

## Mission as Peacebuilding in Nigeria at its Hundredth Years of Existence

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### **Abstract**

The hundred years of Nigeria as a nation almost coincide with the hundred years of the presence of the Catholic Church in the Northern part of the country. The missionary task a hundred years ago was *ad gentes* in every sense: it was a region that demanded what is defined in *Redemptoris Missio* 31 as 'specific missionary activity' since here the Gospel had not yet been proclaimed and the Church was not established. Today the Church is vibrant and widespread throughout the North. However, as this paper argues, the need for the presence and activity of the missionary Church is no less urgent. In this region, best described today by adjectives such as underdevelopment, insecurity and violence, the missionary priority needs to be focused not so much on Church establishment but rather on being a Model of Peace, in a strategic and committed response to the ongoing and challenging cycle of poverty, conflict, violence, and underdevelopment.

### **1. Introduction**

In the early 1900s when the first Christian missionaries came to Shendam to begin the task of first evangelization in Northern Nigeria, their primary missionary priority was to establish a local Church in this part of the world where the Gospel had not yet been proclaimed and the Church was not yet present (Hickey 1981; O'Connor, 2009). Over a hundred years have passed since then, much has happened and things have changed. In 2007 the Catholic Church celebrated 100 years north of the rivers Niger and Benue and in 2014 Nigeria celebrates, amid ongoing troubles and insecurity, its birth as a nation one hundred years ago. And so we must ask, for Christian missionaries coming to or working in Northern Nigeria today, has the primary missionary priority also changed in these hundred years? As we pose that question, we remember that in post-Vatican two theology, the Church is missionary by nature and hence the term 'Christian missionary' applies to every member of the Church and to every local Church (*Ad Gentes* 2, 6; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 15, *Redemptoris Missio* 3).

According to Pope Francis, two great issues are fundamental at this time in history and will shape the future of humanity. These issues are first, the inclusion of the poor in society, and second, peace and social dialogue (*EvangeliiGaudium* 185). In saying this, the Pope was not referring specifically to Northern Nigeria but I believe he could very well have been since little could sum up the missionary challenges in the region at this time more than these two issues: the many social, cultural, economic, religious and political structures which help to silence and exclude the poor and promote the elite minority, and the increasingly regular presence of brutal forms of violence, insecurity, instability and helplessness which polarize the peoples, often long religious lines, and ensure a fertile ground for ongoing disturbance. These two issues are intimately related, since, as the Pope so rightly said, "until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence" (*EvangeliiGaudium* 59).

Today, the local Church in Northern Nigeria, in terms of members, leadership, structures, is undoubtedly vibrant. I suggest that today's missionary priority is not what it was 100 years ago, that is, the establishment of the Church. The Church must of course continue to spread and grow, but the missionary priority is to help the already vibrant Church, which following Vatican II ecclesiology is to be a sign and instrument of Communion, become a "model of peace", a living sign and active instrument of peace in Northern Nigerian society (*EvangeliiGaudium* 170, 227).

The aim of this paper is not to try to analyse or critique Nigeria's missionary or political history, but rather to reflect on why and how the Church in Northern Nigeria today must give priority in its missionary endeavours to situations of conflict so as to be an agent of peace. I discuss briefly the relationship between four issues: mission, development, conflict and peace. The logical link between these is and must be dialogue, especially interreligious dialogue, as a necessary path of mission in Northern Nigeria. I give a brief overview of the causes of conflict in the region and then go on to highlight some challenges involved in peacebuilding today. Most of what I say is a result of my reflections as I worked in dialogue, particularly with women, in the very complex conflict situation in Northern Nigeria. I conclude with some recommendations for missionaries as we look back at our past and move forward within our present reality as Church.

