

Ecumenical Cooperation at the Service of National Reconciliation: A Proposal

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Abstract

Building sustainable peace in places violently torn apart is essential to Christian identity. Hence, this contribution offers that the Body of Christ in Nigeria, attentive to her ethical responsibility in the light of advances in critical criminology, especially Victim Studies and Restorative Justice, must move beyond its current acrimonies to evolving structures and habits that care for victims and perpetrators of violence so as to build just peace. *Africae Munus* notes that the search for reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa cannot be an exclusive search. It must be ecumenical and interreligious (nos 88-96). The post-synodal exhortation, however, does not proffer areas of ecumenical actions for reconciliation, justice and peace. This limitation becomes clearer if one compares it with WCC's resource book, *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation*, which also focuses on reconciliation and justice in Africa. The article seeks to contribute to ecumenical dialogue of life, and particularly to suggest missing ecumenical structures in Nigeria. The Body of Christ united in suffering must respond ecumenically to heal Nigeria's past and present to realise a future hoped for.

Keywords: *Africae Munus*, Christian Association of Nigeria, Ecumenical Ecclesiology, Reconciliation, World Council of Churches

1. Introduction

Building sustainable peace in places violently torn apart is essential to Christian identity and mission. This paper argues that the ecumenical Family of God in Nigeria, attentive to her ethical responsibility, must balance its current preoccupation with acrimonious theological debates with proactive ecumenical structures and habits that care for victims and perpetrators of violence. This is core to building just peace. *Africae Munus* notes that the search for reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa cannot

be an exclusive search. It must be ecumenical and interreligious (nos 88-96). The Post-Synodal Exhortation, however, does not proffer areas of ecumenical actions for reconciliation, justice and peace. This limitation becomes clearer if one compares it with WCC's resource book, *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation*, which also focuses in part on reconciliation and justice in Africa. This contribution argues for more ecumenical dialogue of action and life in relation to a missing strategic ecumenical structure in Nigeria. The paper suggests that the Family of God united in suffering must respond ecumenically to heal Nigeria's past and present so as to realise a future hoped for.

2. A Theological Background: 'Justice and Peace Ecumenism'

Ecumenical ecclesiology motivates this contribution. This ecclesiology is a systematic reflection of the Church's self-understanding as a community of persons/communities that explicitly professes belief in Christ. Hence, the Church is beyond denominational lines (Ogoko, 2007, pp. 411, note 934). I should state immediately that one needs to exercise caution when putting forward or subscribing to any ideal types of ecclesiologies. These serve only a heuristic purpose (Mannion, 2007, p. 31).

Nevertheless, within the theological framework of this *ecumenical ecclesiology*, Roman Catholic Church [henceforth RCC] for instance recognises and proclaims its mission as one of reconciliation, justice and peace: "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'" (Benedict XVI, 2011, no. 17).

Similarly, the World Council of Churches [henceforth WCC], through its Faith and Order commission, sees reconciliation and unity especially in situations of conflict as a core of the mission of the Church (World Council of Churches, 2006, no. 14). In other words, justice and peace grant credibility to the Christian faith, and an absence of these especially in moments of crisis discredits the Church, its mission, and its institutions. So, a truly ecumenical Church united in suffering pursues a collective commitment for justice and reconciliation. In a traumatised and perplexed world, such Church becomes an effective agent of

evangelisation and a “model for a more fraternal society attentive to the needs of the poor” (Ogoko, p.363).

The ecumenical ecclesiology offered above aims in the face of a violent past for what may be called 'justice & peace ecumenism'. This form of ecumenism is not a reactive one that characterise some ecumenical associations, especially in Africa. These associations were originally established to checkmate perceived islamisation of constitutionally secular countries. The Christian Association of Nigeria [CAN] for example was established in the late seventies, not to promote ecumenism. On the contrary, CAN was formed as a common Christian body to confront the Islamists (Adogame, 2005, pp. 128-133). Conversely, the 'justice & peace ecumenism' inherent in the ecumenical ecclesiology adopted here is proactive. It seeks to work for the dignity and flourishing of the peoples where the Church finds itself through contextual restorative processes. This 'justice & peace ecumenism' takes inspiration from what emeritus Pope Benedict XVI says in *Africae Munus*: “Justice is never disembodied. It needs to be anchored in consistent human decisions. A charity which fails to respect justice and the rights of all is false. I therefore encourage Christians to become exemplary in the area of justice and charity (Mt 5:19-20)” (AM 18). However, ecumenical cooperation today, at least at the national level, is at its lowest ebb.

