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Fifty Years after the Second Vatican Council: A Critical Review of the Roman Catholic Church’s Approach to Interreligious Dialogue and Seeking a Way Forward Through Interreligious Friendship

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Abstract

Interreligious dialogue ought to lead to transformation of hearts and the theological traditions of the religions engaged in dialogue. This cannot happen when the dialogical model adopted by any of the religions is shaped by an exclusivist theology that refuses to consider the dialogical partners as possessing salvific truths, legitimate in themselves, without reference to another religion for its legitimacy. Though the Second Vatican Council encouraged dialogue among religions, the question remains, can the Catholic Church accept the view that its dialogue partners are legitimate media for God’s salvific truths in themselves? After fifty years since the Council, it is important that a critical review of the dialogical model adopted by the Catholic Church be done and a more transformative method of dialogue be embraced that affirms God’s freedom to engage human society through the many religions.

Introduction

The conciliar declaration on the relation of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions, otherwise known as Nostra Aetate, has been celebrated by many since the Second Vatican Council as a forward looking and ground-breaking document that helped to shape the church’s future dealings with other religions. There is some truth to this claim and there are also vestiges of the ancien régime on how the Catholic Church views itself and its mission in relation to other religions and what is not Roman Catholic. To foster authentic dialogue among
religions, these paradoxes present in the desires of the Roman Catholic Church and its actual teachings on other religions are worth exploring and critiquing.

The beginning words of *Nostra Aetate* reflect an awareness of the dynamics operative in the world the Second Vatican Council was faced with and had to address. The examination of the Roman Catholic Church’s relations with non-Christian religions is addressed within the context of growing bonds of friendship among peoples from different lands and cultures. This is a strategic approach that legitimizes the claim that the Catholic Church is on the right path in its desire to engage non-Christian religions in friendship.

It is of great importance, theologically, to use friendship to describe the type of relationship the Council aims to have with other religions. Friendship, as understood in many western epistemological discourses, entails the respect of otherness, openness, trust, and a transformation both of perceptions of the other and of self-awareness. While affirming the positive path the Council called for Catholics to follow in their interactions with members of other religions, it is of utmost importance to evaluate how faithful the Catholic Church has been to this project for the past fifty years since the pastoral council called for a healthier way of engaging other religions.¹ This evaluation is necessary because the document, *Nostra Aetate*, spelt out the relevance of those things that bind human community together – the reality of their common humanity; their desire to serve God; their common origin; and their common destiny.²

² Ibid, #1.
Limitations of the Hermeneutics on Interreligious Dialogue Proceeding from Nostra Aetate

Though this section addresses the limitations of the conciliar document, Nostra Aetate, the strength of the position adopted by the Council lies in the revolutionary break from the ideology of separation that characterized the Catholic Church’s relational engagement with non-members to a conscious effort to engage them and a willingness to consider non-Catholic religious traditions as possessing elements of salvific truths. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, isolation from other Christian and non-Christian religions was the rule of law within the Catholic Church. This approach by the Catholic Church gained support through the decisions of the Council of Trent that declared anathemas on the teachings of the Protestant churches. Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire was enjoined by the Council to suppress the Protestant churches in his dominion. Pope Pius IX, in his Apostolic Letter, Iam Vos Omnes enjoined Protestants to abandon their erroneous beliefs and return to the Catholic faith. This view was pushed forward by many popes in their attempt to combat Modernism and resist the restructuring of Christendom by the nationalistic forces that gripped Europe during the Modern Era.

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8 See Pius IX, Encyclical Letter: Qui Pluribus – On Faith and Religion, (November 9, 1846), #15, [http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9quiplu.htm](http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9quiplu.htm) (accessed January 25, 2013). While condemning the
While the Reformation was seen as mainly a Christian event concerning heretics who later became legitimate Christian Churches breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church (as the church became known after Trent), historical data justifies the argument that the dynamics of the Roman Catholic Church’s relation with other religions changed after the Council of Trent.\footnote{See “Cum Nimis Absurdum (Bull establishing the Roman Ghetto in 1555)” in Kenneth Stow, Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy 1555 – 1593 (New York: JTS, 1977), pp. 294 – 298.} The ideology of ‘error can never be right’ was used to address both the Protestant reality and everything that was not Roman Catholic. The suppression of Jews intensified in territories that were controlled by Protestant and Catholic princes, including the Papal States.\footnote{Many post-Tridentine popes enacted laws and published papal bulls that restricted movement of Jews in the Papal States. The “Edict concerning the Jews” by Pope Pius VI even reserved capital punishment for Jews who spent the night outside the ghettos erected to curtail their movement and separation from Catholics in the Papal States. For a detailed treatment of this edict by Pope Pius VI in the late eighteenth century see Nancy Nowakowski Robinson, Institutional Anti-Judaism: Pope Pius VI and the “Edict concerning the Jews” in the Context of the Inquisition and the Enlightenment (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris, 2004).}

One may wonder why this paper begins the discussion on the limitations of Nostra Aetate with a discussion on the non-tolerant attitude of the Catholic Church as an institution during the post Trent era. The simple answer is that the anti-Semitic attitude that has shaped the Roman Catholic and Christian attitude toward Jews originates from the mentality of religious superiority. This has found itself in the theological defense of the relevance of Roman Catholic theological hermeneutics on the salvific universality of Jesus Christ in relation to the legitimate revelation found in other religions. The Curial documents, Dominus Iesus and Dialogue and Proclamation, both emphasize the claim of Roman Catholicism to the plenitude of nationalistic forces in the Papal States, Pius IX condemned the attempt to introduce Protestantism into the papal territories and describes Protestantism as erroneous in its teachings. See Encyclical Letter: Nostis et Nobiscum – On the Church in the Pontifical States, (December 8, 1849), \#6 http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9nostis.htm (accessed January 25, 2013). Pius X vehemently condemned Modernist teachings including those that defended other religions as legitimate ways of engaging the divine. See Encyclical Letter: Pascendi Dominici Gregis, (September 8, 1907), \#14, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-domini...html (accessed January 25, 2013).
truth and this plenitude lies in the definitive and final revelation in Jesus Christ. Thus, for example, the claim of Islam to divine revelation is negated and only appreciated if it reconciles with what the Catholic Church teaches on Jesus Christ. Also, proclamation is seen to take precedence over dialogue.\textsuperscript{11} This point is buttressed by Pope John Paul II in the encyclicals; \textit{Redemptoris Missio} and \textit{Fides et Ratio}. In these documents, the relationship between freedom and truth is found in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{12} Consequently, any theological reflection on the salvific role of other religions essentially must proceed through a Christ-centered hermeneutics. Even though \textit{Nostra Aetate} admits the possibility of the veracity of the truth claims found in other religions, such truth claims derive their validity only through the hermeneutic criteria propounded by the Roman Catholic tradition.

\textit{Nostra Aetate} betrays differing theological opinions; while trying to maintain the ecclesial identity constructed during the era when the Catholic Church saw itself as the only legitimate religion in relation to Judaism, after Christians were expelled from the Temple and Synagogue liturgies, and the other religions found in the Roman Empire,\textsuperscript{13} there is the noticeable desire to “acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture.”\textsuperscript{14} Such tensions can be helpful when allowed to play out in the spirit of openness. It is worth noting that the tension is

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Nostra Aetate, #4.
\item Ibid, #2.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
not resolved in the document. Perhaps, the council fathers intended it to be unresolved. The desire to engage other religions was relatively new considering the centuries-old position that recommended isolation from the separated churches. Caution seems to have prevailed as the council fathers deliberate on how and what type of engagement was needed in relation to non-Catholic religions.

The fundamental question arises; how is evangelization going to play out in the Roman Catholic Church if one is to take seriously the recommendations put forward by the Council in this document? The council fathers called upon Catholics to engage in “dialogue and collaborate with non-Christians in the spirit of prudence and love and while always witnessing to the Christian faith and life.”\(^\text{15}\) Unfortunately, the Catholic Church has spent centuries building a theological identity that legitimizes its own relevance in the religious context while trying to delegitimize Judaism and other religions. The usage of the term “the new people of God”, though it cannot be found in the entire Christian Scripture, to describe the identity of the members of the Roman Catholic Church, preserves the relevance of Roman Catholicism at the expense of Judaism that has always rightly understood itself as a way of relating with God who has chosen them to be His people. Ironically, *Nostra Aetate* uses this phrase to define the Catholic Church while rejecting anti-Semitic attitudes and ideologies.\(^\text{16}\) Even though the context in which this phrase is used in the document buttresses the rejection of anti-Semitic attitudes, the term itself does not justify an embrace of Judaism in its entirety. The problem with the phrase lies with the adjective “new.” One wonders why the relationship between Christ and his followers will be phrased in similar terms to that between God and Israel.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
\(^{16}\) Ibid, #4.
The use of the term “the new people of God” is tied to the understanding of the Early Church being the “New Covenant”. Just as Israel’s covenant with God made them the “People of God,” the Catholic Church sees itself, as did the early Christians, as entering into a covenantal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, thus making members of the Catholic Church the ‘new people of God.’ This term smacks of the centuries old anti-Semitic attitudes beginning with the early Christians that have shaped Christian-Jewish relations.

The term, “the new people of God,” reflects the arrogance of the early Christians and the ignorance of the knowledge of the enduring legitimacy of the covenant between God and Israel by many members of the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries. Even though Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, in 2001, helped to clarify the usage of this term by the Council, it still does not remove the contradiction that helps to give legitimacy and finality to the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church in relation to other religions. Rather than argue for the legitimacy of the Roman Catholic Church within the boundaries of Judaism, since it is a religion that first understood itself as the people of God, Roman Catholic magisterium, as reflected in the conciliar documents, grants legitimacy to Judaism only within the context of Christ’s salvific role in human history. By using the adjective “new” to qualify the Roman Catholic Church and its members, Judaism, like the other non-Christian religions simply becomes preparatio evangelica.

17 The Letter to the Hebrews (Heb. 8:8) gives a Christological meaning to the passage in Jer. 31:34. However, though Jeremiah talks of a new covenant to be made between God and Israel, the enduring word of God, first proclaimed at Sinai, remains: Israel will always be God’s people and Yahweh will be Israel’s God.

18 More study is needed to understand why the Council decided to add the adjective “new” to qualify the people of God in describing the identity of Catholics.


20 Lumen Gentium, #9.
The fullness of Christianity as understood by the Roman Catholic magisterium is the finality and totality of God’s revelation.

_Nostra Aetate_ fails to resolve this dilemma and simply repeats it while trying to change the dynamics of the relationship between the Catholic Church and Judaism. The prayer of the Council is reflected in the Dogmatic Constitution, _Lumen Gentium_, which states: “...the fullness of the whole world may move into the people of God, the body of the Lord and the temple of the holy Spirit, and that in Christ, the head of all things, all honor and glory may be rendered to the Creator, the Father of the universe.” This prayer simply reflects a Roman Catholic hope where human society will possess a Christian identity. It is not an interfaith prayer that reflects the glory of God manifested in many and yet valid revelations of encounter between God and humanity. There is no scriptural basis describing the covenant between God and Israel as old, imperfect, and incomplete except in some New Testament writings, noticeably the Letter to the Hebrews, which uses these terms in the context of the brewing tensions between the Jewish religious authorities and the new Christian sect within Judaism that was threatened of expulsion from Temple worship and eventually expelled. The theological significance of such terms must never be devoid of their origin within such historical events.

The early Christians, faced with the reality of defining themselves outside of their mother religion, Judaism, felt the need to approach such a task by defining themselves in relation to Judaism; first, when the majority of the followers were Jewish converts. A positive view of Judaism was accepted and the Jewish Christians adopted the Jewish dietary regulations and insisted on the Jewish ritual of circumcision as necessary requirements for membership in

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21 Ibid, #17.
the Christian community.\textsuperscript{22} It took the courage of the Apostles Paul and Peter to argue for a broader approach to defining the requirements for membership in the community.\textsuperscript{23} Eventually, at the Council of Jerusalem, a compromised position was adopted.\textsuperscript{24} Second, as the demography of Gentile Christians increased, the negative rhetoric against Judaism and other religions became very apparent. As early as 130 C.E., writings on Christian apologetics justifying the legitimacy of Christianity at the expense of Judaism and other religions were already in circulation. Using the pseudonym Mathetes, a Christian writer wrote the \textit{Epistle to Diognetus}. Diognetus was the tutor of the emperor, Marcus Aurelius. In the epistle, the author trivializes and makes fun of and trivializes Jewish ritual practices and the Jewish people. The purpose of this was to show that Christianity transcends such superstitious and idolatrous practices found in Judaism.\textsuperscript{25}

Another noticeable limitation found in \textit{Nostra Aetate} is the total absence of the need to engage thousands of indigenous religions found in the emerging independent countries in the colonized territories in Africa, Asia, North and South America, and Oceania. Even \textit{Lumen Gentium}'s attempt to address the relation of non-Christian religions to the Church of Christ is found lacking in this area. Emphasis is given only to Jews, Muslims, and humanists.\textsuperscript{26} It is particularly telling because the resilience of these indigenous religions in refusing to convert to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Acts 15:1
\item Ibid, 15:2 -4, 7 – 11.
\item Ibid, 15:13 – 29.
\item I should point out that the only place the Indigenous Religions of Africa and Asia are mentioned is in the first encyclical letter of Paul VI, written during the Council. He had visited some countries in Africa while he was Cardinal Archbishop of Milan. His observations of the way of life of the indigenous people must have shaped his views on the people and their religions. See Encyclical Letter: \textit{Ecclesiam Suam}, (August 6, 1964), #107, \url{http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam_en.html} (accessed January 25, 2013).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Christianity and abandon their religious or secular stance seems to have made the Council to reflect further on how God might be working within the context of these people. While many of the council fathers were ministering in places considered mission territories in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania, the noticeable absence of treatment of the indigenous religions in these areas reveals a prevailing attitude that justified the common interests of colonialism and Christian evangelization. The former couched colonial interests under the guise of bringing civilization to the people in these continents and Christian missionaries were driven by the agenda of making Christians of the pagan worshippers of these lands whom they reduced to the status of devil worshippers.