## 2. Relationship between Mission, Development, Conflict And Peace

Conflict cannot be replaced; it can be managed. In the words of Pope Francis, "Reality dictates that there are conflicts in all families and all groups of people. And conflict must be faced head on: it should not be ignored" (Pope Francis, 2014). Conflict is an inevitable part of life and it can be managed negatively (through violence in one form or another) or positively, transformed into something life giving, that is, it can be transformed into peace (Fisher 2000, Schirch 2004). Peace is not the absence of conflict or of war. By and large it is "that situation of justice and rightly ordered social relations that is marked by respect for the rights of others, that provides favourable conditions for integral human growth, and that allows citizens to live out their lives to the full in calm and joyful development" (Arinze, 2002, 1). Since conflict in Nigeria, as in so many other parts of the world today, takes on a religious colour, or religion is a strong factor in much of the conflict experienced, then religion must be part of the transformation process.

Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* tells us that mission, which is the responsibility of every baptised person, "is to further the progress of poorer nations and international social justice, as well as help less developed nations to contribute to their own development" (n.5). Obviously our mission as Church cannot be reduced to development, as though the two were synonymous, but our mission, to be a sign and an instrument of Communion and a model of peace, obliges us to be concerned for the joys, hopes, griefs and anxieties of all people (*Gaudium et Spes* 1), especially the poor, and to be actively involved in changing this situation. Similarly, working for peace is an inherent part of mission and of this we are very much reminded this year as we celebrate the canonization of John XXIII who wrote the ground breaking encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*.

Development and peace are Siamese twins and which of the two comes first and is more dependent on the other is a hypothetical question. As Paul VI said in *Populorum Progressio*, "Development is another name for Peace" (n.27) and equally we might say underdevelopment or poverty is another name for conflict. As Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "a peace which is not the result of integral development will be doomed; it will always spawn new conflicts and various forms of violence" (n.219).

In Northern Nigeria, countless peacebuilding conferences and groups have published communiqués calling on citizens to live in peace if they want

security and development and telling the government that there will be no peace unless there is justice and transparent accountable leadership (McGarvey, 2009, 346-367; Umaru, 2013, 287-314). They seem to be contradicting themselves: telling the people to live in peace and simultaneously telling the government that people will not live in peace unless there are the basic indices of development. However, as people know from experience, the truth is that as a result of violence, lives are lost, homes and businesses are destroyed, industries are closed down, money meant for development of social infrastructure is poured into security measures, possible investors are turned off, and among the people unemployment increases, the cycle of poverty continues, grievances augment and again violence erupts. It is so true that violence begets violence.

Much rhetoric in Nigeria, as indeed globally, surrounds the term 'development' in government discourse with respect to both international and national funds but little visible development results and certainly there is no real strategy to key in citizen participation in production and improving their own lives by means of infrastructure. Instead, corruption is a part of daily life, politics is an economic affair, there is impunity in leadership, elections are tampered with, public funds are swindled, public educational and health facilities barely function, roads are treacherous, there are little or no employment opportunities, the vast youth population is left idle and hopeless, and violence erupts. And so the cycle continues.

In the cycle of poverty, underdevelopment, conflict, violence, poverty, - religion is embroiled. Religion is very much a part of this cycle either because it is a factor that is close to people's hearts and forms part of their personal and group identity, because it is a source of hope for the poor who have nowhere else to turn, or because the easiest way to gain political favour or to heighten insecurity so as to make money out of security, is to play the religious or ethnic card. Thus, while religion has the potential to be a moral authority, a prophetic voice, an inspiring source for selfless commitment to the common good, a conscientious and organized instrument of positive change, it can be and is so easily manipulated for evil. Herein lies our missionary challenge as Church.