3. Current Ecumenical Debates

One can locate ecumenical debates at two levels – ecclesiological definitions and the response to ethno-religious violence.

Let's examine the first debate i.e. ecclesiological definitions. The emergence of Pentecostal and charismatic movements in Nigeria has led to attempts to re-interpret Christianity and redefine its praxis. Accordingly, it is becoming more difficult, mainline churches will say, to know the genuine *ecclesia* from the charlatan. Some in the Catholic Church take exception to ecumenical engagement due to the tendency to place church-members on equal level with the Mother Church.

Emmanuel Mbam notes that current practice of all believing communities belonging to one ecumenical body i.e. CAN, where they are equal, glosses over the ecclesiological questioning that should precede necessary kind of ecumenical dialogue (June 2012, pp. 75-76). Kenneth Enang, on his part, recalls with incredulity a respondent's remarks to a question about the

one Catholic Church: “One of them boldly stated that in Nigeria, there are only three religious currents, namely the original African religion, Christianity and Islam. In Christianity, all churches are equal, no more, no less” (June 2012, p. 253). There is a perceived general anti-Catholic disposition among various Pentecostal and African Independent Churches (Uzochukwu, 2012, 3.1.1). There are mutual suspicions of proselytism (3.2.5.1). This is why many particular Churches in Africa shun deep ecumenical engagements (3.2.5.2). So, ecumenical interactions involving the Catholic Church are limited largely to annual prayers for Christian unity and humanitarian activities.

Let me buttress my point on the first debate with the theme and overall tenor of Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria's 2014 annual conference. On the Conference poster and flier, there were nineteen topics for exploration. All the nineteen topics centred on internal ecumenical regeneration and inter-ecclesial relationship (i.e. between the Catholic Church and other Christian Communion). Of the nineteen topics, ten were on ecclesiological definition and delineation. The Conference proceedings (Ijezie, Audu, & Acha, 2015) however fares better, although the 751 paged proceedings might still leave one with the sense that most of the contributions have reduced the Nigerian ecumenical project to definition and delineation of dialogue partners and the levels of respect to be accorded these.

Yet the revised Ecumenical Directory (henceforth ED) (*Pontificium Consilium ad Christianorum Unitatem Fovendam*, March 25, 1993) states that “The nature of the ecumenical activity undertaken in a particular region will always be influenced by the particular character of the local ecumenical situation” (ED 31). Some might argue that ecclesiological differences and contestations are “the local ecumenical situation”. Notably, ED equally acknowledges that each contextual ecumenical engagement has “many other factors, political, social, cultural, geographical and ethnic, which can give distinct shape to the ecumenical task” (no. 33). Indeed, Nigeria has various “political, social, cultural, geographical and ethnic” issues “which can give distinct shape to the ecumenical task”. Principal among it are Nigeria's volatility, impunity, and need for national consciousness. This falls under what is called 'dialogue of action' that “fosters collaboration with others for goals of humanitarian, social, economic or political ends, aimed at the common good, peace and harmony” (Gotan, 2008, p. 100). It is important, however,

that if 'dialogue of action' will succeed, 'dialogue of life' must be emphasised and equally promoted by ecumenical dialogue partners. This leads me to the second principal source of current debate.

Till the first quarter of 2015, religious terrorism was rampant and the impact was and still is quite devastating on Christians as well as Muslims. Religious terrorism caused untold hardships to Nigerians, particularly Christians. They were killed; their churches bombed, burnt or attacked; Christians were brutally killed (Kaigama, June 2013, pp. 1-19). The adequate Christian response was one of the rifts between CAN and the Roman Catholic Church. The popular Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), one of CAN's blocs, preferred to see the rise in religious fundamentalism and terrorism as persecution of Christians and unjust 'war'. Hence, they favoured a more militant approach. Supporters of this line of action appeal to the Just War tradition.

