of the father over the son, and opposition to what would become the dominant Christology, "homoousian Christology."²⁹ Arius harped on the supremacy and uniqueness of God the father; that the father is infinite, eternal and almighty, hence, must be greater and of higher essence than the son. He taught that the son had a beginning, contrary to origin, who taught that the son is less than the father only in power, but not in space and time. Arius maintained that the son possessed neither the eternality nor the true divinity of the father, but was rather made "God" by the father's permission and power, and that the Logos was rather the very first and the most perfect of God's productions before ages. In vehement condemnation and rejection of the speech of Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, which he called and interpreted as a revival of Sabellianism, Arius argued that: "if the father begat the son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there

²⁵ Falk, P. p44

²⁶ Bettenson, Henry (1979ed). *Documents of the Christian Church*. London : Oxford University Press.

²⁷ Boer. p.161

²⁸ ibid

²⁹ Rowan, W. (2002) *Arius*. Grand Rapids, Michignsn: W.B.Eerdmans.

was a time when the son was not. It therefore necessarily follows that the son has his substance from nothing”³⁰.

From the discussion thus far, it is evident from these controversies that Christian ecumenism is synonymous to the origin of Christianity and has continued to be a Christian history. However, ecumenism has had its positive and negative impact on Christianity. While the early Christian ecumenism led to imprisonment, punishment and even persecution and death, the modern ecumenism in its refined form, had not only brought a bitter unspiritual politics and rivalry into Christendom, but has maintained the age long identity as a "divided people of God". At the end, the rancor, and division has led to the speedy spread of Christianity to the very ends of the earth.

9.0 CONCEPT AND ORIGIN OF ECUMENISM

The word “ecumenism” is one of the prominent words in the contemporary religious vocabulary. Hart Beverly Beach defined ecumenism from its etymological connotation. As derived from the Greek word *oikoumene* which means the world or the inhabited planet earth. He opined that the word ecumenism was first used by Herodotus who was known as the father of history. Herodotus in the fifth century, defined ecumenism as a geographical expanse or jurisdiction, and later by Aristotle and Demosthenes.³¹ The word *oikoumene* or ecumenism was not originally used as a religious or theological word, but with a secular connotation; politically, to address the rulers of empires as the kings of the whole universe. It is also used for social functions of association of actors and international sports such as appeared in the imperial inscriptions on coins and those that spoke of the “holy ecumenical competitions” among others.³²

Visser't Hooft further identified eight meanings or concepts of ecumenism in all its historical, development:

- 1) Pertaining to the whole inhabited earth (2) pertaining to the whole Roman empire (3) pertaining to the whole church (4) that which has universal ecclesiastical validity (5) pertaining to the world wide mission outreach of the church (6) pertaining to the relationship between the unity of the churches or Christians of separate confessions (7) consciousness of or desire for Christian unity. (8) An open friendly nonsectarian spirit, favorable to rapprochement and dialogue in dealing with the other Christians and their beliefs.³³

In biblical times, ecumenism (*oikoumene*) was used to refer to the world controlled by the Greco-Roman civilization in contrast to others referred to as the “Barbarians”. Origen was the first to conceive the church as an *oikoumene*; to represent the entire world as environment for the gospel. The early church councils were also called ecumenical because they were summoned by the emperor of the *oikoumene* as it represented the geographical world

³⁰ “Socrates” Dispute of Arius with Alexander, his Bishop.” The Ecclesiastical Histories of Socrates Scholasticus. [www.documentacatholica.eu/03d/03800440,Socrates_Scholasticus-Historia_ecclesiastica\(schaff\),-EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholica.eu/03d/03800440,Socrates_Scholasticus-Historia_ecclesiastica(schaff),-EN.pdf).

³¹ Beach, B.B.(1974: 24) *Ecumenism: Boon or Bane*. Review and Herald, Washington DC.