The Church is a community of believers focused on right communion with God and with one another. A believing community that is concerned only for cult or for doctrinal content with no sense of guiding ethical conduct that is committed to breaking this cycle would seem to be little more than a

“noisy gong or a clanging bell” (1 Cor. 13: 1). I cannot love God whom I do not see if I don't love my brother or sister whom I see (1 Jn. 4:20) and of course this includes not only the many brothers and sisters of our own community but also those of our neighbouring communities (cf. Mt. 5: 43 – 48). As the Church though its social teaching has pointed out so very often and so very strongly over the years, the Church is called to be on the side of the poor in a preferential way. It is not enough to simply feed the poor and look after their needs, but the Church, which includes all its members and certainly not only its leaders, is called to be a voice for the voiceless and help the voiceless be given voice by challenging the structures that make them voiceless (Dorr, 2012). This is the commitment of the Gospel and is inherent in our mission as Church. As Bishop Desmond Tutu is often quoted as saying: “There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in”.

It would make little logical sense, in a situation such as that found in Northern Nigeria where the cycle of poverty, violence and underdevelopment is evident, to plan or work for development without considering the damages and setbacks brought about by conflict and violence and working to resolve them so as to help build sustainable peace. It would equally make little sense to think that one can call peace from the sky unless one is concerned for the issues of poverty, underdevelopment and injustice that are at the basis of the conflicts which are too often expressed violently and along religious lines. Conflict and underdevelopment go hand in hand. Hence, to be engaged in development and not challenge the issues of injustice which are at the heart of the grievances which so often are expressed in violence, is rather counterproductive. To claim to be Church and not be engaged in development or in the issues giving rise to the violence would be somewhat counter-evangelical. This is clearly implied by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in its Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, when it states:

the Church's social doctrine is not a privilege for her, nor a digression, a convenience or interference: *it is her right to proclaim the Gospel in the context of society*, to make the liberating word of the Gospel resound in the complex worlds of production, labour, business, finance, trade, politics, law, culture, social communications, where men and women live. This right of the Church is at the same time a duty, because she cannot forsake this responsibility without denying herself and her

fidelity to Christ: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! (1Cor. 9:16). The warning that St. Paul addresses to himself rings in the Church's conscience as a call to walk all paths of evangelization, not only those that lead to individual consciences but also those that wind their way into public institutions:" (2006: n. 70, 71)

This complex task and great priority of evangelization today is one which the Church in Africa recognised as it gathered in Rome in 2009 for the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops:

The three principal elements of the theme chosen for the Synod, namely reconciliation, justice and peace, brought it face to face with its "theological and social responsibility", and made it possible also to reflect on the Church's public role and her place in Africa today. "One might say that reconciliation and justice are the two essential premises of peace and that, therefore, to a certain extent, they also define its nature." The task we have to set for ourselves is not an easy one, situated as it is somewhere between immediate engagement in politics - which lies outside the Church's direct competence - and the potential for withdrawal or evasion present in a theological and spiritual speculation which could serve as an escape from concrete historical responsibility (AfricaeMunus 17)

### **3. Causes of Conflict in Nigeria**

Many Nigerians are very critical of the colonial enterprise and see that so much of the suffering endured today is a legacy inherited from that phase of history. The well known Scramble for Africa resulted in the formation of many colonial states and the eventual post-independent African nations which we have today. The struggles most African countries are going through of interethnic wars, broken democracies, poverty, are not at all unrelated to that sad history of slavery and colonialism. Today's neo-colonialism by way of loans, trade agreements, and so on, continues to enslave the continent. While a lot of the pain in Nigeria, and other African countries, is due to internal corruption and greed especially among the elite and the leadership, itself a legacy inherited from the colonial system of country formation and the system of rule used while there, much is to be blamed on international intervention. One might say this is the real root cause and that today's conflicts are the outcome of that troubled past and today's neo-colonialism.