Again, in the spirit of the Council, the recognition of the dynamics operative in the world today calls for an urgent desire to foster healthy ways of interreligious engagement that reflect the characteristics of friendship. The Council attests to this fact through the beautiful introductory words of the Pastoral Constitution, Gaudium et Spes, which states: “The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the poor of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.” This is possible because the Council saw the possibility of authentic friendship existing between the Catholic Church and humanity in general. It is important to explore the nature of such friendship in the context of interreligious dialogue.

27 See Nostra Aetate, #1.
29 Nostra Aetate, #1
Conditions for Interreligious Friendship

Friendship, since it entails a deliberate process between two or more persons, involves a movement toward the other. One cannot be a friend of another without making a move toward the object of the friendship. In other words, friendship involves moving from one's comfort zone into the realm of expectation. Just as one engages the other with an attempt to establish the bonds of friendship, the other, if such friendship is to be authentic, must always have the freedom to respond as she sees fit to the gestures from the initiator. Friendship involves reciprocity. Though the measure of friendship is not to be determined simply by visible exchange of goods, it involves openness of one to the other in a reciprocal manner.

Martin Buber highlights the relevance of reciprocity in relationality. This contribution of his has helped contemporary scholars to appreciate two aspects of friendship; first is the relevance of mutual commitment to the bonds of friendship that unites two distinct persons or groups, and second is the possibility for mutual transformation. Buber’s discourse is relevant if one is to understand what genuine friendship really means especially when contemporary society seems to be held captive by the false elevation of the self at the expense of the other (the self can be the individual, an institution, or a construction of identity that denies the legitimate presence and relevance of alterity).

By stressing mutuality in friendship, the encounter becomes truly open to possibilities. This openness, for it to be truly transformative, must be entered into without preconditions. In the context of interreligious engagements, preconditions can be couched under the guise of

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upholding theological views or claims that deny the religious other her autonomy to define how God continues to reveal himself/herself/itself within their own tradition. However, though friendship preserves the respective autonomies of the friends, there is a fine line between autonomy and relationality. Relationality does not mean the disappearance of differences; rather, it hinges the possibility for encounter within the differences between the participants. Devoid of differences, the encounter stands the risk of being a narcissistic affirmation of sameness.

Post-Conciliar papal documents have stressed the relevance of interreligious dialogue as proceeding from the Holy Spirit.31 Emphasis has also been given to the need to be open to the encounter.32 However, there have been arguments on the part of the Roman Catholic Church that limit how the workings of the Spirit will play out in such encounters among religions. Rather than allow the Spirit of God to define the outcome of dialogue with other religions, the view of the magisterium is to defend the claim that the Church is the sole source of complete salvific truths. In the words of Pope John Paul II; “Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation.”33 The general understanding, as articulated by Francis Cardinal Arinze, is that interreligious dialogue, while leading to friendship, can become a source of conversion to the Catholic faith. However, when the opposite occurs, there is an ideological hesitation that calls to question the authentic discernment of the Spirit.

32 Paul VI, Ecclesiam Suam, ## 93, 107, and 117. See also Nostra Aetate, #5.
33 John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio, #55.
leading the Catholic participant to embrace the other religion.\(^{34}\) In my humble view, such a
double standard approach reveals the attempt on the part of some members of the Roman
Catholic magisterium to deny the complete freedom of God to shape the dialogical encounter
among religions.

Paul VI, in his first encyclical, called for the Catholic Church to engage in serious critical
self-reflection as a way of it understanding itself.\(^{35}\) However refreshing this call may be, it lacks
a notable ingredient – letting the Spirit have complete freedom in defining who and what the
Catholic Church is in relation to other religions. Authentic self-reflection is never in isolation of
external factors; rather, it is always within the dirty and rugged plains of encounters with the
religious other or the secular world. The Catholic Church must trust the Spirit of God in its
deliberations and encounters with the other religions; while believing that the will of God will
definitely prevail. Emphasis ought to be on the revelation of the will of God and not on the
preservation of the ecclesial structures within the Roman Catholic Church.

Hypothetically, interreligious friendship can lead a Catholic to engage in an open and
vulnerable discernment process that leads to conversion to the religion of her dialogical
partner. In that case, the glory of God has been made manifest for that person and it does not
mean in any way that the Roman Catholic Church lacks the ability to provide the means of
salvation as a denomination of the Christian religion. The same can be said of the other
religions should their followers embrace the Catholic faith.

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\(^{35}\) Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, #18.
The basis for openness in interreligious friendship, from the Christian perspective, which is shared by the Catholic Church, is the Holy Spirit. If, as followers of Christ, Catholics trust the Spirit as guiding them in their engagement with other religions, it follows then that there must be the willingness to embrace totally the unfolding of the encounter. The type of openness being called for includes the intellectual, emotional, cultural, psychological, and the religious. The religious other must be seen as the concrete invitation of God to live out the life of faith that transcends the realm of human control and manipulations. It includes being confident enough to challenge one’s religious and social history and speaking truth to those aspects that fall short of the charity of Christ in the Christian context or the ideals of the other religions.

Another aspect of interreligious friendship which can be deduced from the contributions of Buber on his discourse on relationality is trust. This virtue does not merely refer to the individuals involved in the friendship. It extends to the ability of the friends from the different religions to trust that God has willed that they become friends. This has some notable implications. It is not enough to trust the representatives of the respective religions who are engaged in mutual dialogical encounters. What Buber envisages is trust in the respective religions as agents of God’s saving grace. To engage another religion with the bias that that religion is inferior to one’s own is to move from friendship to the realm of religious arrogance. Unfortunately, this is the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church today even after fifty years

since the pastoral council made attempts to broaden its understanding of God’s working outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{37}

Though attempts have been made to engage other religions, the internal documents that shape the attitude of Roman Catholics in relation to other religions show a lingering bias for viewing the other religions as inferior to the Christian religion as understood by the Catholic magisterium.\textsuperscript{38} Rather than focus on expounding arguments showing why Christ is the finality of divine revelation as has been the approach adopted by the Catholic Church’s magisterium, more attention needs to be given to how God continues to work in human history. God’s work in human history goes beyond our human comprehension and sometimes contradicts all that human knowledge has attained. For a change of attitude to occur in the way the Catholic magisterium sees other religions, there must be intellectual conversion on the part of the leaders. They ought to also have total trust in God’s goodness that continues to invite humanity to a deeper relationship. Through this approach, the Catholic magisterium may begin to contextualize the role and place of Christ in the revelation of God to humanity.

For Christians, Christ is God. However, the incarnate Christ cannot exhaust the totality of God’s salvific economy without depriving his humanity of its identity as human or depriving God of God’s infiniteness. This does not mean that the revelation of God in Christ is in anyway insufficient for enacting human salvation. God always engages humanity on the level of human capacity. Not even the totality of human knowledge can exhaust the totality of God’s revelation. The focus should shift from totality to sufficiency. The Christological discourse that

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\item[\textsuperscript{37}]See \textit{Dominus Iesus}, \#7. A distinction is made between Catholic belief and those of other religions. The former is referred to as theological faith and presented as more authentic. The latter is simply referred to as belief.
\item[\textsuperscript{38}]See the curia document, \textit{Dominus Iesus}.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
was summarized in the curial document *Dominus Iesus* focuses on Christ’s revelation of divine economy as total, complete, definite, and final.\(^{39}\) This approach makes it difficult for the Catholic Church to authentically engage with other religions. It also makes it difficult for Catholics to recognize their limitations and inability to comprehend the totality of the mystery of the incarnation as part of God’s concrete revelatory encounter with humanity.

The shift to understanding the salvific effect of the Paschal Mystery as sufficient for salvation does not relativize the ministry of Jesus Christ. The shift makes concrete the understanding that God always encounters humans within their context. It simply implies also that the truths of salvation are not some form of numerical truths that can be counted and which are found completely only within the Roman Catholic Church; rather, it moves the focus to context.

The shift to sufficiency supports the view that God engages humans always within their context and provides them sufficient salvific grace. For Christians in general, God continues to engage them through the salvific effects of the birth, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Christ. Even among Christians, the different denominations emphasize different aspects of the salvific effects of Christ’s ministry. This does not mean that these churches and denominations lack the totality of the salvific truths as the Catholic magisterium would want to opine. Rather, it simply means that God’s salvific grace through and in Christ leads the different churches to God by providing them the sufficient graces needed within their particular contexts. For the other religions, it means that God continues to engage them by providing them salvific graces needed within their religious contexts. One implication of this type of reasoning is that it does

\(^{39}\) *Dominus Iesus*, ## 5 – 6.
not deny the place of evangelization, but changes its aim from trying to present the legitimacy of one religion at the expense of others to the recognition of the particular context of the would-be convert. In other words, evangelization becomes an invitation to discern how God wants a convert to relate with him/her/it within a particular faith community. For example, some people find Roman Catholic expression of Christianity more appealing than other religions. Some find Islam as the community of faith that best expresses their desire to engage the divine. And there are those who spend their entire lives seeking the faith community that best addresses their calling to engage the divine. This does not delegitimise the other religions in anyway. Rather, it supports the argument that God has and continues to engage humans through multiple ways. Again, it does not deny the argument that God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is unique and enduring. Also, all that the Catholic Church teaches about Christ’s role in divine economy can still be valid if understood within the context of Christianity. Even though the effect of Christ’s Paschal Mystery has universal implications, it still does not prevent God from engaging humans through other concrete ways. After all, the enduring covenant between God and Israel did not prevent God from engaging humans through Jesus Christ.

Many instances abound showing how interreligious friendship helps to dispel unfounded prejudices and myths. Among the Ihievbe people of Edo State, Nigeria, a strong sense of interreligious friendship exists. From my interactions with the people of the town as I attempted to study the reason for their peaceful co-existence in relation to other religiously pluralistic areas in Nigeria that have experienced constant tensions and violence, I came to understand the importance the town gives to establishing and sustaining bonds of friendship and hospitality that cut across, gender, religion, and social status. The town is inhabited by
Muslims, Catholics, and members of Ihievbe Traditional Religion. These three groups have been able to create an atmosphere of interreligious appreciation for each other. During the time I spent interviewing the members of these religions and administering survey questionnaires, I realized that, though the members of these religions adhere to their faiths, they have refused to allow religion to become a source of division among them. One concrete way they have been able to make this possible is by having interreligious meetings on a monthly basis. The members of the three religions meet to discuss their religions and challenge each other when a theological view threatens the common peace. This approach has helped the members of the different religions to have a broader perspective of their own religions as well as those of their neighbors.

When asked why there was no religious violence in the town, many of those interviewed considered religious violence to be a betrayal of the ideals of their religions. All those interviewed opined that God’s peace must be celebrated by all religions and the ability to live in harmony demonstrates faithfulness to the will of God made manifest through the presence of the different religions.

Approval for this research was sought for from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Duquesne University. The researcher sought for an Expedited IRB approval. As part of this request, the researcher had to take a research course and examination under the Human Subject Research Training Certification Program. The course, Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Training Program administered by Duquesne University was completed by the researcher in March of 2011. The IRB approval was granted on May 16, 2011, valid until May 16, 2012 under 45CFR46.101 and 46.111 on an expedited basis under 45CFR46.110. The protocol number for this IRB approval is Protocol #11-61. Letters introducing the researcher were sent to the respective heads of the religious communities present in Ihievbe town on May 17, 2011. These include the Catholic pastor of the Catholic community, the chief Imam of the Muslim community and the High Priest of Akakamiya Shrine (one of the shrines that make the places of worship for members of Ihievbe Traditional Religion). In the letters, the researcher was introduced, his intention was declared, and these leaders were asked to produce the names of the adult members of their communities. The letters were approved by the IRB on May 16, 2011. The researcher chose the participants from the list randomly to preserve their anonymity. Each participant in either the surveys or interviews was given a consent form, which was also approved by the IRB on May 16, 2011. Three hundred persons were surveyed, one hundred from each of the religions present in the town. Forty-five persons were interviewed, fifteen from each of the religions.
While recognizing the effort the Catholic Church and many religions continue to make to engage each other on the magisterial or local levels, there seem to be an absence of engagement on the basic parochial level at least as a policy by the different religions. As a Catholic, I would suggest that the Catholic Church take up the example of the Ihievbe people and advocate for interreligious engagement within the parish setting. This is of utmost importance because most of the religious violence that occurs today takes place within the grassroots level. They are spearheaded by fundamentalists who try to make real the negative apologetics coming from the administrative/magisterial levels of their religions. When interreligious engagement becomes truly part of the identity of the different religions and is emphasized intensely on the parochial level, it will rob religious anarchists of their reasoning for religious violence. By interacting and mutually educating themselves, members of the different religions can begin to appreciate the sense of the sacred, the respective spiritualities, and the religiosities of the members of the different religions and understand that commitment to one’s own faith is not the prerogative of members of only one religion. It is a commonly shared reality among religions.