The Catholic Church, on the other hand, favoured a multi-causal and multi-sectoral approach. The CBCN insisted that there was no religious persecution *per se* going on. Accordingly, it was important to partner with all moderate elements even in Islam to find a lasting solution to the religionisation of politics and politicisation of religion in Nigeria (Kaigama, pp. 15-17). CAN thought Catholics were too beholden to Muslims, while the Catholic Church thought CAN was derailing from the Gospel value, and becoming the Christian wing of PDP, the former ruling party. This tension reached its height during the preparation for the 2015 general elections, especially the presidential election. While Oritsejaford-led CAN executive became partisan by throwing its weight behind the re-election bid of former president Goodluck Jonathan, CBCN felt CAN ought to be non-partisan; thus guaranteeing it moral authority to serve as mediator of pre- and post-election peace. In the light of these developments, the Catholic Church paradoxically engages more in interfaith dialogue with Muslims than with fellow Christians in the search for sustainable peace. In the post-Jonathan presidency, CAN's relationship with the Catholic Church is not rosy at the moment. The acrimonious parties are still in the process of ironing out their differences. The Catholic Church's temporary withdrawal from CAN still subsists such that when CAN conducted its national election in May 2013, the Catholic bloc was not represented.

So, while CATHAN 2014 was sorting out the first debate, albeit as an intra-ecclesial and not ecumenical exercise, this paper suggests that ameliorating the second acrimonious debate is necessary and possible as a concrete response to ED's directives on ecumenical cooperation in social and cultural life (nos 211-218). ED states that "Christians should also work together in the use of every possible means to relieve the afflictions of our times such as famine and national disasters, illiteracy and poverty, lack of housing, and the unequal distribution of wealth" (no. 11). Concrete areas of such collaboration include cooperation in common studies of social and ethical questions (ED 214). This paper's proposal is an indication of how to practically achieve ED's vision under the permanent structures for promoting Christian unity e.g. Councils of Churches and Christian Councils (ED 166-171).

4. Ecumenical Cooperation for Reconciliation

The 'suffering peoples of Africa' run to religion for succour when the socio-political structures for alleviation of their complex misery are missing or ineffectual. Beyond giving them spiritual succour, the Family of God must remain realistically praxis-oriented, especially in contexts of ethno-religious conflicts (Uzochukwu, 3.2.5.2). We shall now consider two ecclesial documents responding to Africa's ethno-religious conflicts.

4.1. *Benedict XVI's Africae Munus* (2010)

The second chapter of *Africae Munus* is divided into four sections. The fourth section, which concerns us here, is titled "Dialogue and Communion among Believers" (nos 88-91). This section acknowledges that "interreligious relations" condition peace. Consequently, 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" (no. 88). While this quotation identifies associations for justice and peace as one of the ways to work together ecumenically, the rest of the section does not develop this line of thought.

On the contrary, the rest of the section is devoted to ecumenical collaboration to combat new religious movements within the Christian fold. This proliferation of "divided Christianity remains a scandal, since it *de facto* contradicts the will of the Divine Master" (no. 89). Pope Benedict, therefore, calls on the Roman Catholic Church to pursue the path of ecumenical dialogue in "the spirit of and on the basis of, the

guidelines given in the Ecumenical Directory and through the various existing ecumenical associations” (no. 89). Still on the effects of proliferating new religious movements, Pope Benedict exhorts that the Family of God in Africa must find various ways to stem the appeal of or the exodus to these movements (no. 91). It is not clear if this exhortation is for the ecumenical Family of God or for the Roman Catholic Church. It appears the exhortation is for latter. Two statements lend credence to this claim (See nos 90 & 91). For Mbam (June 2012), there is no ambiguity. The Pope is exhorting the Roman Catholic Church. Reflecting on AM 91, Mbam avers that if the Catholic Church will stem the tide of movement to the new religious movements, like the African Independent Churches, as the Pope and the Synod Fathers exhort, then it (RCC) must “be humble enough to learn what makes the AIC attractive” (89). Mbam avers further that healing is the primary attraction “to the suffering peoples of Africa” (90). Certainly, *Africae Munus* does not dwell on the importance and ways Christian believers can ecumenically be signs of hope in a 'weeping and bleeding continent', beyond the exhortation that the Catholic Church should promote dialogue in order to create a spiritual disposition necessary for learning to work together “for example in associations for justice and peace in spirit of trust and mutual help” (no. 88).