³² Ibid p.42

³³ Visser't, Hooft(1965: 6 - 9) “What’s Ahead for the World Council of Churches?” *These Times*, vol.74,p.442.

recognized by the entire church. It was in the 20th century ecumenical movement that the term ecumenism switch its meaning from ecumenical as "universal" (geographical or ecclesiastical) to ecumenical as denominational unity- the consciousness of worldwide Christian fellowship across ecclesiological boundaries.³⁴

However, the conceptual framework of the word ecumenism especially from the 19th century, is traceable to the prayer of Jesus Christ for the church "that they may be one" (John 17:20-22 NIV). Therefore, ecumenism has come to represent a vision, a movement, a theology, and a mode of action. It denotes the universality of the people of God and affects the way Christians think and go about their faith, the church and the world. In as much as it is practically impossible for all the denominations to converge into one denomination, ecumenism, analyzed in line with the prayer of Jesus, is an expression of unity in diversity.

10.0 THE HISTORY OF ECUMENISM IN NIGERIA

Globally, the history of ecumenism remains the product of denominationalism that has pervaded almost every facet of the once indivisible and united Catholic Church. In the 19th century, the need for a global front that would concern itself with the preaching of the gospel beyond denominational affiliations became high. Christians like the young Men Christian Association (YMCA 1844), the Evangelical Alliance (1846) and the Students Christian Federation (1880), saw the need and potential for unity. As the fragmentation of the church denominations continued, by the 20th century, denominations began to form their ecumenical councils as their churches spread beyond the national frontiers. Theological discussions featured prominently in the quest as the much-desired Christian unity loomed large. After the stimulus of the Edinburg Missionary Conference in 1910, the concern to confront divisive issues of doctrine, polity and practice gave birth first, to the establishment of the International Missionary Council that gave the impetus to the creation of the Universal Christian Conference on life and work in 1925.³⁵ This led to the first world conference "Faith and Order" which met in Lausanne in 1927. These two bodies were fused into the World Council of Churches (WCC). Livingstone further submitted that the initiative for the movements between 1910 and 1927 came majorly within the western Protestantism. By 1937, the Eastern Orthodox and the so called "younger churches" of Asia and Africa were playing important role until the early 1960, when the Roman Catholic participation was expressed through interested individuals. At this boom of ecumenical interests, the International Missionary Council was formed in 1921, to assist various boards and interests in coordinating their separate and competing activities all for the oneness of the body of Christ.³⁶

The International Missionary Council later held five conferences in Jerusalem(1929), Madras(1938), Whithy(1847), Willingen(1952) and Ghana(1957), where they finally agreed to join the membership of the already established World Council of Churches in 1961.³⁷ As the search for Christian unity became prominent in the polities of nations, Baur narrated the

³⁴ Ibid p.25

³⁵ Obineche, & G.D. Vilawa (2017: 145).

³⁶ Livingstone, p.167

³⁷ Nnebedum, Osmond Ekene(2009) "Ecumenism in Nigeria: The Roman Catholic Contribution."M.A. Dissertation, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
<http://www.unn.edu.ng/publications/files/images/NNEBEDUM,%20OSMOND%20EKENE%20PROJECT.php>.

view of "protestant- catholic scandal in Africa". He opined that the missionary message was burdened by four centuries of old sin; inherited and imposed on the Africans like a "second original sin" because the missionaries came to Africa with their national animosities against each other under the cover of religion. This animosity translated into denominational biases and sentiments that led to hatred among members of different denominations even in Africa.³⁸ The appeal made by Fr. Vincent Donovan for denominational unity (ecumenism) found answer in his Kilimanjaro region (Arusha) from 1960 when some 13 Lutheran Pastors and 13 Catholic priests had a monthly interdenominational discussions.³⁹

Falk recalled that the first All African Christian Conference (AACC) was held at Ibadan, Nigeria in January 1958. Among the attendants in this conference were the representatives of the protestant churches who felt the conference provided valuable fellowship that contributed to their understanding of the churches in Africa and so recommended the appointment of a continuation committee to implement the report of the conference that instigated the formation of AACC as permanent ecumenical body in Africa.⁴⁰

Nigeria is not left out of this religious development, as the wind of ecumenism started blowing about the same period when this ecumenical wave was sweeping across the global Christianity. Precisely in 1911, the Presbyterian missionaries in Nigeria initiated a conference that brought three major denominations together; Presbyterian, Methodist and Anglican missionaries. The supposed aim of this conference was to obliterate the border lines of the denomination based gospel. Ekechi summarized the aim of this all important conference as:

To secure uniformity for discipline within the native churches founded by the different missionary societies, (and) discuss such matters as the relationship of the church to manage under native law, the baptism of women themselves, Christians married to polygamous husbands, the definition of spheres of influence in the untouched missionary fields.⁴¹

This supposedly implies that the missionaries to Africa in general and Nigeria in particular were not unaware that the denominationalism they planted in the name of Christianity created rivalry, division and enmity rather than love and unity among the Christians. Ogbu Kalu further observed that while this movement was said to be a ploy to cage "denominational competition," the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) was said to be the unannounced target: that the conference was convened in order to break the Roman Catholic monopoly of the mission fields in Nigeria.⁴² To corroborate Kalu's position, Baur and Eke, remarked that for protestants, the ecumenical movement has been restricted to a search for unity among the protestant churches, sometimes as a strengthening bond against the so called "Roman

³⁸ Baur, John(1994) *2000 Years of Christianity In Africa: An African Church History*. Kenya:Paulines Publications.

³⁹ Ibid p.499

⁴⁰ Falk, P. p.468

⁴¹ Ekechi, Felix K.(1972) *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igbiland,1857-1914*. London: Cass.

⁴² Kalu, Ogbu U.(1978). *The divided people of God: Church union movement in Nigeria* 1857-1966. (New York: Nok publishers international Ltd

1857-

Catholic danger.”⁴³ Hence, when the RCC was approached for the ecumenical body, they turned it down. However, Nnebedum, citing Grooves observed that the 1911 conference came up with a resolution that bordered on unity of the Christian faith⁴⁴:

The conference solemnly declares the aim of missionary effort to be the establishment of one church of Christ. The conference resolves that to attain this unity, there should be mutual and full recognition of the discipline of the churches of southern Nigeria. That an effort be made to obtain corporate unity of native Churches. That immediate steps be taken for the corporate union of native churches not episcopally ordained.⁴⁵

By 1923, the evangelical union of southern Nigeria was formed by the churches and denominations that were willing to join in the ecumenical movement.⁴⁶ Lana pointed out the formation of national ecumenical body in Nigeria, the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) in 1930 in Lagos as the first organized ecumenical body in Nigeria that had its aim as the common concern for unity.⁴⁷ In 1947, another missionary conference was held at Onitsha, attended by five denominations; Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Qualboe, and Sudan United Mission (the missionary body working in northern Nigeria with the earlier name as Sudan Interior Mission). Although the Sudan United Mission withdrew from the conference because the colonial policy then did not favor her, yet this second attempt ended in futility but for the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) that was formed in 1948 that re-invigorated the interest of the member churches toward success.⁴⁸ Subsequent efforts led to the scheduling of December 11, 1965 for the inauguration of the then agreed forum, *the United Church of Nigeria* which never held. Among the various reasons given for this failure include, lack of clear-cut ideology, inadequate mass education, personality conflict, ethnic sentiments to interdenominational antagonism among others.⁴⁹

About the same period, other denominational ecumenical bodies were formed such as the fellowship of churches of Christ in Nigeria in 1955 (comprised of the churches that are free from the missionary control from the west, but distinct from the independent churches) and the Nigerian association of the *Aladura* churches established in 1960.⁵⁰ Since the attempt for a national church union failed, its motivation led to the formation of the Christian Association

⁴³ Baur, John. p. 500. also Eke, Vitus Chibisi (2016) "Development and Challenges of Ecumenical Movement in Nigeria." *Roczniki Yeologiczne Tom Lxiii, Zeszyt. 221-237.* <https://tnkul.p//files/RT2016,Eke.pdf>. also corroborate with Kalu Ogbu.

⁴⁴ Nnebedum, Osmond Ekene (2009): 39 - 40).

⁴⁵ Grooves, C.P. (1955) *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*. Vol.11. 1878-1914. London: Lutherworth Press.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.290

⁴⁷ Lana A.S. (1987)' Visible Unity: The goal of Ecumenism in Nigeria'. Unpublished Doctrinal Dissertation, University of Ibadan.