Another concrete step that can help to demonstrate the importance the Catholic Church gives to interreligious friendship is to celebrate the presence of other religions as a gift from God within its liturgical worship. What I am suggesting here goes beyond the occasional interreligious liturgies celebrated during the Week of Prayer, started by the late Pope John Paul II at Assisi. Rather, I am advocating for the recognition of the presence of other religions as a

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41 As noted by Cardinal Cassidy, the plan of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue at its founding was to encourage the establishment of dialogue commissions in every Roman Catholic diocese. Unfortunately, this has not been the reality. See Edward Cassidy, *Rediscovering Vatican II: Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), p. 135.
gift from God and worth giving thanks to God. When, during every Eucharistic celebration, the Catholic community gives thanks to God for the presence of the religious other in its midst, it will create in the minds and hearts of Catholics a sense that God’s gift transcends their own religion. I do know that this may be difficult due to the current theological position held by the Catholic magisterium, but on the parochial level, individual faith communities can begin to explore this possibility and make it part of their parochial identity. This can become the practice also of the different religions within the parochial level. Among the Ihievbe people, though they do not have this as part of their liturgical celebrations, a noticeable practice among them is for members of the different religions in the town to celebrate with their friends their different religious rituals. Friends of Catholics usually participate in the Catholic liturgies; Friends of Muslims find time to participate in the Islamic prayers at the Mosque; and Friends of members of Ihievbe Traditional Religion participate in the rituals of the religion. They are motivated by their strong sense of religious hospitality and friendship. The gesture of worshipping with a friend demonstrates a sense of complete trust not just on the emotional level, but also on the religious and psychological level. By worshiping with the friends these people do not abandon their faith traditions. Catholics continue to be Catholics; Muslims continue to be Muslims; and Traditionalists continue to be Traditionalists.

Conclusion

Interreligious dialogue can only lead to conversion of hearts and respect for each religion when it is bound to fraternity among religions and seen by every religious tradition as part of their identity as valid media for relating with the divine. Religious violence continues to
plague many societies today even when human society boasts of being bound to the ideals of communal living. These acts of violence must be addressed along with their root causes with all candidness. It cannot be enough to articulate reasons for dialogue among religions without also reflecting on the dialogical goals within the religions of the agents to the dialogue. For Catholics, the desire to engage in dialogue must be reflected in the entire life of the denomination. It must go beyond theology and be incarnated in the prayers and worship of the faith communities within the Catholic Church. Furthermore, it should become an essential part of Catholic spirituality. By so doing, the desire to embrace exclusivist doctrinal positions that have often led to violent discriminations against non-Catholics will be denied all legitimacy.

Friendship is a concrete way of fostering peace among people. The viability of interreligious friendship lies in the possibility of transferring the benign rapport among persons to the theological sphere; where each religion presents others in positive terms. When people of faith are actively engaged in entering into bonds of friendship, they are more likely to develop a sense of respect and acceptance of differing religious views.

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Paul’s Theology of the Church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27): Its Missionary Implications for the Church in (Africa) Nigeria

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Introduction

The importance of St. Paul in the New Testament studies cannot be overemphasized. In fact next to Jesus, majority of theologians and scholars would agree that Paul is the most prominent and influential figure in the history of Christianity. He is a unity figure for all Christians, regardless of culture, continent, nation, color, race and language. He represents the unity of humanity. This is clearly reflected in his theological teachings and writings. Issues dealt with in some of these writings particularly 1 Corinthians, are in some form, the same problems that globally confront our pluri-religious communities including the Church in Africa, particularly Nigeria. They include divisions of all kinds, sexual immorality, and marginalized role of women in the society. Others are crises of conscience and faith, social and political

43 Cf.Tedodore Mascarenhas, “The Missionary effort of St. Paul: A Model for Proclamation in a Multicultural and Pluri-Religious Situations,” (Lectures at Pontificia Università S. Tommaso D’Aquino, Rome, 16 February, 2009). Mascarenhas also noted that “Paul’s biography as an Apostle of the Gentiles also makes him unique. And reflecting on him is timely, since recently Pope Benedict XVI, had declared the period from June 29, 2008 to June 29, 2009 as “the Pauline Year.”
44 Much have been written on the history of the emerging Church in Africa, her strengths, weaknesses and challenges in terms of evangelization, such that it suffices here to avoid repetitions, but refer readers to these basic and indispensable documents, The Church in Africa and her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000 “You Shall be My Witnesses” (Acts 1:8): Lineamenta Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa (Vatican City: Libreria Editrici, 1990). See also the Instrumentum Laboris (Vatican City: Libreria Editrici 1993); John Paul II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa (Vatican City: Libreria Editrici, 1995). I would also like to add that through out this work and to avoid homogenizing Africa (the sub-Saharan West African region), particular attention would be paid to Nigeria.
disharmonies, liturgical abuses, and pride over spiritual gifts and lack of hope in the resurrection.⁴⁵

These problems no doubt overlap. Using literary-historical approach this paper attempts a detailed exegetical and robust contextual theological discussion of 1 Corinthians 12:27. This text emphasizes Paul’s theology of unity or moral union, among members of the church, the Body of Christ. While identifying in detail some areas of disunity in Nigeria (social disharmony, political mismanagement and division among religious groups) this work highlights the relevance of 1 Corinthians 12:27 for the Church in Africa, particularly Nigeria. The concluding section proposes and concludes by emphasizing the evangelizing mission of Church, particularly Catholicism, to this part of the world. Stronger members of the Church must educate and support weaker members, even of the larger society and share the fruits and richness of Scriptures especially Pauline writings with them. Love, forgiveness and search for common-good must be key ingredients of this community, the Body of Christ. For Paul there is no Church without Christ. His teachings in 1 Corinthians 12:27 remains an inspiration for African Catholicism, particularly the Church in Nigeria.

Historical Context of 1 Cor. 12:27: A Reappraisal

Historically, the context and setting of Paul’s missionary teaching on the importance of unity among members of the Church, the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), is not different from the overall setting of the entire First Letter to the Corinthians. Corinth played a leading role in

⁴⁵ See Michael Ufok Udoekpo, *Corruption in Nigerian Culture: The Liberating Mission of the Church* (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 1994), 9–10 for a list of problem facing Nigerian Society which include ethnicity, disunity, violence, political instability, religious conflicts and fanaticism, bigotry and intolerance of all forms.
uniting Greek city-states in the time of Macedon and Alexander the Great. Destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C.E, and rebuilt during the time of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C.E., Corinth became a provincial capital in 27 B.C.E. During Paul’s time (32/33-66/67 C.E.), Corinth was a thriving commercial center, mainly because of its geographical location. It attracted devotees of various traditional Greek cults as well as proponents of religions, including Judaism and Christianity, which were all familiar to Paul.

Paul brought Christianity to Corinth, before proceeding to Ephesus from where he wrote the 1 Corinthians to a divided and disunited community of Corinth (1 Cor. 12–14). He wrote to a Church he founded, but now plagued with dissension, unhealthy competition, disunity, boasting, pride and division. Yet this community of Corinth (as in African culture) was also known for all kinds of religious manifestations that were very spectacular and tantalizing. But the down-side is that these tantalizing religious gifts were used negatively for selfish purposes. This turbulent or divisive picture is well painted by Murphy-O’Connor when he wrote:

The potential for disension within the community is evident. Most members had in common only their Christianity. They differed widely in educational attainment, financial resources, religious background, political skills and above all in their expectations. A number were attracted to the church, because it seemed to offer them a new field of opportunity, in which the talents whose expression society frustrated could be exploited

46 See also the “Battle of Corinth (146BC)” in http://wn.wikipedia.org/wiki/battle_of_Corinth_(146_BC) accessed 1/24/2013. Here it is stressed that the “Battle of Corinth was a battle fought between the Roman Republic and the Greek state of Corinth and its allies in the Achaean League in 146BC, that resulted in the complete and total destruction of the state of Corinth which was previously so famous for its fabulous wealth.” See also Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” in The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, edited by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990, 798.
to the full. They were energetic and ambitious people, and there was little agreement among their various hidden agendas. A certain competitive spirit was part of the ethos of the church from the beginning.\textsuperscript{49}

As an exemplary missionary Paul addresses this turbulence and divisiveness in his writings. He reminds the church in Corinth that when they were pagans they were “attracted and led away” by idols (1 Cor. 12:2). Idolatry attributes the honor and devotion that belongs to God to false gods. As a man of many cultures and missionary zeal, Paul teaches the Corinthian church that true conversion to Jesus Christ is not contradictory to unity with others who also worship the same God. Their gifts (1 Cor. 12:10; 13:2; 14:3–6, 24; 1 Thess. 5:20) should be for the common good. And unity in diversity must prevail in a Christian community.\textsuperscript{50} Unlike the Corinthians Paul uses his knowledge of Hellenistic Greek and Stoic Philosophies, positively and to the advantage of the Church. This is true where he rhetorically adapts the popular image of the “body” found in those philosophical thoughts not to confuse the society, but to provide theological reflections. He also uses it pastorally to illustrate the importance of unity among members of the Church, the Body of Christ, in the text that follows.\textsuperscript{51}

Text, Translation, Structure and Delimitation of 1 Cor 12:27

Paul says: “Umeis de, evste sw/mas Cristou/ kai. me,lh evk me,rouj (“You are the Body of Christ and individual member of it”).\textsuperscript{52} But in the textual apparatus of \textsuperscript{N}27, the neuter noun, 

\textsuperscript{50} Lambrecht, “1 Corinthians,” 1604.
\textsuperscript{51} Cf. Ibid, 46–51, where Paul’s philosophical education is discussed and possible presence of Stoic teachers in Tarsus, Paul’s place of birth.
\textsuperscript{52} Although the translation is mine, the Greek is that of Nestle-Aland, \textit{Novum Testamentum Graece}, and 27th Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998 (from now on, \textsuperscript{N}27)). For scholarly curiosity, see \textit{The New Testament in Hebrew and English} (Middlesex, England: The Society for Distributing Hebrew Scriptures, 1993), 344 for how this text is rendered in the Hebrew New Testament: wql.x,B dx’a,-lK’ wyr”b’aew> x:yiM’h; @WG ~T,a;w> (“Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular”).
me,rouj (part) is replaced with me,louj (of member), the genitive neuter of me,loj (a member, limb, any part of the body), in Codices Bazae (D), Athous (Y), Latin Text (Vg) and in the Syriach Peshitta (Sy). In fact, even though Codex Bazae (D) is known for emendation, the meaning is basically the same as in these other Codices. The scribes would have been wrestling with the closeness in meaning and structure of “me,lh/, me,rouj and its repetitive occurrences in this unit, especially in the preceding verse 26, “kai. ei;te pa,scei e]n me,loj( sumpa,scei pa,nta ta. me,lh\ ei;te doxa,zetai Îe]nÐ me,loj( sugcai,rei pa,nta ta. me,lh (“whenever one part suffers, all other parts suffers with it; but when glorified all other part rejoice with it”).

Additionally, 1 Corinthians 12: 27, is unquestionably from the remote context of chapters 12–14, where Paul addresses the situation of abuses and usages of spiritual gifts in the church in Corinth. Chapter 12 argues for diversity of gifts, while the hymn of love in chapter 13 serves to illustrate the unity that should characterize the church in Corinth. This love is stressed in chapter 14:1. In other words, our text, (1 Cor. 12:27) is linked with what precedes as well as with what follows. Proximately, in the unit of 1 Cor. 12:27–31, Paul concludes the argument that began in verse 4, by tying together its two parts (vv.4–11 and 12–26) and thus returning to the original emphasis. In verse 27, the preceding imagery of the body (vv.12–26) is now applied specifically to the Church in Corinth emphasizing the need for unity in the face of multiplicity of their talents. Further thorough exegesis of this key verse (1Cor. 12:27), serves to highlight the relevance and implications of Paul’s enduring theology of unity among members of the Church,

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our 21st century multicultural and diversified religious communities, particularly the Church in Africa.

Exegesis of 1 Cor. 12:27: The Church as the Body of Christ

E. Schwizer carries on an extensive discussion of the Greek term, sw/ma (body), which in Homer means “corpse.” The Greek did not differentiate linguistically between “body,” (i.e., visible matter pertaining to a particular entity), and “body’ as the vessel of the human soul with its attendant implications of feelings, sentiments and life in the non-physical aspects. For some of them sw/ma can refer to a celestial body or any other inanimate object, and then later to a slave, and not merely to the animal or human as a vessel of a spirit. Plato and his school thought of the body as that which falls away with death and liberates the soul, just as the Stoics and the Aristotelians had their own interpretations of the body. In the OT, there is no precise word for “body,” but a person is both transitory and mortal. In the NT, there are several non-Pauline texts which often speak of the dead body (Mk 14:8), as raised body (Matt. 27:52; Acts 9:40 John 2:21).

In few other places Paul with his pluralistic-educational and missionary backgrounds talks of the “sacrifice of the body as putting oneself at the disposal of the service of the Lord (Rom. 12:1). Fitzmyer notices also that Paul uses the expression sw/ma Cristou/ (“body of Christ”), in many senses: of his historical, crucified body (Rom. 7:4), and of his Eucharistic Body

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55 E. Schweizer, “sw/ma. ato/ to,” EDNT 3: 322. See also BDAG, 983–984 where sw/ma, has been extensively discussed under the umbrella of meanings such as; (1) “body of humans”, “slaves”, “plant and seed structure”, “substantive reality”, “a unified group of people.” It is in this last sense that our text (1 Cor. 12:27) belongs.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 323.
(1 Cor. 10:16), and of the Church (1 Cor. 12:27–28). In 1 Cor. 12:27, it is a metaphor or a figurative way of expressing the corporate identity of Christians with Christ. No wonder Mascaranhas rightly reiterates that “there is no Church without Christ.”

Returning to this figurative way of expression, this metaphor of sw/ma Cristou/ , the body of Christ is widely disputed by scholars. Does the expression in 1 Corinthians 12:27 mean the Corinthians as a group is the “Body of Christ,” while maintaining their individual membership? J. Weiss for instance in his commentary on 1 Corinthian 6:13 once proposed a holistic definition of the “body,” which was later adopted by subsequent commentators like, R. Bultmann, and J. A. T. Robinson, which paved the way for the cosmic sacramental hypothesis of P. Benoit.