4.2. WCC's *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation* (2006)

This resource for churches in situations of conflict, published by WCC's Faith and Order commission, is a product of field and interdisciplinary work informed by local self-study projects in East Asia (Fiji Island), Sub-Saharan Africa (Sudan), Western Europe (Northern Ireland), and North America (the USA) (World Council of Churches). If one compares the RCC's position with that of the World Council of Churches, one will see some differences between the scope of, the sensitivity to ecumenical engagement at the service of justice and peace, and concrete proposals on how to respond to situations of conflict and victimisation in *Africae Munus* and WCC's *Participating in God's Mission*. Besides presenting 10 questions that are meant for local ecumenical self-study concerning justice and reconciliation, *Participating in God's Mission* concretely addresses the issue of dealing with or coping with churches' divisions and differences and how this can be put to creative use. Its intention is that the churches engage in local self-study projects and draw up effective programmes that respond to the local situation in need of healing and reparation (World Council of Churches, 2006, pp. 61-62). The Church as an anamnestic community can contribute towards the purification of memory such that

this memory of the past does not keep today and the future hostage (Volf, 2009, pp. 10-11). As such *Participating in God's Mission* declares that the Church has a central role to play in overcoming stereotypes fuelling the 'politicisation of victimhood': "the churches have a contribution to make: based on their tradition they can help deconstruct myths, stereotypes and prejudices that impede the appreciation of others in their irreducible otherness" (World Council of Churches, 2006, no. 85). In other words, healing and reparation after violence and victimisation go beyond proclamation, teaching and exhortation. Action has priority.

Hence, it is imperative to move beyond these acrimonious theological debates to 'dialogue of action' for holistic healing and national reconciliation.

5. Basis for Ecumenical Dialogue of Action

It appears that the first joint project between the Catholic Church and the Protestant community was the National Institute for Training-In-Moral-Education (TIME). This institute, established in 1971, was to train future teachers of religious education in primary and post-primary institutions. The institute was open to people of all faiths, even Muslims ("History of St. Augustine's College of Education," n.d.; Makozi, 1982, p. 97). Again in the seventies, probably the success of TIME led to another ecumenical project, the Christian Health Association of Nigeria (CHAN) (Makozi, p. 97). It is important to note the nature of ecumenical engagement in Nigeria originally. The first two projects (TIME and CHAN) were not inherently intra-ecclesial projects. In other words, these were not focused on worship, doctrine and doctrinal dialogue. Rather, there was a pragmatic attention. The members sought to deploy the resources of the three blocs (Catholic, Protestant, AICs) for national development through sound moral education and qualitative and accessible health institutions. The nature of original ecumenical engagement appears to inform the formation in 1976 of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), of which the Catholic Church is one of the founding blocs. On the heels of the relatively early success of TIME and CHAN, the Christian denominational blocs saw the possibility of a formal organisation whose *raison d'être* would include acting as "a liaison committee for consultation and common action". It would also serve as "a watchdog of the spiritual and moral welfare of the nation," promoting "understanding among the various peoples and strata of society in Nigeria". Above all, it would be dedicated to spreading the gospel of Christ (Makozi, pp. 97-98).

While one makes a case for renewed ecumenical dialogue of action at the service of national reconciliation, it is important to note that some previous ecumenical dialogues of action failed. TIME is a foremost failure. Its early years, during the immediate post-Civil war era, were characterised by the optimism that Christian denominations could work together for the sake of national rebirth. Yet, Project TIME eventually failed due to human or sociological factors. Either by default or design Project TIME in time became synonymous with the Catholic Church. It seemed as if other denominations withdrew their support or the Catholic Church took it over due to clash of doctrines especially on the curriculum of faith and morals. Perchance, Project TIME failed in due course because of unresolved theological differences and acrimonious prejudices. So, it seems the kind of dialogue of life in ecumenism being argued here is fraught with problems.