⁴⁸ Ekpunobi, Emma(2001) *We are Closer than We Think: An Analysis of Contemporary Issues in Ecumenism*. Enugu, Nigeria: Rabboni Publishers International.

⁴⁹ Nnembedum. p.50-51

⁵⁰ Adebayo, Francis Kehinde (2015). "A Missiological History of Christian Association of Nigeria." *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. www.ijste.org. ISSN 2422- 8443. Vol.13:1-9.

of Nigeria (CAN). This today is the largest ecumenical body in Nigeria that encapsulated five ecumenical groups or blocks:

1. Catholic secretariat of Nigeria (CSN)
2. Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN)
3. Christian Pentecostal fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) or Pentecostal fellowship of Nigeria (PFN)
4. Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC)
5. TEKAN and ECWA fellowship of Nigeria

The basic aim and objectives of CAN is stipulated in Article 5 of the constitution of CAN as follow:

- a. To serve as a basis of response to the unity of the church especially as contained in our lord's pastoral prayer "that they all may be one" (John 17:21).
- b. To act as a liaison committee, by means of which its member churches can consult together and when necessary, make common statement and common actions.
- c. To promote understanding, peace and unity among the various people and strata of society in Nigeria, through the propagation of the gospel.
- d. To act as watch man of the spiritual and moral welfare of the nation. As the first ecumenical umbrella to include the Roman Catholic Church and the protestants and Pentecostals missiologically together, Adebayo sums up the place of CAN:

The Christian Association of Nigeria holds a great future for ecumenism in the world, first as a national body; it has the privilege of promoting robust Interfaith and intra-faith dialogue on theological and service issues. It can serve as a rallying point for the West African sub- region and sub- Saharan Africa for ecumenical Movement that discourse at the global level which will place CAN in a broader Ecumenical relevance.⁵¹

11.0 THE PROBLEM OF ECUMENISM IN NIGERIA

Although, the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) seemed to have been out of pressure; yet it achieved a purpose: In principle, the Christian church in Nigeria has formed an ecumenical body. This has given the church in Nigeria the ample opportunity and a forum to sit together irrespective of their denominational differences, to discuss issues that affect Christianity in Nigeria. CAN today is a voice through which the entire Christianity (church) can speak concerning herself, the society and the government. In this way, the Christian body can collectively make some great and positive impact in the governance and welfare of the nation. It is also true that these goals may have not been realized in practical terms, but they remain achievable goals. Nevertheless, ecumenism in Nigeria is engulfed with some perennial problems which tend to cripple the effective performance of ecumenism in Nigeria. One of the major determinant factors on how the various churches and Blocs that makeup CAN demonstrates their support towards the ecumenical body is denominational allegiance. This is manifested in such a way that despite the fact that CAN is the central ecumenical body for the church in Nigeria, it has no overriding influence over the member

⁵¹ ibid

denominations and churches. Instead, the churches pay their total allegiance to the blocs that represent them before CAN, and as a result, they give a divided loyalty to CAN. This structure has affected negatively, the ability of CAN to determine and decide issues of the ecumenical body, since the major source of funding CAN as a body is through the dues accrued from the blocs. CAN is therefore starved of funds when the blocs fail to remit their dues to her as the effect of the above organogram. With this, CAN has no other option for survival than to turn to the government and probably spirited individuals who would want their interest protected by the religious body for funding. This renders CAN incapacitated and makes her renege in her sacred responsibilities both to Christianity, the society and the government because "he that pays the piper dictates the tune". No wonder CAN has kept mute over the religious, social, economic and political decadence in contemporary leadership in Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is observed that one damaging disadvantage of denominationalism is the sectorial belief in one's supremacy over another. This has been the unfortunate situation Christianity has found itself in the history of Nigeria. For instance, the Roman Catholic church (RCC) refused to join the early move for an ecumenical body in Nigeria until the second Vatican council embraced ecumenism (Falk,1997:394.470).⁵³ Before then, many Catholics see ecumenism as a step to syncretism and as such, renowned Catholics like Abbe George De Nante condemned the Vatican II Council's document in ecumenism.⁵² This may not be far from the Catholic feeling of ecclesiastical superiority that divides Christianity into the church "(catholic church), and the churches"(any other church outside the RCC is seen as rebels and dissidents) as they pray for the later to one day return to Rome.⁵³ There is also the observable trend of *holier- than – thou* attitude explicated by most church denominations in Nigeria like the Seventh Day Adventists who see ecumenism as a bane by their standard of faith and belief.⁵⁴ The same applied to most of the Pentecostal churches against the AIC bloc; mostly made up of the white garment churches as towing the lines of the denominational gospel introduced in Nigeria by the white missionaries. Similar to this factor is the dual citizenship of the churches whose founding denominations are outside Nigeria. Such churches in their dilemma, end up confused between the need to be loyal to their ecclesiastical authority abroad, and the urgency to remain in the commonwealth of the brethren (CAN). This creates a level of double loyalty which leads to unintentional disloyalty to CAN in attempt to serve two masters at a time. Within these extremes also is the fear - intimidation and demo-superior churches or blocs in CAN.