Similarly, Murphy-O’Connor rightly notices that, in the first part of the letter, Paul introduces the name “Christ,” about four times in the context in which it cannot be understood as the individual Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:13; 6: 15; 8:12; 12: 12). It can only be a designation of the community. This designation of community as Christ has also like the issue of the “body,” provoked some arguments among commentators. Uppermost in mind is that of C. Wolff, who,

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58 Fitzmyer, *Paul and His Theology*, 90. See also Col. 2:17 and Eph. 4:12.
60 See Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 287 where Bultmann and Robinson are noticed to have regarded “man” as a “soma,” and nearest to our word “personality,” respectively, challenged by R. H. Gundry, who in the line of Paul proposes “a distinction between the individual body of Christ in which he arose and ascended to heaven, lives on high and an ecclesiastical Body consisting of believers in which he dwells on earth through the spirit.”
Based on 1 Corinthians 12:12 (activity of the spirit) insists that, “the community is “Christ,” in so far as it is the sphere where the saving power of the spirit is at work.”

I agree with Murphy-O’Connor that it is only functionally could the community and Christ be considered one. Believers were the means by which the Risen Lord acted in the world. What Christ had accomplished while physically present, the Church continues to do in his name and through his power.

In other words, according to Paul, the most fundamental activity of the church is an expression of its being. By calling the community, the Body of Christ, Paul uses stoicism positively to identify the physical presence of Christ in the world, for the common good. The mission of the Church is to continue in time and space, the ministry of Christ on earth (1 Cor. 1:24).

Paul’s insight into the nature of the church as an organic unity inevitably conditions his understanding of individuation. For him, individuation by independence (“I think therefore, I am”) has no place in his missionary work, because this threatens the basic foundation of his theology of unity and inclusivity. In other words, the text of 1 Corinthians 12:27, expresses the moral unity of members of the church. This also confirms the observation of Lambrecht that, “although Paul’s arguments in dealing with difficulties are mostly theological and Christological,

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63 Murphy-O’Connor, Paul: A Critical Life, 287.

64 See Eung Chun Park, Either Jew Or Gentile: Paul’s Unfolding Theology of Inclusivity (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), esp.65–73 where Paul discusses the unity of the church. But this work, though there are some places where scripture is used arbitrary, is very relevant to our discussion on 1 Cor. 12:17. Terms like, “cultural pluralism” and “universalism,” among others, closed to the heart of this study, runs through Park’s work.
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the problems in Corinth concern above all the ethical behavior of the Christians." The more reason perhaps why Paul recognizes and warns earlier in verses 2-11 that,

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one I given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing the same Spirit; to another might deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes (NAB).

In Paul's view and vision the spiritual gifts enjoyed by the church in Corinth are to be used “for the common good,” and not for its disruption. As all the members of the limbs of the body conspire for its well-being, so it is with the Body of Christ. As mentioned earlier, issues raised and emphasized in 1 Corinthians 12:27 are in some forms similar to those prevalent in the Church in the continent of Africa today, particularly in Nigeria. How can this local Church in the light of 1 Corinthian 12:27(unity in diversity) manage its gifts in the face of multiple challenges of disunity and disharmony?

65 Lambrecht, “1 Corinthians,” 1604.
66 Fitzmyer, Paul and his Theology, 91.
Missionary Implications /Relevance of 1 Cor. 12:27 for the African Catholic Church (Nigeria)

Like the tantalizing gifts and manifestations of Paul’s time in the Corinthians’ church, African Church or society as a whole is blessed with some sense of communal living, sharing, extended family sharing, respect for seniors and deep sense of value of the dignity of the human person. A deep sense of the sacred also characterizes this culture, even before the advent of Christianity, in their practice of their African Traditional Religion (ATR). In terms of natural endowments Nigerian Church and society in particular are endowed with mineral resources like black gold, crude oil, good climate, soil, oceans, food, (sea and land), vegetations and with enviable human resources yet to be well harnessed for the common good.

In other words, Nigeria till date and in spite of these gifts is still struggling to overcome multiple set-backs: ethnicity, lack of adequate or in-depth dialogue among religious groups, issues of social justice, human promotion and freedom, role of women, poverty and lack of responsible political leadership, bribery and corruption, discriminations, social disharmony and other kinds and acts of division. For lack of space let me select three of these divisive challenges (social, political and religious disharmonies) facing Nigeria for further discussion.


Challenges of Social Disharmony

Nigeria as a nation once described as “the giant of Africa” is constantly searching for social understanding or harmony. This harmony no doubt is traceable to the family whose mission is described by the Vatican II as “being the primary vital cell of society.”  

The family is the basic unit of social organization as well as the first and fundamental school of social living. It is a place where different generation come together and help one another for the purpose of growth and harmony of individual’s right with other demands of social life. As a font of new life, Henry Peschke sees the family not just as a primordial community, but as the centre in which the human person can develop bodily and spiritually in a healthy fashion.

In other words, in any given society the families propagate and help detect the pace of social order. A good church or nation begins from a good family. And the “well-being of the individual person in both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.” It is in the family that young people particularly in Nigeria receive primordial knowledge of the ethics of the world around them, including the ethics of unity in diversity stressed by St. Paul. It is here that they are supposed to be taught the unselfishness of the mutual love of co-existence, unity, humility, charity and justice as well as those virtues of obedience, modesty, patriotism and deep sense of the dignity of fellow human persons. Africa and Nigeria in particular cherishes family life, filial piety, in fact, an extended one for that

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73 See Vatican II; *Gaudium et spes*, n.47.
matter. But ironically or unfortunately the foregoing values, virtues and ideals are not common in modern African (Nigerian) families today. Where they were found and cherished in the past, they are today gradually eroding. Today parents have little time for children upbringing, perhaps and effect of the down-side of social globalization. African children today talk back to their parents and some disrespect their elders or seniors, unlike in the past when such behavior was seen a taboo. Incessant longing for materials things, money, power have become the order of the day. Poverty and lack of contentment are among the contributing factors to these ugly images of disharmony in Nigerian families. This in turn has negative effects on the nation as a whole.

Today, Nigeria has become a society where the poor are assisted to become poorer, while the rich become greedier. Justice and honesty have become subjects of caricature. Wealth and the nation’s resources distributed among the minority privileged few, no matter the means, is extol as virtuous behavior. And everyone is over if not unnecessarily tribal conscious, such that response to national duties and responsibilities are daily painted with questionable impression such as, where is he or she from, south, north, east or west?” Or is he or she a Muslim, Christian, Catholic or Protestant?”

Decrying this type of social disharmony and divisions, Michael Edem in his work Confused Values in Nigeria, Rituals and Reveal Mythology, writes, “Socially, Nigeria is propelled by the philosophy of conglomerationism, groupism, gathering together or bonding together or drawing together for a particular purpose...what the psychologist call mob or group

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74 Udoekpo, The Limits of a Divided Nation, 23.
Doubling down on the non-constructive roles Nigerian leaders play in this type of socially divided atmosphere Edem insists;

They will say so many lofty and beautiful things about Nigeria, but will not lift a finger to implement. Such people are very much at home with their language. Their language is used as a barrier to cut off others. Even transaction is carried out in their language. The so call Lingua-Franca-English is thrown away as garbage. One who does not speak the language is at a loss. It happens in the offices and at conversation at family circles as well. In the offices, a non-speaker of such language cannot transact any business.

Apart from this barrier of social harmony posed by multiplicity of wrong or uncharitable use of languages and dialects, the social condition of living in Nigeria is heart-breaking. Disorderliness is notice from the airport to market and business areas; and from worship places to cultural and eating centers. Schools, political and commerce offices are sorrowfully not different, including banks and post offices. Renouncing these “sorrows” Ezenwa Hilary Odili once wrote, “the Hobbesian might is right’, “Machiavellian” means justifies the end prevalent in our society today are antithetical to the correct understanding of justice. They are not and will never be the right paths towards the preservation of law and order. They militate against equity, orderliness and social harmony.

Challenges of Political Disharmony

Politically, Nigeria is nothing compared to what the world recently witnessed in American politics that culminated in the swearing-in ceremony of President Barack H. Obama as the 44th President of the United States of America. There was no blood shed, no mob actions, no anarchy, and no accusation of bribery and corruption, nor money laundering or coup as

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76 Edem, *Confused Values*, 34-35.
such. Rather the world witnessed not only a peaceful and a strongly contested democratic election, but also a peaceful concession, transition and transfers of power.

On the other hand it is no secret to anyone that in politics Nigeria is not only extremely divided, but has been a confused environment where kidnapping of political opponents or their family members, money laundering and physical cash distributions to loyal supporters, dishonesty, bribery and corruption have become a common and regular exercises.\textsuperscript{78} This goes back to Nigeria 1960’s independence from the British colonialism.

In fact, since Nigeria was introduced into an independent parliamentary system of government, no military or civilian leader, governor, president or head of States has come and gone without serious and open allegation of cases of corruption that leaves a horrific stigma of scandal in the minds of Nigerian citizens.\textsuperscript{79} This does not restore of foster unity. And no lessons seem to have been learned neither from the past nor from the western democratic process.

Addressing his fellow Nigerians Odili sorrowfully comments again that,

Why we in this country suffer political instability is because we play politics in a manner no mature country ever does. Our own politics is a sorry situation.... It is a sink or swim affair. Survival of the fittest is the maxim. Election malpractices and riggings are common. The people are fooled.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{78} In terms of corruption in Nigeria I refer readers to my 1994 work, \textit{Corruption in Nigeria Culture: The Liberating Mission of the Church}, especially the local literature or newspapers that address this phenomenon. There no point recycling the arguments here.

\textsuperscript{79} Udokpoo, \textit{The Limits of a Divided Nation}, 51.

\textsuperscript{80} Odili, \textit{Sorrows of a Nation}, 53.
In addition to social and political disharmonies, religious groups in Nigeria are still till today been confronted as I said earlier with similar challenges that Paul’s contemporary witnessed in 1 Corinthians 12, bad ethical behaviors including division, violence, lack of dialogue and intolerance.

Challenges of Religious Disharmony

The three major identifiable religious groups in Nigeria are mainly Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR), mentioned earlier.\(^{81}\) Like the Corinthians’ church instructed by Paul, unity or harmony can hardly be seen among them. In Islamic religion Nathaniel Ndiokwere once rightly observed the internal disunity among them. He brilliantly wrote,

There are liberals and conservatives as well as “born again” fundamentalist and fanatics. There are mystics. Over 90% of all Muslims are said to be Sunnis (from ‘Suna, the tradition of the Prophets), who consider themselves to possess Islamic orthodoxy. There are also Shi’ite Muslims found mostly in Iran and Iraq who differ from the Sunnis in Islamic Theology and in their understanding of Mohammed’s successors.\(^{82}\)

In Nigeria these various groups of Muslims with their different theological perspectives are also found. In fact, Yahaya, the leader of the Shi’ite group in Northern Nigeria or the spokesperson was once quoted as saying that he would defy all laws as far as they are man-made and not from Allah.\(^{83}\) The point is that these differences in Islamic group are obstacles to dialogue, stable politics and unity not only within Islamic world but also between them and

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\(^{81}\) Apart from my comments on footnote 23 I would like to bring readers attention to John Bakeni Bogna’s work, *The Encounter of the African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity in Northeastern Nigeria: Towards a Contextual Theology of Interreligious Dialogue*, a 2012 doctoral dissertation accepted at the faculty of Theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome. In addition to its rich and up-to-date bibliographical materials, here the author attempts and discusses with affirmation not only the historical emergence and existence of this religion but the challenges facing them in terms of unity, dialogue and tolerance for one another.


\(^{83}\) See Udoekpo, *The Limits of a Divided Nation*, 32
other religious groups. In terms of political decisions religion plays a huge role that would often lead to violent or rise of tension.

There are many cases of such violent and conflict in Nigeria traceable to differences that exists between Islam and Christianity which I have already discussed elsewhere.\textsuperscript{84} Most recently in Nigeria is the threat of the so called ‘Boko Haram,’ a terrorist group suspected to be causing recent killings of innocent people especially Christians in Northern Nigeria. This threat is spreading and threatening harmony and trust among other religious and cultural groups in the nation and beyond.\textsuperscript{85} Some would see it as “religious and northern agenda” and therefore have very recently invited all Nigerians to join hands irrespective of religious and ethnic affiliation, to fight this menace of Boko Haram insurgency.\textsuperscript{86}

In terms of African Traditional Religion there might be minor internal disharmonies and differences here and there, depending on its adherents or worshipers and their locations. But its overall structure and contents are the same: belief in deity, blessings and curses, witchcraft, rituals, customs and divination, spirit and ancestors, sacredness of human life and hospitality.\textsuperscript{87}

African Traditional Religion’s lack of a single leader, founder and Scripture as well as their primitive and syncretistic nature may be counted as signs of weaknesses, decline and

\textsuperscript{84} See my discussion of this in \textit{The Limits of a Divided Nation}, 34-35.

\textsuperscript{85} In fact the United States Senate Benghazi Hearing group that questioned the Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, on the last Benghazi incidence where about four US diplomats lost their lives, significantly mentioned the threats that Boko Haram and other Islamic terrorist group might present beyond the boundary of African nations.


disharmonies, hence threats or obstacles to dialogue and unity. But its resilience in different parts of Nigeria particularly in Ikot Ekpene area of Akwa Ibom States should not be ignored. In this part of the world, although many former adherents to ATR have resisted modernization or deflected to Islam and Christianity, Nyoyoko observes that, “the vast majority of them while claiming Christianity as their denomination, carry over and retain almost intact the beliefs and some practices of ATR.” Part of the reasons he argues is that basically the average African still retains traditional world-view and moreover, Christianity has not yet succeeded in dialoguing with ATR, nor presents adequate substitutes for some of the ATR’s values condemned by Christianity, leaving room for more challenges to solve, division to bridge and dialogue to engage in.

African Christianity and particularly Catholicism have its share of disunity and disharmony to work on. This is reflected in the number of proliferated churches and worship centers scattered on every street and village corners of Nigeria. Some of the reasons given for such break-ups or disunity is unconnected from what has been socially, politically, religiously discussed already, including poverty, the need to belong, search for power, healing, money, freedom and cultural identity.