While I accept the merits of the foregoing arguments, I submit that we do not need to resolve all our theological arguments before responding to our local context. Hence, it is still valid to call for balancing between preoccupation with theological debates and ecumenical dialogue of action. We must remember the monastic tradition. The Church lives her life first and theologises later.

6. Balancing Theological Debates with Proactive Ecumenism

In African fundamental philosophical ethics, the 'Palaver' is a narrational discourse through which the community, as a 'stomach', 'digests' the spoken word together. In other words, the African community appears to reflect together, interpreting the issues in and through the community, to arrive at moral decisions especially on issues of justice and peace (Bujo, 2001, p. 87; Magesa, 2004, pp. 161-163).

It is about time Christians in Nigeria conveyed an ecumenical palaver as a significant step to helping Nigerians cultivate empathetic hearts for peace, justice, and reconciliation. Justice towards reconciliation does not necessarily depend on retributive punishment, and not even truth commissions. There is the assertion that the movement towards higher ground includes the transethical like forgiveness. The higher ground does not even depend unconditionally on reparative justice. Time and again we are reminded that retributive punishment – even in very strict and stark manifestations – does not serve as deterrence (Vorster, 2006, p.

394). The nascent Buhari-led government must recognise that the underlying social causes have to be proactively addressed for lasting positive peace to reign.

Accordingly, the church (which has strong mediating roles in fractured societies like Nigeria) and other social institutions must complement themselves in seeing to the positive change in people's morality, in order to "create a moral-cultural foundation that honors human rights ..." (Amstutz, 2006, pp. 560, 564). This is part of the church's mission of restoration. If the community can be a force for good or ill in relation to crimes and violence, then the Christian community possesses "the power to be a key player and motivator behind the community" (Earl, 1999, p. 245). The ecumenical Family of God has an indispensable role to play in reforming values and attitudes. This ultimately helps the traumatised and disconnected societies to transcend irrational factors that fuelled past acrimonious life.

6.1. Ecumenical Summit for National Reconciliation

Perhaps a practical way Christians can go about rebuilding trust at the national level might be through a National Ecumenical Summit on Justice and Peace in view of the country's volatile post-amalgamation existence and post-2015 general elections that exposed again our primordial cleavages. This might afford the Family of God in Nigeria to walk, work, and breathe together on issues of justice and peace, and the rebuilding of trust. The proposed summit might contribute equally towards proactively punctuating the spiral of toxic emotions in the country. Nigeria has a significant Christian population. The nation's conflicts and crises affect the church across denominational lines. Hence, such summit might be a graced event that can bring together all the Christian denominations and their experts in the various fields and sectors concerned about helping Nigeria move beyond the ever-present 'toxic emotions' of its citizens.

This summit, under the aegis of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), might be for many Nigerian Catholics a particular but decisive way of receiving the implication of the ecclesiology of the first African Synod and its *Ecclesia in Africa* (the Church-Family of God). In John Paul II's post-synodal exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (EA) (1995), African Catholics were challenged to see the link between this ecclesiology and the issue of justice and peace. In nos. 105 and 106, EA states that the Church-Family of God

must promote justice and peace, show commitment to justice and solidarity by each member, especially in public offices, even in the church's structure. This call is premised on the mission and action of Christ and the proclamation that the human race is the same family of God (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 32). The summit under consideration here will evidently be seen as an opportunity for the whole Family of God in Nigeria to come together and work out a common framework for rescuing the country from 'toxic emotions'.

Accordingly, the summit can enable the church in Nigeria to come up with reconciled vision, mission, and ways to actualise the 'impact areas' in Peace building i.e. areas of reflection and evaluation that will be useful to guide the church in Nigeria on the necessities for just peace in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. If this happens, this will be a moment of grace for the church in Nigeria that the various denominations can move towards reconciliation with themselves, without necessarily implying re-unification. This form of reconciliation can show a strength and will that can be a shining light for many warring peoples in Africa.