In terms of more immediate causes of the conflict and the serious security challenges in the Northern States of Nigeria today are a variety of factors

that tend to differ in emphasis, from one state to another. These generally include economic issues and narrowing opportunities, resource-related conflicts involving for instance land, territory, and water bodies, unequal access to political power and position among ethnic groups, the feeling of marginalization, issues around appointments into traditional leadership positions, all of which affect relationships between individuals and groups resulting in ever growing deep-seated suspicion and the inability to develop cooperative relationships. Due to overlap of ethnic identities with religion it often, unfortunately, finds expression in religion. There is growing polarization along religious fault lines in the northern states today. Many issues, including even the choice of leaders, tend to be viewed from the prism of a perceived religious divide. Religion often becomes the instrument of offence and defence; and a tool in the hands of people who utilise it to manipulate the consciousness of the people in the northern states. Furthermore, the weak adherence to the rule of law promotes impunity as well as a strong feeling of perceived injustice and helplessness from among the populace. The large pool of unskilled, unemployed and indeed unemployable youths, all of whom are ready tools for violence, drug abuse, criminality and insurgency is a major area of concern.

Radicalization of the religious space has also been a serious factor. As many investigations and scholarly researchers have shown, religion or its radicalization is not the only reason for Boko haram. However, there is equally no doubt, that the provocative and inciting preaching by some religious clerics has been instrumental in the rise of today's insurgency in the north (Anwar, 2013; Kukah, 2014).

#### **4. Challenges in Working for Peace**

##### ***4.1 Politicization of Religion***

One of the major challenges in working for peace in Northern Nigeria, and I believe it holds true for any conflict situation where religion is a major factor, is the whole politicization of religion in the complexities of the issues. When Hans Kung worked on finding a global ethics between the religions he recognized that religions have tremendous socio-political implications (Kung, 2005). Religion has a negative as well as a positive potential in society. In itself it is a social, historical and hence also political construct. In Nigeria, while the majority of the population will maintain that the problems are due to religion, and in truth the conflict in many parts does become a matter of Muslims versus Christians, the political manipulations of religion for economic and political gain is so much more intricate. A

simple but seriously inadequate reflection of the Boko Haram issue in Northern Nigeria is that this represents an attempt to Islamize Nigeria and to remove all Christians from the North. While this may have been and may be the ideology shared by some of those in Boko Haram, and while such an ideology may indeed be growing in the North among disgruntled Muslim youth, it is undoubtedly so much more complex. It involves so many factors including a web of lies, manipulations, economic deals, and personal interests, all surely not unrelated to oil in the Chad basin, the 2015 presidential elections, the money made by security agencies and their partners, and so on.

Surely, religion is a major factor in conflict situations across North Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan, but the rise of extremist groups in these places may indeed have much more to do with economic manipulations than with the views of any extremist clerics per se. Hence, a major challenge for anyone involved in peacebuilding in this kind of context is to remain above the superficial prejudices and stereotypes, stay firm in the belief in the positive and transforming power of religion, including both Christianity and Islam, and help others to do the same.

#### ***4.2 Role of Religions in the Interplay of God and Guns***

The Scramble for Africa and the colonial enterprise were not done in God's name but certainly God's name and the superiority of Christianity were recruited into its service. Hence, I believe we have a moral responsibility to ensure that today we as Church, both local and universal, do not contribute in any way to more abuse or domination. This should not result in our being afraid to speak in God's name. Nor should it result in missionaries abandoning the wider notion of evangelisation in favour of development as for a while they seem to have done, as Pope John Paul II rather subtly pointed out in *Redemptoris Missio* 58. Rather, the humble recognition that the Church was not entirely innocent of the justification or the success of colonialism, obliges us to promote dialogue and to do mission in a way that is consistent with respect for the people within their culture and their religions. Inter-faith and intercultural dialogue is not an option but a necessary part of any missionary endeavour (*Redemptoris Missio* 55, *Africae Munus* 88).

This also obliges us to be actively engaged as Church, through lobbying or whatever, in calling for justice in international relations with the underdeveloped countries. Related to this is the responsibility we all,

Africans and ex-patriots, have to be careful of the way we speak of Africa, the poor, and mission when we seek financial aid. We must not continue to promote the philosophies of the past wherein the “West was Best for all the Rest” and “Africa was only good for making heroes of Europeans” (Wainaina, 2005). Justice in international relations demands respect much more than it demands compassion.