88 See Bakeni, The Encounter of African Traditional Religion, 189-196 for extensive discussion on these weaknesses.
91 See Udoekpo, The Limits of a Divided Nation, 36-40, for extensive list of some of these churches and worship centers.
Antidotes and Mission of African Catholicism in the Light of Pauline Theology (1 Cor 12:27)

In the face of these challenges, the evangelizing mission of the Church, in the light of Paul’s theology must be the foremost antidotes. Perhaps the more reason why the Synod Fathers in recognition of this mission unequivocally said:

It has been rightly noted that, within the borders left behind by the colonial powers, the co-existence of ethnic groups with different traditions, languages and even religions often meets obstacles arising from serious mutual hostility. Tribal oppositions at times endanger if not peace, at least the pursuit of the common good of the society. They also create difficulties for the life of the churches and acceptance of pastors from other ethnic groups. This is why the Church in Africa feels challenged by the specific responsibility of healing these divisions. For the same reason the Special Assembly emphasized the importance of ecumenical dialogue with other churches and Ecclesial Communities, and dialogue with African Traditional Religion and Islam.  

Besides these dialogues that have been suggested by the Synod Fathers, this study argues that the text of 1 Corinthians 12:27, the word of God could also be closely studied, translated into local Nigerian languages, re-embraced or re-actualized by religious communities, in African (Nigerian) Church. This confirms the report given by Cardinal John Onaiyekan, the Archbishop of Abuja on October 6, 2008 during the Synod on the word of God of which 1 Corinthians 12:27 forms a part. Stressing the importance of access to the word of God he said,

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93 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 49. See also various Vatican II documents like, the Declaration on the Relation of Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, October 28, 1965; Degree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, November 21, 1964; Degree on Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, 1965. See also, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Declaration “Dominius Iesus” On The Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church,  
(http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20); accessed March 21, 2009;  
Since Vatican II, large sections of the lay faithful have developed a strong thirst for the word of God in Sacred Scripture. However, with the weak economies of Africa, a Bible may cost as much as one month’s wages in many places. The Protestants are to be commended for making access to the word of God a priority. In many places, the Catholic Church has teamed up with them within the context of the Bible Society. One must also mention the efforts of the Fathers and Daughters of St. Paul (the Paulines) and the SVD (Congregation of the Divine Word), who publish many Bible texts and material at more affordable prices. Many languages do not have adequate translation of the Bible, yet the Bible in the vernacular is absolutely essential.\footnote{Cf. James Chukwuma Okoye, \textit{Scripture in the Church; The Synod on the Word of God and the Post-synodal Exhortation Verbum Domini}, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011, 26-27.}

Reading and listening to the word of God (1 Cor.12:27) in native languages reminds the Church in Africa and Nigeria in particular of the reality of the wounds and the danger of disunity and disharmony, already discussed. It also calls for urgent but closer attention for the need to work for greater unity and harmony among the social, political and religious fabrics of the society. It further drives home the message of Paul that the most fundamental ministry of the church is to be the antithesis of a world which is constantly characterized above all by threats of divisions and fragmentations. As the Body of Christ, the Church is to liberate the captives by revealing the opportunities of freedom in dependence on others.\footnote{Murphy-O’Connor, \textit{Paul: A Critical Life}, 289.} Her mission is clearly encapsulated as well in that missionary mandate of Matthew’s Gospel “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matt 28:19).

In addition the mission of the Church, a missionary Catholicism is further stressed by Vatican II in her initial pages of \textit{The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World}. Like Paul, the principal work of the Church as underlined in this document includes the promotion of the unity of the human person, “It is man himself who must be saved. It is
mankind that must be renewed. It is man, therefore, who is the key to this discussion, man considered whole and entire, with body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will.»⁹⁷

Just as it was for Paul, the Church as an organic unity has far-reaching implications for our understanding of Christian morality or development of the Christian conscience. Paul for instance, taught some litigants of his time in the same Corinthian context that” To have lawsuits with you is a total failure for you” (1 Cor. 6:7). In other words, for Paul when a Christian brings a law suit against another Christian, it is equivalent to bringing a case against oneself, because they are both members of one body, the Church.

African Catholicism must imitate Paul in the education of the Christian community since excessive practice of divisions is a clear sign of ignorant. This could be done from the pulpits, catechetical instructions, through modern means of communication and media channels, radio, television, newspapers and church bulletins, and other forms of training.

The Church can help in educating the electorate of Nigerian society. It does no harm to draw the attention of Christians and Catholics in Nigeria to the definition of politics given by John Paul the II. In his Encyclical Letter Laborem Exercens, that commemorates the ninetieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum, he defined politics as the “prudent concern for common good.”⁹⁸

I believe this is what the Vatican II documents *Gravissimum Educationis* was meant to suggest, when she observes that as a mother the Church has “the obligation to offer assistance to all people for the promotion of a well-balanced perfection of the human personality for the good of the society in this world and for the development of a world more worthy of humanity.”

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 12:27 reminds us that Paul is a unity figure for all Christians. He represents the unity of humanity in his preaching, teachings and writings. This is true in the foregoing discussion of Paul’s address to the Corinthian church plagued with unethical issues of various kinds: divisions, rivalries among members, abusive and wrong use of spiritual gifts, boasting, pride and selfishness. Others were sexual immorality, crises of conscience, lack of hope in the resurrection, ambitious tendencies and hidden agendas contrary to the spirit of the common good.

Similar moral phenomena in Corinthians’ Christian Community are found to be common challenges in our contemporary societies today, especially in the Church in Africa (Nigeria). Gifted with openness to multiple cultures, Jews and Gentiles, endowed with great missionary zeal, rudiments of Judaism, Greek Philosophy and Stoicism Paul positively uses the familiar image of the “body” (sw/ma) to offer theological, Christological and pastoral teaching to the troubling church in Corinth. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:27 he stresses unity in diversity in the church as the Body of Christ. He sees in the church an organic unity and ethical union with far-
reaching moral implications, including respect for one another’s culture, religion above all, the dignity of the human persons.

With this, Paul remains an inspiration to the universal and missionary Church, particularly the Church in Nigeria (African Catholicism) in the challenges of her evangelizing mission. Besides dialogue with ATR, Islam and other denominations, the Church must translate, re-actualized the text of St. Paul, in her catechetical instructions, seminars, homilies and sermons through various available means of modern media today. The role of good family upbringings in a stable social and political modern society must be kept in mind and emphasize in homilies and catechetical instructions. Stronger members of the Church especially leaders should support, socially and politically educate and religiously encourage weaker members through exemplary love, promotion of unity in diversity and reconciliation. This must be within and outside the Church, and among all religious bodies, thereby keeping the candle of inspiration and the richness of the missionary and theological implication of 1 Corinthians 12:27, burning in the Church in Africa (Nigeria).

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African Initiated Churches and Party Politics: Zimbabwean Experience

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Abstract

The author argues that some African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe like the Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC), Johane Masowe weChishanu Apostolic Church (JMCAC), and Africa Apostolic Church (AAC), were co-opted by the Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front’s (ZANU- PF) political ideology of authoritarian nationalism and that made them an indispensable constituency for winning national elections. Co-optation into ZANU- PF’s political ideology was achieved through the combined use of violence and bribery on church members and leaders. AIC leaders were susceptible to co-optation because they deliberately disregarded social justice and human rights issues and opted for material and financial benefits from politicians. Their churches also lacked international connections with autonomous AICs of the same denomination. The research revealed a symbiotic relationship between church leaders and politicians at the expense of the laity and Zimbabwe. The analysis yielded the conclusion that AICs, political leaders, and others just like them, should be removed and replaced by people who better serve the well-being of Zimbabwe’s population.

Introduction

African Initiated Churches or African Independent Churches or African Indigenous Churches or African Instituted Churches (AICs), were all established by African initiative rather than by foreign missionary agendas (Oduro 2006: 1). AICs have, therefore, been defined as:
‘congregations and or denominations planted, led, administered, supported, propagated, motivated, and funded by Africans for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and worshipping the Triune God in the context and worldview of Africa and Africans’ (Oduro 2006:2). They integrated biblical Christianity with African Traditional Religion (ATR) to produce a unique Zimbabwean Pentecostalism which emphasized prophesy, faith healing, miracles, dreams, seeing visions and speaking in tongues. Apostolic AICs in Zimbabwe were all similar, for the devotees put on long white garments, were committed to live like the New Testament apostles, and had an experience of Christianity as vibrant and alive as when Jesus walked on earth. They emphasized the works of the Holy Spirit. The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) ideology was authoritarian nationalism which was a form of social organization characterized by submission to authority and it opposed individualism and democracy. There was absolute obedience to authority, as against individual freedom. Totalitarian nationalism identified the nation with the leader, and made disobedience to the leader tantamount to betrayal of the nation. It put the nation and its people at the mercy of the leader. Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) pursued a liberal ideology which advocated equality of opportunity for all within the framework of a system of laws. Liberalism was also very much concerned with allowing a maximum of freedom for the individual within the context of a system of laws which limited interference with individual rights by government or by other individuals. Hence the liberal ideology also invariably involved a bill of rights to define the rights of individuals and especially to limit the power of government to interfere with those rights.
The Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC) was founded by Muchabaya Momberume who changed his name to Johane on baptism at a Methodist Mission (Bourdillon 1987: 298) in 1932 and the Johane Masowe weChishanu Apostolic Church (JMCAC) was founded by an Anglican, Shoniwa Masedza who took the name Johane Masowe in 1932 (Maxwell 2006: 54, Hastings 1994:521). The Africa Apostolic Church (AAC) was founded by Paul Mwazha in 1951. AICs were formed as a protest against white domination in mission churches, the impossibility of the promotion of Blacks above certain levels and a tendency to demote Africans as the white missionary force increased (Hastings 1979:68). Lack of Africanization in the leadership of missionary churches provided fertile ground for the formation of AICs. During the colonial period, many Black converts to Christianity were discriminated against by white missionaries and were unable fully to reconcile their Zimbabwean traditional religious and cultural beliefs with the teachings of their church leaders, and hence splits from their parent churches were inevitable. The reasons for these splits were usually either: political - an effort to escape white control, historical - many of the parent churches, particularly those from a Protestant tradition like the Anglican and Methodist churches, had themselves emerged from a process of schism and synthesis and cultural - the result of trying to accommodate Christian beliefs within an African world view. Beginning in the 1930s, there began to be splits and breakaways from mission churches to form AICs. Africans had become aware that such things were not unknown in Europe and North America. Africans posed questions such as, why were there so many different churches and missionaries? Was there more than one God and different bibles? Missionaries had had to explain the origins of different churches.
The JMAC and the JMCAC looked much alike, in at least their early stages, for both Marange and Masowe heard voices, had visions and dreams, and each claimed personal revelations (Hastings 1994:521). Bourdillon (1987: 298) asserted that Marange claimed to have received a full charter of his Church with all its rules and practices through the direct dictation of the Holy Spirit. It is from his visions that Marange was regarded as the second John the Baptist who had come to redeem the world as it was written in the Bible. Like St. Paul on his way to Damascus, Marange saw the light and a voice said to him, ‘You are John the Baptist, an Apostle’ (Hastings 1979:77). In Marange’s case the revelation was found written down in a book, *The New Revelations of the Apostles*, which supplemented or even replaced the Bible (Hastings 1994:521, 533).

Both Marange and Masowe had almost messianic authority; nobody in their congregations was to challenge what was revealed to them. Authority came to them directly, and only, through personal revelation and the power of the Holy Spirit (Hastings 1994:521). Both Marange and Masowe developed a very rich, symbolically complex liturgy; neither developed a city or central location of any sort. Both believed in water baptism, though Masowe allowed no one but himself to baptise (Hastings 1994:521). Refusing the church right to baptise to anyone else was an indication that the JMCAC had the character of a totalitarian, but industrially modernizing society for it encouraged its followers to start their own small industries for making and selling baskets, furniture and tin ware (Hastings 1979:77). From my observations at church gatherings, authoritarianism in the JMCAC equalled that of Mugabe in that the way Mugabe centralised state power in himself was the same with JMCAC leaders.
Masowe proclaimed a message of withdrawal from European things—no bibles for his followers, though he had one himself from the start, no schools, no one was to be employed in companies (Hastings 1979:77, 1994:533). That was done so as to destroy colonialism. His followers were to survive by making and selling baskets, furniture and tin ware (Hastings 1979:78). The element of visions and dreams provided personal guidance for the interpretation of the scripture or to add to scripture in a fairly minor way (Hastings 1994:521). The JMCAC was a Christian church which did not read the Bible. They claimed they did not need the Bible because they received the word of God ‘live and direct’ from the Holy Spirit (Engelke 2007:3), as did some biblical characters like Abraham, Moses, David, St. Paul and the Old Testament prophets who spoke directly with God. The JMCAC considered scripture as unnecessary, even a dangerous mediator (Engelke 2007:3) because people who used the Bible interpreted what God said to specific people at a specific time and place and within a specific cultural context. It was not said to them. They also misinterpreted the scriptures because the time and context when God said the words recorded in the Bible to people like St. Paul had changed. For the JMCAC, the materiality of the Bible marked a distance from the divine and prohibited the realization of a live and direct faith.

AICs were both religious and political movements. That was true with the JMAC and JMCAC. Governments fought against their anti-social teachings such as refraining from going to hospitals when sick, and their refusal to enter the colonial labour market. Both the JMAC and the JMCAC did not allow their children to go further than elementary grade seven in education, fearing that their children might be won by mission churches. The JMAC allowed children to do only elementary education which made them able to read the Bible. Masowe’s denunciation of
the Bible was formed against the backdrop of colonial history, and his rejection of the Bible was, in part, a political critique of colonialism. By forming their own AICs, Marange and Mwazha critiqued colonialism, but they did not reject the Bible. They used the Bible as a tool for the liberation of Africans. The missionaries in the Gandanzara area, Makoni District, where Masowe was born and raised, emphasized literacy and literature as key dimensions to the ‘richness’ that Christianity would bring to an impoverished people (Ranger 1999: 198). That impoverishment was understood as both spiritual and material. Books were presented to Africans as the answer to both spiritual and material poverty. Masowe regarded books as oppressive tools used by colonialists to subjugate Africans (Angelke 2007: 5). As a way of decolonizing his followers’ minds, Masowe discouraged them from getting book education. It was also a way of sabotaging the British colonial system (Angelke 2007: 162).