Furthermore, this form of reconciliation will spare the church in Nigeria the kind of scathing evaluation Michael Hurley gives the churches in Europe and in Ireland – that they lack courage and vitality to forge far-reaching ecumenical reconciliation:

...the contrast between the boldness of the statesmen and politicians of Ireland and of Europe and the timidity of their Churches and Church leaders is saddening. What is scandalous now is not only the disunity of the Churches but also the weakness, the lack of vitality of the ecumenical movement and its leaders (Winter 2003, p. 373).

For some African Christians who have been to Europe, and who have seen and learnt of the extent of ecumenical dialogue and movement towards reconciliation, it might be discomfoting to them that ecumenical dialogue in Africa has not gone half way what is in Europe. Hence, one can be struck by Hurley's words. If situations in Europe and in Ireland are scandalous, what can one say of Africa's?

Yet, if by a stroke of grace building upon courage and determination the ecumenical church in Nigeria can come together to concretely and proactively respond to violence in an ecclesial manner, then the church will gloriously contribute to enhancing human dignity, the quality of human life, and a culture of peace.

6.2. Ecumenical Summit: Planning and Execution

Given the pervading sense of caution and distrust among Christian denominations, which dates back the era of denominationalism and quest for control of the 1980s (Enwerem, pp. 187-188), one might ask how this paper's contribution can be realised.

CAN's Directorates of Planning, Research and Development and Ecumenism & Inter - Faith can be constituted into a preliminary Study Group to brainstorm on drawing the modalities, themes, and theological, pastoral and practical resources for the summit. Since the directorates are necessarily ecumenical, the members from CAN's five blocs (Catholic Church, Christian Council of Nigeria, Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, Organisation of African Instituted Churches, and TEKAN and ECWA Fellowships) can engage in preliminary brainstorming sessions on the nature, goal, feasibility and methodology of the proposed Peace Summit. Assuredly, the brainstorming sessions, in an atmosphere of openness to the Spirit and contextual exigencies, will generate ideas and scenarios that the preliminary study group can study, narrow and isolate prior to drawing up a thematic map of clustered ideas. This stage can help the study group come up with an overall theme, sub-themes, and propose resource persons and specific activities that can draw on CAN's multiple denominational and spiritual traditions.

By this stage, the study group can present its proposal and recommendations to CAN's National Executive Committee (NEC) that meets once a quarter. This committee consists of representatives of all the five blocs, the six zones, the thirty-six states and FCT. The NEC's ratification is important so that the proposed Summit can be owned by all major stakeholders in order to allay any fears of being hijacked by any bloc or groups of persons. Of course, these representatives can also give critical input on the theme, methodology and activities of the proposed Summit. If approved, the Study Group can be upgraded to the Summit Planning Committee with clear mandate in organising and mobilising stakeholders and interested parties for the summit.

6.3. Theological Ethical Basis for Proposal

The hope is that Christian Association of Nigeria can do for Nigeria what AACC and the NCKK did for Rwanda and Kenya respectively. If this is done, Nigerians will see it and know how the church is taking serious its 'ministry of reconciliation' through its 'Afro-Christian Palaver'. Consequently, the ecumenical church in Nigeria can help to restore trust in the churches that have been more of the problems than good news.

Furthermore, the national ecumenical summit can serve as model for practical and gospel-laden ecumenical engagement which can help many Nigerians (and Africans) hostilely divided along denominational lines to work together in respect for the sake of justice, peace and reconciliation believing indeed that 'a different world is possible'. There is the possibility of another ecumenical world where the churches can rejoice in their differences and let these become resources to rebuild the traumatised continent and its peoples. Furthermore, when a national summit suggested here is successfully put together, Christians in different parts of the continent can derive inspiration from this and use the structure that they experienced as a prototype for similar structures, processes or rituals at various levels.