Doctrinal conservation has remained part of CAN politics and problem, and a bane affecting the fabrics of ecumenism In Nigeria. Hence, the constitution of CAN is silent on issues of doctrine to avoid controversy. While the mainline churches remain mostly conservative in doctrinal issues, others demonstrate greater dynamism. To the mainline churches, this attitude by the other churches towards the indomitable doctrines of Christianity that make them possess their orthodoxy and retain their status quo, is a clear demonstration of unchristian tendencies. At the same time, the new generation churches see the mainline churches as dwelling in the archaic past and has lost the flavor of time and the dynamism for making the

⁵² Nnembedum. p.68

⁵³ Baur. p.500

⁵⁴ *ibid*

gospel relevant in the modern generation. This affects CAN's message of oneness, but has remained the strength of the church in Nigeria.

Proliferation of churches is another problem facing ecumenism in Nigeria. The concern and beliefs in proliferation has different dimensions; some protestant groups and Pentecostals justify proliferation of churches as church planting in fulfillment to the biblical mandate for evangelism. To others, especially the mainline denominations, church proliferation is nothing but time bomb that will definitely explode since CAN has no control over it. Nnenedum has argued that "proliferation of churches in Nigeria has continued to hinder the dream of Christian unity". Moreover, the nonchalant attitude of the government towards the practices of religions and in this case Christianity, is not helping matters in ecumenism. The Nigerian constitution clearly declared Nigeria a secular state that allows the freedom of worship. This implies that the state has no right to interfere in the affairs of any religion, but reserves the power to determine how these religions operate within the law. Yet the government through the corporate affairs commission (CAC) registers and issues certificates to the proliferating churches to operate. It can be assumed here that it may mean that the Nigerian government is aware that a united Christianity will positively affect the socio-political unity of the country hence; the Nigerian government (politicians) divide the country along religious and tribal lines as a tool for political gain. Also, since CAN looks up to the government for financial support, the government has a significant role to play in conjunction with CAN for a better ecumenism to thrive in Nigeria.⁵⁵

Finally, ignorance towards the context of ecumenism among Christians in Nigeria is identified as one of the factors that hinder the efforts towards a successful ecumenism in Nigeria. The attitude of Christians, particularly, the pursuit of self-interest by the church leaders, holier than thou attitude, persistent fighting and character assassination among the hierarchy and lay faithful of Christians, are clear evidences that a greater number of those "gathering together in God's name" are not aware why they should gather. Rather they are often gathering, for their selfish interests. Eke presents a vivid picture of acrimony arising from this ignorance thus:

inter-church criticism and discrimination are carried over to the daily Civil life of individual Christians to the extent that Christians of a Particular denomination discriminates against those of other denominations in the area of employment, business, corporate societies. And even national/state polities. Job opportunities are offered to those who belong to the same Christian denomination with the owner or management of any establishments.⁵⁶

12.0 CONCLUSION

The history and development of Christianity and Christian ecumenism has remained undulated from its beginning. Several heresies and heretical groups have arisen from the time of Christ to sow the seed of discard and to form the gate of hell against the church. It is