#### ***4.3 Building a Peaceful Identity as Christians***

The weight of our past and the association of the Western world with Christianity, even today, is such that Muslims find it hard to believe that Christianity is a peaceful religion, a religion of morality and of right and just relations. Of course, if we consider it a matter for competition rather than for self-examination, we can say the same about Islam. But, it does demand self-examination and hence as a missionary Church, we have a responsibility to give evermore authentic witness if we are to redeem our name. In many parts of Northern Nigeria, when trouble erupts and it becomes a full blown Muslim v Christian war, many Christians, even leaders, insist that any harm done by Christians to Muslims is as a result of self-defence, retaliation attacks for offences suffered, and thus is considered somehow less deserving of criticism. Self-defence is given a frighteningly wide definition: if Christians are killed in one part, to kill Muslims in another part is 'self-defence' since people will claim this “it is the only way that they will stop killing us”. To work for peace in such a situation demands educating people and helping them to find non-violent ways of self-defence and of 'retaliating'.

#### ***4.4 Define the role of religion in a democratic state (what is it to be secular?)***

Another challenge in the area of peacebuilding is to find ways of developing an understanding of the role of religion in a democratic state. Nigeria is supposedly a democracy. Yet government funds are poured in to finance Muslims on pilgrimage to hajjin Mecca, Christians on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and other Christian sites, state chaplaincies, and so on. The role of government in religious affairs and of religious figures in political affairs is increasing by the day.

In Nigeria, with the sharī'a debate in 2000 and with so many of the other conflicts that erupt, it is obvious that the role and place of religion in society has not been sufficiently clarified. To follow in the footsteps of France or Ireland in their attempts to purge all traces of religion from the public space,

does not seem the best response in a pluri-religious country such as Nigeria. Similarly, to allow religion have the major role it has in political affairs is not the response either - and is not practical in a pluri-religious nation. Given that religion is so much a part of everyday life in Africa and Africans are by nature religious people, it is said, much more discussion must be held so as to find the practical and acceptable way in which all religious adherents are given an equal playing field in all parts of the country and the state ensures as "referee not patron" (Kukah, 2009) that the religious freedom of all citizens are respected.

#### ***4.5 Peacebuilding has become an industry and a flag***

A major challenge in working in the field of dialogue and peacebuilding is that peacebuilding has in fact become an industry. Nigeria is inundated with NGOs, established to bring peace and to promote harmonious coexistence. The same can undoubtedly be said about many other troubled underdeveloped countries. Many NGOs do great work, certainly. However, among the best wage paying institutions with which people dream of finding work in Nigeria are international development partners and aid agencies, and if not with these then with their partner NGOs and CSOs. People love to attend conferences and seminars and workshops on peacebuilding as it allows them the opportunity to enjoy the comforts of a good hotel and even get transport allowance and maybe per diem or seating allowance for having given of their time to come to receive training for which in other parts of the world people have to pay dearly! A favourite engagement of First Ladies and other politicians is to call for peace or to host peacekeeping events, often being little more than a political flag. Thus, peacebuilding is an industry and it is difficult to break this jinx.

Some organizations, including the Women's Interfaith Council in Kaduna, try to awaken a volunteer spirit. Women leaders are not paid for the many hours they put into organizing and participating in diverse peacebuilding interfaith events, they rent cheap venues and give simple food, no allowances are given for transport or attendance, risks are taken and sacrifices are made and there is no material benefit offered. This approach is still rather unique but it is a method that is to be encouraged as it is only through sacrifice that peace will eventually reign.