One can imagine the joy and hope this can unleash again on Africa, the various countries, and neighbourhoods, not to talk of the churches, when many traumatised persons – not only of mass violence, but countless victims of child, and domestic abuses, school bullying, and cultism – realise that the religious communities to which they belong are anxiously navigating within a sub-culture that stands midway between triumphalism and self-loathing. Hence, they get the message that at last they (victims; peoples) matter; and their woundedness is important and will no longer be subject to politics of victimisation.

The kind of ecumenical summit proposed here within a space inundated with rituals of healing can become a watershed form of witnessing to the Christian God's 'love of justice' and the 'justice of love' that find creative and bold ways to heal the wounds of those who had been traumatised. The communities of the Church of Christ can, for once, not make the hopeless attempts to forget their differences, or continue to compete among themselves on "short-term" and "guilt-motivated humanitarianism" or "mindless activism" (McCullum, 1995, pp. xxiv, 66)

in response to the dire situations of violence, and absence of *shalom* in most parts of the country.

On the contrary, they can make use of their differences (in spiritualities, accents on justice, peace, love, solidarity, history, and structures) to witness how the Church can collectively contribute towards healing through a process of mourning, acknowledgement, purification & atonement, reconfiguration, and reconciliation, and possibly reunification in some cases if so desired (de Gruchy, 2002, p. 158; Zehr, 1999, pp. 144-148). Indeed, this can signal the birth of “a new spiritual community” where its “common denominator is always overcoming the separation of people” (Graf, 2005, p. 375). This is to us what reconciliation is: the overcoming of estrangement which ushers in *shalom*, and “*koinonia* between individuals or groups who are at odds with each other and have broken off relations” (Hurley, pp. 367-368).

When the Church does this, Christians, then, may begin to lay claim truthfully to the epithet: “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people” (1 Pet 2,10) because they show that they undeniably do what the just kings used to do (cf. Ps 72). In addition, they set captives free from bondages that negate *shalom* (Luke 4,18-19; 7,22-23). Hence, their people – friends and enemies – can be “saved from death through love that risks life for life” (Swartley, 2006, p. 144). This is how the gospel of Christ, the gospel of just love and just peace, can conquer the kingdom of Satan, the root of the idolatry behind ideologies and terrorisms wasting Nigeria and its citizens (Villa-Vicencio, 2004, pp. 157-159, 170). Then the Christian faith can speak authoritatively on being a religion of hope.

7. Conclusion

This contribution has argued that ecumenism in Nigeria should be more avowedly proactive. While doctrinal and psychological acrimonies persist and the members of the Family of God united in Christ bear some degree of responsibility for these acrimonies, there is a lot Christians can do together at the service of justice, peace and reconciliation as advocated by *Africae Munus* (2010) and *Participating in God's Mission* (2006).

If we must truly incarnate ecumenism in Africa, it must be life-based in the light of the current state of post-colonial volatility. Indeed, there are various ways of pursuing this praxis-oriented ecumenical cooperation. However, this contribution is an instance of promoting what the Catholic

Church's ecumenical Directory refers to as ecumenical cooperation concerning socio-ethical questions, human need, and ameliorating national disasters (ED 44, 211, 214-215).

This input's principal argument is that the Family of God united in Christ must find bold and creative ways to institutionally embody the solidarity it so much proclaims. This institutional expression of solidarity, i.e. justice, is not an optional extra. It is constitutive of Christianity's mission of reconciliation. If in spite of the current acrimonies among Christians today in Nigeria, they are able to harness their positive differences to heal our land, then Christianity can convince Nigerians that it has a redemptive role in the country. The 'justice & peace ecumenism' presented here is reasonable, responsible and loving, taking serious the facts and narratives of multi-ethnic/religious victims of mass violence.

If ecumenical partners work through the kind of thematic framework presented here, they will be regarded as helpful dialogue partners with critical criminologists and other members of the civil society. Together they all can come up with concretely viable ways to respond to the needs of victims and their demands for justice, especially when they are trapped in a culture of impunity. Finally then, the Church united in suffering and responding ecumenically to heal the past shall help the present midwife a future full of hope founded on just peace and reconciliation.

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