⁵⁵ Nnenedum. p.70-71

⁵⁶ Eke. p.230

observed that the greatest foes of the church have remained the foes within- the church fighting against itself. It was for this reason that the great controversies of the early church for which the early councils were called, brought to fulfillment, the prayer of Christ for the unity of the church, "that they may be one". However, in the face of these doctrinal crises within the ranks and file of Christianity, the remarkable result was the formation of ecumenical movements, to defend and define the orthodoxy of the religious movement. It was these consolidatory movements that gave Christianity a doctrinal foundation of one faith, one creed and on scripture. In this same way, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is the ecumenical body in Nigeria formed in 1976 to give a united and formidable voice to Nigerian Christianity.

There is no doubt that it has pioneered the protection of the interest of Christians in Nigeria and tried to foster peace and unity among the various Christian denominations in Nigeria. However, in the discharge of its duties, it has fallen from its expectations. Paramount is the fact that while it claims to be ecumenical; the divisions, courtesy, and internal religious bigotry among its members have remained obvious. This paper has not only attempted to identify some of the challenges militating against the success of CAN as an ecumenical body in Nigeria, but has also proffered some possible solutions. The controversies in the early Church bequeathed a consolidated and formidable church to the subsequent Christian generations because of the effort of the ecumenical councils which stood firm in defense of the "unity" of the body of Christ, the church. In like manner, CAN should endeavor to replicate this role and legacy so as to also bequeath to the subsequent generation of faith, a better "united" and formidable church that will keep the banner of faith flying in the midst of all modern religious, political and social odds.

13.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

With the constitutionally provided purpose and objective of CAN and its role of leading the nation and her people to partake of Christ's salvation, CAN should fundamentally, and as a matter of urgency, take the clear lead as the regulatory body for the anticipated orderliness in the body of Christ. It is her responsibility to develop strategies that would help it monitor and checkmate the activities of its member churches. This suggests that CAN should develop links that would create a direct relationship between her and her member churches. It was earlier observed in work, that intermittent crisis that rocky the early church necessitated the need to defend the church against the infiltration of heresies. It is recorded that ecumenism originated out of this exigency which led to the development of the articles of faith and creed which made the church formidable even beyond that century when it was wrongly assumed that religious discusses shall end with the demise of the church. Here in Nigeria, CAN is not bothered about doctrinal differences, but rather accept church membership through their blocs than their doctrines. Therefore, it is our opinion here that there is the need for CAN to develop and strike a balance between its neutrality or otherwise on doctrinal matters, and also set out some guiding principles and standards to identify what qualifies a church. It should then work in synergy with the government with such policies to checkmate the proliferation of religious groups that hide under the cloak of Christianity to perpetrate irreligiosity and heresies in the body of Christ-the Church.

CAN should be proactive in its role as watchdog in national matters. Nigeria is a secular state though, with Christianity and Islam as the two dominant religions and the government finds it expedient to collaborate with their leadership in drawing the roadmap for the development of the nation. Therefore, it behooves on CAN as representing the Christian body, to be up and doing in defending the interest of its members in the fulfillment of government obligations to her citizens. CAN should at all times embark on awareness campaign for Christians to be partners in progress especially in national issues and as the ecumenical body of Christians, should actively play regulatory roles in maintaining peace and tranquility among her Christian members. There is the need to obliterate the imaginary but existent times of insubordination in the association so that the Christendom that is more united in brotherly love and unity will gradually replace the denominational sentiments, antagonism and rivalry in the present Christianity in Nigeria.

Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17:21 presuppose that there is need for ecumenism and ecumenical unity in Nigeria since unity is a gift from God. Eke opined that spiritual ecumenism finds its expression in public and private prayer for the unity of Christians.⁵⁷ The necessity of this prayer is what Kasper describe as the beauty of ecumenism.⁵⁸