#### ***4.6 Women's involvement in patriarchal culture and religions***

Just as women's poverty and vulnerability in Northern Nigeria is greater than that of men, due in great part to the dominance of patriarchal cultures,

so too women's voices and their concerns are often times excluded from Government programmes of response and of mediation in times of conflict and in efforts at reconciliation and peacebuilding. Similarly, women are excluded from the mainline decision making levels in religious bodies, both Christian and Muslim, as well as prominent interfaith councils and state-sponsored religious bureaus. When interfaith events are organized, especially when it is by government or by influential circles, it is the male religious and community leaders who are invited.

For example, in 2012, after the outbreak of violence in June, a State Committee on Reconciliation was established in Kaduna, consisting of sixty men (as in, male). People objected so ten more were added, three of whom were women; the others included youth representatives and some other groups that had felt left out. In August 2012, a Committee was established by the Northern Governors Forum for Reconciliation, Security and Healing. It was initially all male with one woman; she objected so she was asked to get five other women to join her. This is the norm. If women are invited, it is usually as an afterthought and as a symbolic gesture of 'gender awareness'! However, most often, if a woman is invited to speak, it will be on "women's issues". In fact, in a synod held recently in Rome on the Catholic Church in Africa from Vatican II to the Third Millennium, three women were invited to speak, all within thirty minutes and all on the role of women; all other speakers at the two day conference were men! Hence, in work with women and for women in peacebuilding, serious obstacles due to patriarchy are encountered.

#### ***4.8 Specific challenges from a missionary perspective:***

##### ***4.8.1 Overcome the bad reputation of religion***

Religion has a bad reputation in relation to war and peace. Yet, as Hans Kung said, there will be no peace between the nations without dialogue between the religions (2005). This is for many reasons, the most obvious and pragmatic being so much of the strife experienced in the world today, not only in Nigeria, is very much coloured by religion. However, religion has been a positive source of hope, strength and inspiration for people to challenge and non-violently confront situations and structures of injustice; religion is a teacher of positive human values; and religion is for so many people and in many societies a moral authority of peaceful, just and right human relations. As Church, as missionaries, we are seen as people who propagate a faith, a religion. Hence, we have a responsibility to believe in our religion and to ensure religion is taught and practiced as a positive and

not a negative force.

Undoubtedly, religion has an equally bad, if not worse, reputation in relation to patriarchy and to gender equality and this reputation applies across the board to all religions. Although the struggle for gender equality is generally thought of in terms of development in secular discourse, a matter of legal provisions and so on and so forth, I am convinced that there will be no gender equality in so many parts of the world without the intervention of religions, simply because religion is such an influential factor in women's recognized roles and rights in most developing societies. Hence, our involvement in women's or gender-focused theological discourse and our support of that within the various religions is a necessary engagement in our mission for peace.

#### 4.8.2 *Working together with people of other faiths on Justice and Development*

Working for peace and working for development is not the responsibility of the Church alone but is one we can only carry out in respect and dialogue with people of other religions. Our definition of justice and of development cannot be understood only within a Christian framework or that shaped by our own cultures. Other peoples have their cultural understandings of development and these are shaped and influenced by their religious beliefs and by their faith communities. Hence, to work in mission towards making present those values of God's kingdom, which we may speak of as indicative of development, necessarily implies respectful dialogue with people of other religions and cultures. As we are told in the document *Dialogue and Mission*: “any sense of mission not permeated by [such] a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the Gospel” (n.29). In this context, the Church is advised to ensure that all its development projects are done in dialogue with the people who are to be its beneficiaries and this must be done with respect for their cultural as well as their religious views.

### **5. Contribution of Missionaries: *yesterday, today, tomorrow***

#### **5.1 *A critical look at the methodology of mission***

As Church, it is good to look back critically at the methods of the early missionaries and see which of these methods we might be suffering from today. Did missionaries promote an attitude of interethnic and interreligious openness and dialogue; did they help to establish a Church that is arrogant in its own sense of theological and institutional superiority; did their methods help to form Catholics who are high on cult but without

commitment to social responsibility; did they bring a Catholicism that did not sufficiently dialogue with the local culture and customs many of which were strengthened rather than challenged in their patriarchal and other elements? We might find that the missionary enterprise may actually have been stronger in some of these areas than the local church is today. Whichever is the case, we can, with the benefit of hindsight, be more critical and conscientious of the effects of our missionary method as local Church today.