By the 1930s, the then Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwean) authorities consolidated the power of the white settlers. Literacy and the book had both become highly charged instruments of the struggle, for soon after starting his own church, as an act of defiance, Masowe told his followers to burn their Bibles because they came from men with evil hearts (Angelke 2007: 5). Masowe attested that whites and their book were not trustworthy, for missionaries said one thing, the Bible another (Angelke 2007: 5). Polygamy, which was part of Zimbabwean culture, was condemned by the missionaries, but was not condemned in the Bible, for kings like Solomon were polygamists (1Kings 11:3). St. Paul argued that only those who would like to be deacons, priests, and bishop should be monogamists (1Tim. 3:2, 12, Titus 1:6). History was written by the victors and that was the problem with the Bible. The Bible was written by the colonialists who were the victors over Zimbabweans. When asked why his
people did not become Christian, King Mzilikazi replied that the Matabele liked many wives (Hastings 1994:320). The JMAC allowed its members to be polygamous so as to destroy the missionary church which advocated for monogamy. The JMAC knew that Zimbabwean men liked many wives and hence many Zimbabwean men would leave missionary churches and become members of their church.

Masowe viewed the Bible as reflecting white might and as a record of what the missionaries and colonialists wanted Zimbabweans to know (Angelke 2007: 5). He did not trust what he read in the Bible. That was the problem with text based knowledge. For him, the Bible was a tainted sign. In colonial Africa, the Bible carried an indelible essence of white might (Angelke 2007: 245). The Bible’s materiality was a sign of its limitations for it was viewed as a barrier to the presence of the divine. The Bible took the focus away from what Christianity was really about, a live and direct relationship with God. For Masowe, the Bible was written two thousand years ago in a Palestinian culture which was different from Zimbabwean culture. The Bible addressed Palestinian existential problems which were different from Zimbabwe’s – hence irrelevant to the needs of contemporary Zimbabweans. When Masowe said that the Bible was a ‘record of what the colonialists wanted Zimbabweans to know’ or ‘the Bible was stale,’ he was expressing the terror of the text. For Masowe, the Bible produced trepidation because it was a sign of colonial authority and administration, which forced Zimbabweans to carry pass books wherever they went (Angelke 2007: 5). That terror was felt both politically and theologically, and it threatened the immediacy of what they understood as a live and direct faith.
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The contradiction did not exist in the JMAC and the AAC. They used the Bible. For the JMAC, the Bible was not fully adequate and hence they supplemented it with their own Bible. In the JMAC and the AAC, the authority of the Bible was understood to be independent of missionaries and was appropriated through active embrace of it. The Marange church would not deny that the written word was a powerful tool for political manipulation, or that the missionaries had sometimes used the Bible in dishonest ways. (Angelke 2007: 6). They believed that the Bible was frequently used to colonise, oppress and exploit Zimbabweans.

After the demise of colonialism, the JMCAC members were allowed to go to school. Throughout colonial Zimbabwe, education was vital in creating and maintaining the symbolic power of mission and state and the Bible was a key source of that power and it bore ‘the essence of white might’ (Angelke 2007: 5). The JMCAC had political and theological objections to scripture. The Bible and other religious texts were used as reading manuals (Angelke 2007: 52). There was an association between literacy and Christian faith. Schools were built by missionaries where religious education was of paramount importance. The promotion of education, literacy, and the vision of Christianity, which was to oppress and exploit Zimbabweans went hand in hand (Angelke 2007: 53).

Historically the Bible was used in colonial and postcolonial Africa as a tool of subjection and liberation (Bornstein 2009:1). The JMCAC did not read the Bible and saw itself as following unfettered doctrines of Christianity (Bornstein 2009:1). The Bible was forsaken, but its members believed that they were participating in a truer version of Christian theology. The faith of the JMCAC was not mediated by materiality of the printed word of God.
Valentin Y Mudimbe argued that missionaries were ‘the best symbol of colonial enterprise (Angelke 2007: 72). That agreed with Thomas O Beidelman, who maintained that ‘missionaries may be considered the most ambitious and culturally persuasive of all colonialists, attempting social changes and domination in their most radical form’ (Angelke 2007: 77). The majority of white church leaders saw themselves as mutual partners with white settlers in the so-called civilizing mission among the pagan natives of colonial lands, as if to suggest that Africans had no history, no culture, and no destiny (Lapsley 1986:6). In Zimbabwe there was a complex relationship between both the church and the colonizers, and those colonized without the support of the missionary church.

The great economic and political challenges which Zimbabweans faced, gave rise to an aggressive form of worldly theology among AICs. When a society is under deep economic and political challenges, as was witnessed in Zimbabwe after 1990, fundamentalist thinking and answers, including the religious, have huge appeal. It was very difficult to see how the purportedly ultra-religious post 1990 AICs which preached more worldly gospel were in any way better off spiritually and materially than they were when they preached the other worldly gospel before 1990.

The Problem

In this paper AICs were studied and understood in a distinct time – post 1990, and during a particular socio-political dispensation, an economically poor and politically violent Zimbabwe. After 1990 Zimbabweans were poorer than they were before because of ZANU- PF’s government corruption and bad economic policies. Before 1990, the JMAC, JMCAC and AAC
were not very much concerned about material wealth. Their focus was a spiritual life in heaven. With the coming of greater poverty from 1990, when Zimbabwe introduced the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (Maxwell 2006:134), the theologies of AICs changed from other worldly to worldly. The worldly theology appealed to most Zimbabweans who flocked to AICs in search of spiritual solutions to quick financial and material wealth. Zimbabweans were suffering economically, socially and politically due the actions of both political and AIC leaders. The real problem was how to get rid of the current AIC and political leaders – or others just like them, and to replace them with people who better served the well-being of Zimbabwe’s population.

Methodology

I focused on AICs’ and political parties’ relations in Zimbabwe post 1990. This paper provided an opportunity to analyse AIC leaders’ present role in the political and socio-economic dynamics of Zimbabwe. To what degree did the AICs reflect the dominant political ideology of ZANU- PF, and to what extent were they co-opted into that ideology? Because Zimbabwe had been governed by ZANU-PF from 1980 to 2013, it was ZANU-PF which figured most prominently in the Zimbabwean political scene and in this paper. My research was done in Zimbabwe from 2000- 20011. Most of the interviews and participant observations were done in Harare, Chitungwiza, Kadoma, Marange, Bocha and Buhera. I participated in the Passover celebrations of the JMAC, AAC, and JMCAC at Mafarikwa Village, Marange in Manicaland Province, Guvambwa near Sadza Growth Point; and Juranifiri Santa in Chitungwiza, respectively. I accompanied my relatives who were members of the three churches to the Passover celebrations and to the various church services. I attended seven church services for each
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church. When not at the church services, I met members at their homes, places of work, and social gatherings such as weddings and funerals. I did not use tape-recorders for they were viewed as unholy objects to be carried into the worshipping sites. I was asked to remove all metallic objects which I carried - that included my wrist watch and shoes. No recordings, not even writing notes during services were allowed. I was only allowed to see what was done during worship and to listen to the sermons and public prophesies. I was also not allowed to use tape recorders and videos because the church leadership was afraid that I might give the information to the media and that was going to damage their relationship with political parties. I wrote down whatever I had seen and heard as soon as I reached my place of residence.

Qualitative methodologies were employed to understand co-optation of AICs into ZANU- PF political ideology, as well as what church leaders and political parties did to get religious people to vote for them. The research revealed a symbiotic relationship between some church leaders and politicians at the expense of the laity and Zimbabwe.

Unholy Alliance: Political Parties and AICs

AICs were successful in keeping religion and politics separate during colonialism and the 1980s. That was more difficult from the 1990s on (Angelke 2007: 44). Regardless of any commitments to immateriality, it has been difficult for the JMCAC to keep their ‘empty spaces’ empty (Angelke 2007: 34). My participant observation has led me to argue that some AICs were forcibly co-opted into ZANU- PF’s political ideology and that made them an indispensable constituency for winning national elections. Co-option was achieved through the combined use of violence and bribery on church members and leaders. AIC leaders were susceptible to forced
co-option because they deliberately disregarded social justice and human rights issues and opted for material and financial benefits from politicians. I further maintain that the JMAC, JMCAC, and AAC were co-opted into ZANU-PF political ideology and became a very important and fertile constituency for any Zimbabwean politician aspiring to the presidency of Zimbabwe. ZANU-PF used corruption, bribery, and violence to co-opt AIC leaders and turn them against the laity. The job of the AIC leaders became to get their congregations to vote for a party which was not governing in the popular interest.

During the colonial period and the postcolonial period, from 1980 to 1990, AICs were silent about politics and not visible in national politics because poverty in Zimbabwe was not as wide spread and deep-rooted. Before AICs were forced to join ZANU-PF, their argument was that the church should steer clear of politics, religion and politics do not mix, and it was ungodly for a true Christian to be involved in politics, for politics belonged in the devil’s domain (Ranger 1967: 381). The AICs maintained that they did not talk about politics and the socio-political environment in Zimbabwe, but in reality most AIC leaders were ZANU-PF apologists who never criticized ZANU-PF for its gross human rights abuses. AICs said they were more concerned with evangelization and had nothing to do with carnal things like politics. In reality, the propping up of ZANU-PF was one of their agendas at their gatherings. Before 2000, AIC devotees were not forced to attend political rallies by their bishops and pastors and politicians. AICs were not viewed as a potential constituency from which to get votes during elections. That was because Zimbabwe was economically doing well, poverty was not wide spread and unemployment was below ten per cent. Although AICs were a big section of one of the few organised forces of Zimbabwean civil society that could offer alternative leadership - the church, they appear to
have been both co-opted and corrupted by politicians. Instead of giving moral, social, political, and economic direction to Zimbabwe during difficult times, some AICs have been co-opted into the ideologies of political parties. AIC leaders who were supposed to be critical of both ZANU-PF and MDC wrongdoings were co-opted and muzzled.

I contend that a strong relationship between AICs and party politics started in 1990. What was not known was the extent of the relationship between AICs and party politics in Zimbabwe. It was a totally new phenomenon in which religion was used to openly support a violent political party. It resulted in some AICs inviting politicians to address their church gatherings. A major strategy of ZANU-PF after losing the 2000 elections was to co-opt into its political ideology AICs because they had remained silent during colonial rule and had never publicly criticized it. ZANU-PF co-opted AICs, distorting Christian truths about social justice issues, mixing some Christian truths with ZANU-PF doctrine. Godfrey Nzira of the JMCAC, Noah Taguta of the JMAC, and Paul Mwazha of AAC, allowed themselves to be drawn into this deal with ZANU-PF and designated themselves as political constituencies, sources of votes. The leaders who were forcibly co-opted were ‘politically reliable’ and accepted the superiority of Mugabe and ZANU-PF. If they condemned ZANU-PF wrongdoings, they were reminded of their ‘complicity’ with colonialism through silence.

ZANU-PF took AIC devotees for granted, thinking that they were political imbeciles and illiterates whom they could violently and physically abuse, beat and maim; and kill their relatives, and then beguile them into voting for them during national elections. Violent political parties, such as, ZANU-PF, expected Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s cheap grace (1959: 35) from the very
Zimbabweans whose relatives they killed, whom they abused and beat during every election after 2000. By ‘cheap grace’ Bonheoffer meant that grace which the sinner expects without the sinner undergoing a process of true repentance and real transformation. (Bonhoeffer 1959: 35). Political violence and hoodwinking during election time did not make religious people in Zimbabwe vote for violent politicians and political parties. Adherents of AICs were so politically seasoned that they did not accept political violence - whether physical, spiritual, or mental - to determine the outcomes of national elections. While they did not give cheap grace to perpetrators of political violence, chicanery, demagoguery, and rhetoric, adherents of AIC’s did not vote for them.

The church was a “constituency” for politicians who did not need to call for political rallies. There was nothing amiss for Zimbabwean politicians to go to the church to seek votes because they have a right of freedom of association, assembly, and worship. The problem arose when politicians forced religious people to buy party cards or when they prevented other politicians from addressing congregations, as was the case then in Zimbabwe. It was common for political leaders to turn to the church at election times and join church congregations to secure votes before an election. The religious constituency was crucial as it constituted the biggest percentage of voters in the country. The majority of Zimbabweans were Christians, so ignoring that constituency was political suicide.

AICs in Zimbabwe were a new political playground and a fertile one, too. Both ZANU- PF leader, Robert Mugabe, and MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, visited AIC shrines seeking votes. At the AIC gatherings, ZANU-PF and MDC leaders embraced conservative doctrines on divorce
and sexuality, using them to bolster their ‘indigenous authoritarianism’ against the growing rights–based discourses of the civil society. This is despite the fact that the MDC claimed to be a liberal political party. Political leaders openly backed AICs which endorsed teenage marriages, polygamy, and refused to have their children immunised, or taken to hospitals for treatment, and which did not send their children to school (Gambanga 2010). Polygamy, which was practised by some in the AICs, was accepted by the politicians in their quest to woo voters (Gambanga 2010). Despite all those negative traits, as far as modern culture was concerned, the AICs became a constituency that politicians could ignore at their own political peril.

**ZANU- PF Co-opting AIC Leaders**

The MDC and ZANU-PF went to AIC gatherings to mingle and address captive audiences and potential voters offered by submissive church groups. Mugabe was robed in the JMAC’s white bishop’s (Labbah Hummah’s) cassock and had a wooden bishop’s crook in hand and sang along with members of the JMAC at a Passover ceremony at Mafarikwa Village where he was invited to address over 150 000 people (Chimhete 2010). Mugabe was ‘consecrated bishop’ of the JMAC. The JMAC leadership asked Mugabe to allow them to spearhead the ZANU-PF’s election campaigns for future national elections (Eagle 2010).