REFERENCES

- “Socrates” Dispute of Arius with Alexander, his Bishop.” The Ecclesiastical Histories of Socrates Scholasticus. [www.documentacatholica.eu/03d/03800440_Socrates_Scholasticus-Historia_ecclesiastica\(schaff\),-EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholica.eu/03d/03800440_Socrates_Scholasticus-Historia_ecclesiastica(schaff),-EN.pdf).
- Adebayo, Francis Kehinde (2015). “A Missiological History of Christian Association of Nigeria.” *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. www.iiste.org. ISSN 2422-8443. Vol.13.
- Baur, John (1994) *2000 Years of Christianity In Africa: An African Church History*. Kenya: Paulines Publications.
- Beach, B.B.(1974: 24) *Ecumenism: Boon or Bane*. Review and Herald, Washington DC.
- Bettenson, Henry (1979ed). *Documents of the Christian Church*. London : Oxford University Press.
- Boer H.R. (1976), *A Short History of the Early Church*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Day Star Press.
- Crabtree, V. (2013) “Gnosticism(1st—7th century).The Birth of Christianity”. <http://www.humanreligions.info/gnosticism.html>.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p.234

⁵⁸ Kasper, Walter (2007). *A Handbook of spiritual Ecumenism* (New York: New City Press). Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/neoplato>

- Duchense, L.M.O.(1965) *Early History of the Christian Church: From its Foundation to the end of the Fifth century*. Translated by C..Jenkins(1st.ed.1912). London: Murray.
- Eke, Vitus Chibisi (2016) "Development and Challenges of Ecumenical Movement in Nigeria." *Roczniki Yeologiczne Tom Lxiii, Zeszyt. 221-237.*<https://tnkul.p//files/RT2016,Eke.pdf>.
- Ekechi, Felix K.(1972) *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igbiland,1857-1914*. London: Cass.
- Ekpunobi, Emma. (2001) *We are Closer than We Think: An Analysis of Contemporary Issues in Ecumenism*. Enugu, Nigeria: Rabboni Publishers International.
- Falk, P. (1997). *The Growth of the Church in Africa*. Pleateau Nigeria: ACTS Publications.
- Goodman, Martin (1999)"Judaism, the Roman Empire and Jesus: The Emergence of the Church". *A World History of Christianity*. Adrian Hasting (ed).UK: W.E. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Grooves, C.P. (1955) *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*. Vol.11. 1878-1914. London: Lutherworth Press.
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. www.iep.utm.edu/neoplato.
- Kalu, Ogbu U.(1978). *The divided people of God: Church union movement in Nigeria 1857-1966*. (New York: Nok publishers international Ltd.
- Kasper, Walter (2007). *A Handbook of spiritual Ecumenism* (New York: New City Press). Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/neoplato>.
- Lana A.S. (1987)"Visible Unity: The goal of Ecumenism in Nigeria". Unpublished Doctrinal Dissertation, University of Ibadan.
- Leeming, David (2004), *Jealous Gods and Chosen People: The Mythology of the Middle East*. NY: OPU.
- Livingstone, E.A. (1977), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Montanism. <http://earlychurch.com/montaniam.php>.
- Newman, Albert A.H. (1951). *A Manual of Church History*. Vol.1. Los Angeles: Judson Press.

Nnebedum, Osmond Ekene. (2009) "Ecumenism in Nigeria: The Roman Catholic Contribution." M.A. Dissertation, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
<http://www.unn.edu.ng/publications/files/images/NNEBEDUM,%OSMOND%20EKENE%>.

Obineche, J.O. & G.D. Vilawa (2017), "The Impact of the Ecumenical Councils of the Early Church on Christianity in Nigeria" *Insight Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol.13, June/December 2017. Ogun State, Nigeria: Babcock University,

Obineche, J.O., Iheanacho, N.N. & C.Mbonu (2013). *New Testament Studies Volume One: The Four Gospels*. Port Harcourt Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt Press.

Renwick, A.M. and Harman, A.M. (1999). *The Story of the Church. 3rd ed.* England: Inter Varsity Press.

Renwick, A.M. & A.M. Harman (2009), *The Story of the Church, 3rd edition*. Inter-Varsity Press.

Rowan, W. (2002) *Arius*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans.

Shelly, Bruce. *Church History in Plain Language* Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008.

Visse'rt, Hooft (1965: 6 - 9) "What's Ahead for the World Council of Churches?" *These Times*, vol. 74.

Vos, Howard (1960) *Highlights of Church History*. Chicago: Moody Press.