### **5.2. *International lobbying***

International lobbying is an important arena for the Church to be instrumental in peacebuilding today. Undoubtedly, European based missionary organizations still have great strength in diverse ways and can greatly influence international policies and relations through their lobbying efforts in the UN or other international political and legislative arena. The Africa Faith and Justice Network and many others are to be very much commended and supported in their important work. Churches in Africa can be involved in the African Union, ECOWAS and other international fora where the Church can have observer status and can use its authority to bring about change:

the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the Church's immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28).

The more international pressure that is put, for accountable leadership, for transparent elections, for gender equality, for non-violent options... the more chances there is that things will change.

### **5.3. *Formation of pastoral agents***

The fragmentation among Christians in Nigeria and in many other African countries is sometimes blamed on the negative relationship that Catholics

from Ireland had with our Protestant counterparts (Crampton, 1979, 171). The negative view of Muslims has no doubt been influenced by the negative view we as Church once held of Islam. It is therefore important that an ecumenical and dialogical missionary formation is given to pastoral agents in Nigeria today. Some basic training in political analysis is also necessary as our seminarians and others study religions and the challenge of co-existence. It is important that the formation given encourages a critical study of missionary methods in Africa today. *AfricaeMunus* somehow alludes to this when it says:

Given the great ferment of peoples, cultures and religions which marks our age, Catholic universities and academic institutions play an essential role in the patient, rigorous and humble search for the light which comes from Truth. Only a truth capable of transcending human standards of measure, conditioned by their own limitations, brings peace to individuals and reconciliation to societies (n.135).

Peace in Africa, the Pope tells us in *AfricaeMunus*, is conditioned by interreligious relations. Hence “it is important for the Church to promote dialogue as a spiritual disposition, so that believers may learn to work together, for example in associations for justice and peace, in a spirit of trust and mutual help” (n.88). Hence, in forming pastoral agents today, it is important to form them in a way that teaches them to search for answers in dialogue with the cultures and religions which shape their society and our world at large and to thus be able to bring reconciliation and peace to their lands.

## 6. Conclusion

The *Lineamenta for the African Synod*, n. 35 stated: “No nation can prosper in an atmosphere of insecurity. No meaningful development is sustainable in a society replete with mutual rancour, bitterness and hate. Mutual prejudices hinder cooperation and exchange, and rob a people of a hope of a great nation.”

A video broadcast on the official Nigeria Centenary website looks at the pained history of Nigeria, its ongoing struggles, and its song of hope and strong conviction in a better tomorrow. It speaks of Nigeria as “a nation that has seen the death of ancient empires and the birth of new civilizations; the heights of greatness and the depths of cruelty; a country that has been beaten, never broken; subdued, never conquered; We are many, but we are

one people, one nation, forever united, in our sheared struggle, a common heritage, a bright future.”

The task of the missionary Church in Northern Nigeria today is to help to make this bright and better future come true. This, I believe, is the imperative and the missionary priority of the Church in Nigeria today as the country celebrates its one hundredth birthday in an increasingly insecure environment of violence, underdevelopment, poverty and pain, and as the Church celebrates a little over one hundred years of presence.

The post-synodal exhortation, *Africae Munus*, offers some good advice. It tells us that “If all of us who believe in God desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism” (n. 94). And it encourages us with the words:

the difficulties encountered by the countries and particular Churches in Africa are not so much insurmountable obstacles, but challenges, prompting us to draw upon the best of ourselves: our imagination, our intelligence, our vocation to follow without compromise in the footsteps of Jesus Christ... Together with all sectors of African society, the Church therefore feels called to respond to these challenges. It is, in some sense, an imperative born of the Gospel (n.12).

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