ZANU- PF control of state apparatus and politics was entrenched, so much so that even the most liberal AIC leader ended up a captive of ZANU- PF’s political ideology. ZANU- PF co-opted some AIC leaders to serve its ideological needs; the same cannot be said of the whole church. Some AIC leaders like Zebia Chitanda, of the JMAC lived up to their convictions. They did not allow themselves to be co-opted by the dominant ZANU- PF political ideology of
violence, corruption, greediness for money and material wealth. Chief Chiweshe was both a notable member of the JMCAC and a prominent ZANU-PF supporter who maintained that their church’s faith was politicized by a young prophet called Philip for prophets wanted power for themselves (Angelke 2007: 116). Lawrence Katsiru was a JMCAC prophet, a regional head of ZANU-PF, and a public relations manager of the city of Marondera (Angelke 2007: 124).

Augustine Chihuri, a ZANU-PF card carrying member, and Commissioner General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police, was a staunch member of the JMCAC and he worshipped at Juranifiri Santa in Chitungwiza (Angelke 2007: 132). In early 2000, the late Border Gezi, a JMCAC prophet, was appointed ZANU-PF Political Commissar and Minister for Gender, Youth, and Employment. Gezi worshipped at Juranifiri Santa shrine which he turned into a political rally intended to mobilize would be voters each time he attended church services (Angelke 2007: 132). JMCAC members sang ZANU-PF liberation war songs instead of Christian songs and they held up ZANU-PF placards at a prayer rally at Juranifiri Santa shrine (Angelke 2007: 249).

Godfey Nzira was a member of ZANU-PF who was a rich, influential, and controversial prophet, who caused tensions in the JMCAC (Angelke 2007: 34, 130). Nzira was charged with nine counts of rape in the Chitungwiza Magistrate’s Court. The charges were brought by members of his congregation who sought faith healing from him. The rapes took place at Juranifiri Santa shrine during the violent 2000 elections. Nzira was convicted and sentenced to thirty–two years in prison. The conviction angered some two thousand JMCAC members who rioted, beating up court officials, police on duty, destroying windows and doors of the Magistrate’s Court (Angelke 2007: 250). The people who rioted were brainwashed to the extent that they believed that Nzira was doing the work of God. Nzira was pardoned by Mugabe and was released from
prison. After his release, he was deployed by ZANU- PF to Muzarabani District, in what was expected to mark the start of a national campaign to coerce members of the JMCAC to support Mugabe and ZANU PF before any elections (Guma 2011 January 26). Nzira died a few months after his release from prison.

Dissatisfaction against ZANU- PF

The new economic and political frustrations of post independent Zimbabwe made many Zimbabweans more religious than before. That was because there was abject poverty, an over ninety-five per cent unemployment rate, and inflation was over a billion per cent. AIC membership increased drastically and that frighten ZANU- PF. AICs were plagued by negative stereotypes by politicians- stereotypes that they were backward and could be easily confused and manipulated (Angelke 2007: 128). ZANU- PF viewed AICs as becoming uncontrollable, useless, and potentially subversive. AIC members were regarded by ZANU- PF as too many and too confused in their leadership to be controlled or even effectively registered. ZANU-PF knew that most AIC members were too poor to cooperate in any way with the government’s plans. ZANU-PF viewed AICs as potential grounds for the articulation of subversive thoughts and as possible elements in fomenting internal strife in post- independent Zimbabwe. The majority of AIC members were unemployed and were frustrated with the government’s economic policies. They were a dissatisfied proletariat who would be subversive and involved in riots.

The fears of riots on the part of ZANU- PF were reinforced by the very successful industrial actions against high unemployment, low wages, and sky-rocketing prices of goods and services. These demonstrations were called by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
(ZCTU), which were organized by Tsvangirai when he was Secretary General of the ZCTU. Fear of subversive activities and riots from AICs caused ZANU- PF to devise a policy of divide and rule where by ZANU- PF was going to co-opt AIC leaders into its political ideology. It was also a way of dividing the civil society members like the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), a pro-democracy group which was joining the ZCTU-led industrial actions. Co-opted AIC leaders were used to neutralize the civil society which was anti- ZANU- PF government.

ZANU- PF knew that outlawing of AICs would be ineffectual, as was the case during the colonial and postcolonial time in Africa (Hastings 1979: 251), but co-option was seen as the best way of stemming the rising tide against ZANU- PF. Banning AICs could contribute to their survival in the long term. ZANU- PF did not ban the ZCTU, but infiltrated it with state agencies and divided it into ineffective different Trade Unions. The ZCTU was infiltrated, divided and rendered powerless to such an extent that since 2000 it has never called for a successful industrial action against the government. Co-opting AICs was a pre-emptive movement to diffuse a potentially volatile political situation.

Ecclesiastical, political, and economic independence were the major causes and impulses for the formation of AICs. The theme of independence ran through AICs from the period of colonialism to the present. It was, by its basic internal logic, a step towards separation, multiplicity, and diversity (Hastings 1979:253). The churches did not want ZUNU- PF to interfere in their ecclesiastical freedom as enshrined in the Zimbabwean constitution. The wave of independence, which the AICs sought from 1990 on, reflected not only religious and ecclesiastical factors, but also socio- economic and political tensions. The thirst for freedom and
independence as it affected AICs, was a spiritual and cultural phenomenon as much as a political one. It took varied and even contradictory forms. The pursuit of the political kingdom by some AIC leaders undermined the religious freedom of AICs. ZANU- PF wanted to destroy that independence by co-opting AICs. ZANU- PF was autocratic and did not entertain the concept of independence which ran through AICs. Criticizing ZANU- PF by the laity and some church leaders was an attempt to regain their independence.

Some members of the JMCAC compiled a dossier of violence perpetrated on their members by ZANU- PF, titled, ‘ZANU- PF Terrorism Against Our Church’ which described how some senior JMCAC members were assaulted or killed, for not supporting ZANU- PF (Guma 2011 January 31). The dossier stated,

The whole church has been infiltrated and assimilated into ZANU-PF. It has been turned into a ZANU PF district with all structures manned by church membership. All church members seen not to be cooperative are intimidated and tortured to comply. The intimidation continues and the whole church is now in the hands of ZANU-PF. Ours is a struggle for freedom of our church from the draconian oppression of this Mugabe regime. We realise it’s a dragon beast that’s dragging our church with it to extinction. So we want to fight, and fight it we will. (Guma 2011 January 31).

The JMCAC laity in Chitungwiza was not happy with Gezi and other church leaders for converting church services into political rallies and for dragging the church into the press. They demanded an apology from Gezi but he refused (Angelke 2007: 132). One elderly member of the JMCAC maintained that as a church, they felt offended because Gezi and Nzira used their church for their own political ambitions (Angelke 2007: 132). In the churches, people were taught not to fear another human being, so intimidation and violence could not work.
Some senior members of the JMAC did not invite Mugabe to attend their annual Passover meeting at Mafarikwa Village, but Mugabe imposed himself into the proceedings after ZANU-PF intimidated the church hierarchy (Saxon 2010). Some JMAC members who were courageous enough to defend the church’s doctrine of staying clear of politics were labelled as sell-outs and MDC supporters and, unfortunately, the church hierarchy accepted financial favours from ZANU- PF (Mbanga: August 23, 2010). That resulted in leaders becoming more susceptible to pressure and even amenable to ZANU- PF wishes. The majority of church members of the JMAC were of the opinion that they knew their true church’s position as far as their religious group and party politics were concerned. The majority of the members made it clear that they were not aligned with ZANU-PF. Their church members were grown-up individuals and they knew what was good for the country. As a church, they did not participate in partisan political activities. The issue of voting was personal and one was entitled to his or her right to vote for a person he or she wanted without fear (Saxon 2010).

Zebia Chitanda, bishop of the JMCAC and president of the Union for Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), was assassinated by ZANU-PF because he insisted that apostolic churches should be apolitical (Mbanga: September 9, 2010). He encouraged members of the apostolic churches to continue holding meetings with Tsvangirai as Prime Minister, to improve the welfare of church members and Zimbabweans at large. Chitanda's position regarding the role of apostolic churches in politics created enemies in ZANU-PF. Chitanda maintained that no political party should manipulate apostolic churches, as that was un-Godly.
MDC Joined ZANU-PF in Seeking AICs’ Votes

The MDC also joined ZANU-PF in using AICs as an indispensable constituency for winning national elections. The difference was that the MDC did not use violence. The MDC used economic and social development, justice and peace as their trump cards to win the presidency. Tsvangirai addressed a JMAC gathering in Mutare in 2009. The MDC leader had two missions: campaigning for votes, and encouraging members of the church who had been discouraged by their leadership from using modern medicine, to have their children immunised against tetanus, polio, measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis and whooping cough (Guma: August 2, 2010). Samuel Muzerengwa, a bishop of the JMAC, was an MDC Senator for Buhera South, and a member of the MDC central committee.

Socialism, Liberalism and Prophetic Nature

Do Christians in Zimbabwe know the political ideologies of the two political parties? Generally speaking, Zimbabwean Christians were ethically conservatives for they were Bible believing Christians. The liberal agenda, which penetrated and divided the western church, had not yet penetrated Zimbabwe as far as Christianity was concerned. The political agendas of the two main political parties in Zimbabwe, MDC and ZANU-PF, were nowhere near the expectations of Zimbabwean Christians. The MDC was a liberal political party which had its base and origin in the Trade Union movement and it advocated a progressive agenda. The liberal agenda generally supported same sex marriages, abortion, gay and lesbian priests, euthanasia and divorce, which were viewed by Zimbabwean Christians as unbiblical from their own interpretation of the Bible. ZANU-PF was a socialist party with its base in authoritarian
nationalism and socialism. It advocated socialism which in its communist-materialistic sense was antireligious. Neither political party advocated the wishes of Zimbabwean Christians as far as their spirituality was concerned. Were Zimbabwean Christians aware of the agendas of the two major political parties? If they were aware of them, why did they vote for them? If they did not know the agendas, then why vote for something which they did not know? There were no liberal and no socialist religious people in Zimbabwe. If they were there; they were a very tiny drop in the ocean.

Demagoguery, Disregard for Social Justice Issues and Lack of International Connections

Some of the leaders of all the three AICs- JMCAC, JMAC and AAC became more worldly and materially oriented post 1990. Material greediness by AIC leaders in an environment of poverty enabled ZANU- PF to easily co-opt the church leadership into its political ideology by giving them money and material wealth. Some JMCAC members, like the late Nzira, had economic and political power. They lived lives of affluence. Nzirai was a reflection of the leadership in the AICs. While the leadership lived in affluence, the laity lived in abject poverty. According to Erica Bornstein, Engelke maintained that JMCAC leaders lived a life filled with material desires and ethical contradictions for personal fame and material greediness were the orders of the day (Bornstein 2009:2). As with the colonial era in which the JMCAC emerged, the economic and political difficulties of material life in Zimbabwe of the late 1990s seem to have urged believers to shed the shackles of the spiritual world for they faced acute poverty.

AICs produced oligarchic church governments whose leaders retained power for decades before passing it on to their children or close relatives. Because of the JMCAC, JMAC,
and AAC leaders’ quests for power and material wealth, they turned themselves into cults which promoted their family members, relatives, and friends, to leadership roles in the churches, while eliminating any leadership threats from within. There was recurrent tension within the AICs between the claims derived directly from personal charisma and loyalty of the local congregation to its immediate prophet or pastor upon the one hand, the attempt to maintain authority, succession, and a wider unity, upon the other. The former prevailed over the latter, but personal authority of the founder was usually sufficient to limit succession within his own life time (Hastings: 1979:76). There were obvious parallels to Robert Mugabe’s style of state leadership, although the consequences might not be as dire as they were for threats to Mugabe’s power (Bornstein 2009:2). There was a growing leadership cult in AICs in which the sacerdotal hierarchy and the founding fathers like Mwazha, Marange and Masowe were heralded as voices of God and visions of angels, and who merged their own persons with the person of Christ. It was a cult sustained by a heavily edited sacred history in which the founding fathers and their successors stood out as the sole agents of the church’s past, where they alone were responsible for the construction of the mother church. This cult thrived on sycophancy and created fear (Maxwell 2006:3). In their contemporary concern for respectability and recognition, AIC leaders had come to resemble the type of missionary white Christianity which they initially disparaged.

From my interviews and participant observations, I found that AIC leaders were viewed as prophetic, courageous, creative individuals, great resistance figures and pioneering indigenous Christians. The interviewees maintained that the founding fathers of their churches were called by God. They told me the history of the founding fathers and their churches.
versions overlooked the abuse of power inside their churches. If AIC prophetic leaders were missionaries to their own people – Zimbabweans; then their practices and morals could be interrogated with the same rigour as those of the white missionaries who supported colonialism and the oppression and exploitation of Africans. Some of the AIC leaders, such as Mwazha, have formed cosy alliances with equally authoritarian secular politicians in ZANU-PF.

Mwazha told his AAC devotees to chant ZANU-PF political slogans and to sign, without questioning, the ZANU-PF anti-sanctions petition against the travel restrictions imposed on Mugabe and top ZANU-PF members by the western countries because they used violence in elections (Nkala 2011). Mugabe reciprocated by giving Mwazha the Order of Merit Award for his outstanding service to the development of Christianity in Zimbabwe and establishing and for sustaining a five-star indigenous church (Sunday Mail Reporter 2012). Many AIC members did not give much consideration to the excesses of their leaders. The growth of AICs in Zimbabwe was similar to the growth of Zimbabwean nationalism with the same motives - to get more power for the leadership and more financial and material wealth for the leaders at the expense of the people. AIC leaders aligned themselves with either ZANU-PF or the MDC for financial and material purposes. That alignment took place in a culture of patrimonialism and prebendalism. AIC leaders co-option into ZANU-PF political ideology had a good deal of ideological sympathy with ZANU-PF’s agenda of cultural nationalism, particularly the notions of indigenization, self-reliance and Black autonomy (Maxwell 2006: 219).

My interviewee, Zorodzai Chisango, a bishop of the AAC in Kadoma, told me that he preached neutrality. His church did not talk about politics in Zimbabwe; it concentrated only on preaching the gospel and was not involved in politics, but maintained neutrality without
supporting any political party. The AAC regarded politics as carnal and it was only interested in spiritual matters and left politics to politicians. AICs believed that it was always better not to confront politicians on socio-economic issues, because it only got in the way of serving God. They decided it was prudent to be silent on political and socio-economic issues. Keeping quiet combined political expediency with a theological dimension. Christianity was a serious matter. If it cannot be reduced to scripture, it certainly cannot be reduced to a newspaper article or a segment on the television news (Angelke 2007: 128). The late Canaan Banana argued that there was no such animal as neutrality He maintained that:

There is no such animal as neutrality; neutrality at best means deafening silence and indifference, and at worst smiling at and admiring the status quo. I refuse to accept the notion that Jesus assumed the role of honoured guest in the theatre of human slaughter and misery. He intervened in human affairs and challenged the principalities and powers that denied God’s children their right to life and to fundamental human liberties (Lapsley 1986:7).

That was quite evident in his inaugural address in Galilee. ‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed’ (Luke 4:18).

These words by Banana provided an apt summary of what I saw during my participant observation of AICs and what I was told by the leaders. The church leaders claimed to be neutral and were only concerned with spiritual matters and not carnal matters. Yet in Christianity, God is not neutral and God is not silent when there is poverty, oppression and exploitation of the poor. The church of God cannot be neutral and silent in an environment of poverty, unemployment and political violence. When AICs thought they were neutral, they were simply sliding into ZANU-PF’s ideological captivity. ZANU- PF’s political ideology was to use
people as a means to an end, allowing absolute power for ZANU-PF for eternity. ZANU-PF justified the use of any means possible to retain political power. In the run-up to the 2000 parliamentary elections, the late Vice President, Simon Muzenda, declared that Zanu-PF would continue to rule till donkeys and mules have horns (ZANU-PF *ichatonga kusvikira madhongi ameru nyanga*). He went further and said that if ZANU-PF gives you a baboon as a candidate, you vote for the baboon (*kana ZANU-PF ikakupai gudo, munotorivhotera*) (Bizabani 2011, November 4). AICs became captives of reactionary forces. My research revealed that AIC leaders were as autocratic as Mugabe in running their churches. They became ‘blind’ to the poverty and suffering of Zimbabweans because ZANU-PF used money and material wealth to seduce them into adopting its political ideology.

Muzenda’s ideas agreed with what some of my AAC bishop interviewees told me. They asserted that Mwazha was anointed to be a Messiah of Africa, just as Jesus was anointed to be a Messiah of the whites. Mwazha, through prophecy, spoke directly with God and nobody in the church disputed what Mwazha told them. Like the JMAC, the AAC bishops also believed that Mugabe was God given to Zimbabwe and Mwazha prayed and blessed Mugabe to be Zimbabwean state President until he dies. Bishop Tonderai Zivai of the AAC asserted that Mwazha was a Black Messiah sent by God for the spiritual salvation of Africans and Mugabe was sent by God for the political and economic liberation of Africa.

AIC leaders could have emulated some Christian leaders who worked in Zimbabwe. Anglican Bishop Kenneth Skelton; Bishop Donald Lamont of the Roman Catholic church; Bishop Ralph Edward Dodge of the Methodist church, Reverends John White (Methodist) and Arthur
Shearly Cripps (Anglican) were not co-opted and made captives of the dominant colonial ideology of oppression, exploitation, and racism against Black Zimbabweans. They were committed to their theology which informed their faith and action. Their faith was Biblical, but within the context of a white, racist, ideologically reactionary Zimbabwean Church headed by white officers. They were extremely radical because they were prepared to demystify the ‘truism’ which the colonialists had erected around themselves. Cripps wrote a play in 1951 entitled: *The Black Christ* (Hastings 1994:558). Matthew Angelke cited Desmond Tutu as telling the following story:

...When the white man came to Africa, he held a Bible in his hand and the Africans held the land. The white man said to Africans, ‘let us bow our heads in prayer.’ When the African raised their heads, the white man had the land and the Africans had the Bible’ (Angelke 2007:72).

Tutu’s story resonated with Masowe’s rejection of the Bible as a tool used to subjugate Africans. Angelke cited Takatso Mofokeng and interpreted Tutu’s story to point to three related realities. ‘They showed the central position which the Bible occupied in the process of colonization, national oppression, and exploitation. They also confessed to the incomprehensible paradox of being colonized by a Christian people and yet being converted to their religion and accepting their Bible, the ideological instrument of colonization, oppression and exploitation. Thirdly, they expressed a historic commitment that was accepted solemnly by one generation and passed on to the other – a commitment to terminate exploitation of humans by other humans’ (Angelke 2007: 72).

During colonialism Zimbabweans said, ‘----It seems as if we had been deceived by the exponents of Christianity, the missionaries. These have come here only to prepare the way for
the racist state where we shall remain permanently the hewers of wood and drawers of water, and where a favoured handful can control and delay our development indefinitely (Lapsley 1986:17).

AIC leaders could be committed to a Zimbabwean society based on human rights, social justice and the termination of oppression and exploitation. During colonialism, the Bible was used by the colonialists and missionaries to oppress and exploit Zimbabweans, but after the demise of colonialism, AIC leaders and Zimbabwean politicians used the Bible to oppress and exploit fellow Zimbabweans. The central theme of the Bible was liberation, not subjugation. As Christian institutions, AICs were not political bodies, but religious institutions. As such, they could be construed as ‘hunting grounds’ for votes by politicians, particularly by politicians who claimed to be Christians. The true gospel of Christ was subversive of all evil and injustice. AIC leaders could not be politically neutral when the standard against which AIC leaders should measure their ‘political’ activism was set by the Bible. Tutu stated that the Christian must always be critical of all political standards, testing them against the gospel standards (Angelke 2007: 73). AIC leaders could answer to God and not to political parties and be political only insofar as Christianity was a religion that supported social justice and racial equality. Canaan Banana argued that:

A Christian church history is a saga of exploitation in the name of Christ, from the subjugation of the European tribes, the crusades to redeem the Holy Land from the infidel, from the subjugation and exploitation of native people in the ‘new world’ to the colonization of Africa in the great missionary thrusts of western civilization. This history is long, sordid, and deeply sad: the result of the use of the Bible as subjugation for exploitation; the self-serving adoption of one group as ‘superior’ to another. In other words, it can be argued that the ideology of racism has its genesis in the Bible (Banana 1993:21-22).
Banana was not against the written word *per se*, as was the JMCAC, but rather against the ways in which a particular text had been abused throughout history. In Zimbabwe the Bible was used by AICs as a template for the oppression and exploitation of the laity. Banana wanted to transform the Bible into a document that could serve as ‘a unifying element that would help our world to set aside our differences and to learn to live together’ (Banana 1993: 17, 19). In contrast, AICs such as the JMAC and AAC used the bible to justify projects of political and economic domination.

I argue that, as a whole, the AICs’ most consistent response to such issues as the deepening crises of unemployment, corruption, and political violence was the entrenchment of the ZANU-PF regime and escalating poverty. The JMCAC leaders could have emulated the founder of their church, Masowe, who was interested in colonial labour politics. He attended the rallies of the Industrial Commercial Workers’ Union (ICWU) in Harare and Bulawayo which addressed a ‘call for unity among Africans, the disillusionment with the failure of the white man to live up to his ‘civilizing’ professions, and the demand for higher wages for Blacks’ (Angelke 2007: 88). At the start, Masowe’s preaching included a potentially more political dimension in its response to the oppressed state of his fellow Zimbabweans (Hastings 1979:77). Masowe criticized Europeans in colonial Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and was arrested and imprisoned three times for defying oppressive and exploitative colonial orders (Angelke 2007: 97). Many of the ICWU concerns were supported by Masowe who instructed his church members to adopt an explicitly anticolonial approach to wage labour through emphasis on economic self-sufficiency (Angelke 2007: 72). AIC leaders could enjoy a good relationship with the state without becoming sycophantic or prostituting their principles – or theology. The
Gospel of Christ confronts all that prevents Zimbabweans from developing their full human potential and all that offends against Zimbabwean human dignity and the pursuit of liberation in all its forms. However, I observed that the type of religion that seemed to be coming daily more popular among AIC leaders was a kind of ‘opium’, a kind of spirituality which soothed the poor Zimbabweans and kept them in a cocoon, but did not confront the issues of corruption, unemployment, poverty, disease, and political violence. AIC leaders seemed to believe that the fight for social justice, human rights, and the pursuit of liberation, were the preserve of the Zimbabwean mainline Christian denominations - the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches - and the anti-religious. That was a tragedy and travesty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is based on the love of neighbour and which ended once and for all the division between the sacred and the secular. The test of true Christianity is not the frequency of our attending Church services, but how we treat the widows, orphans, the poor, the marginalized, and the down-trodden. The JMCAC had no national leader who united them and who was a spokesperson on national issues (Angelke 2007: 129). Each church has its own leaders. Even if some AIC leaders had wanted to criticize ZANU-PF for its human rights abuses, they did not have international connections that the mainstream churches had with fellow Christian denominations all over the world. Those connections enabled mainstream churches to withstand ZANU-PF brutality and violence because they knew that they had international support. That was not the case with AICs.

Bishop Dzingai Nyamupfumbi of JMAC, whom I interviewed, maintained that Mugabe was their political leader whom they were given by God for they had prayed for a long time during colonial times for a Black leader and God answered their prayers by giving Zimbabweans
Mugabe. Furthermore he said that Mugabe would die in power because he was anointed by God. For Nyamupfumbi, Marange prophesied and prayed for Mugabe hence nobody was going to replace Mugabe as leader of Zimbabwe as long as Mugabe was alive. Most of my JMAC interviewees cited passages from their “new Bible’-the *New Revelations of the Apostles* in defence of their support for ZANU- PF.

AICs were regarded by their founders and leaders as family businesses which should be inherited by their children and grandchildren when they die (Hastings 1994:81). What was fairly recent in Zimbabwe was the fervent type of worldly gospel which was a mixture of religion and economic business that had tremendous appeal to many Zimbabweans. From that also came the phenomena of religion as business and a personality cult for the founder or leader of an AIC. The founder claimed God told him/her to start or lead a church congregation. AIC leaders became a brand of religious business people. AICs seem to have attracted many converts, particularly youths and young adults who were frustrated, perhaps by the lack of employment, economic opportunities, and meaning in life in, a country where politicians and their families, friends and relatives were living in affluence. The fact that AICs believed in prophets, faith healing, speaking in tongues, cults of personalities, importance of charismatic leadership, and praying for their members to get jobs in government and the private sector led many Zimbabweans to convert to AICs. Despite praying for their unemployed members to get jobs, very few managed to get jobs, and those who did, were underemployed, which frustrated them more. AIC leaders struggled to mitigate the laity’s desires for hope in Zimbabwe, for guidance, and for relief from the struggles of poverty (Bornstein 2009:3).
People in-between Religious and Political Leaders

For the JMCAC, the bible is an artifact, a thing, and as such, it does not inspire them (Angelke 2007: 7). The JMCAC viewed true Christianity not as a religion of the book, for books could not be spiritual. The Bible represented the rationalization of religious authority (Angelke 2007: 7), for the JMCAC did not have hierarchy in its church. The JMCAC was wary that the written words were dangerous and had the potential to do harm by killing the faith and taking the Holy Spirit out of Christians (Angelke 2007: 7). They claimed that Jesus and his Apostles did not need a Bible. The Bible, as a material object, was not a sign of the divine, according to the live and direct semiotics for it did not represent God (Angelke 2007: 29). The rejection of the Bible and the acceptance of the live and direct concept made it very easy and possible for greedy ZANU-PF members who were ‘prophets’ in the church like Gezi and Nzira, to preach that the live and direct message from God was, that all church members should support and vote for ZANU-PF during national elections. What were preached were not words from God but political party ideology masked as live and direct from God. Nobody questioned the message because there was no Bible to use as a reference point. Every member of the JMCAC was in direct dialogue with God (Angelke 2007: 7). Each prophet and preacher professed whatever suited them under the guise of live and direct messages from God. The live and direct message from God led the JMCAC leaders to be eco-opted and captivated by the ZANU-PF political ideology.

AICs believed in the immediacy of the Holy Spirit and in prophecy, the concepts which were abused by church leaders to accumulate wealth for themselves. The notion of live and
direct faith was key to JMCAC understanding of Christianity. It was a concept through which the church made arguments about how Christianity should be practiced and how God lively and directly told them to support and vote for ZANU-PF. The Bible was not a sign of the divine and of God’s representation, but live and direct faith was an assertion at the theological level, that mediums in the form of prophets, were essential for the church (Angelke 207:11). There was the influence and impact of money and material possession in AICs (Angelke 2007: 160, 247). Mudyiwa was rich for he had a brick-making business; Chigwada ran a farm in Chiweshe and had a Mercedes Benz. Nzira had a hospital fenced with razor wire on top of the dura wall, and a children’s home (Angelke 2007: 250), Gezi and Chihuri had farms, businesses, and had high paying jobs in government. Sandros Namwebonde and Hwimbo had accumulated wealth. (Angelke 2007: 247). Financial and material wealth was antithetical to the JMCAC ideal. The AICs did not want to combine divine with earthly things. The JMCAC was concerned with the degradation of religion through a wayward emphasis on things. It was founded by shrewd political and economic entrepreneurs (Angelke 2007: 247).

Sermons were a way of trying to brainwash the laity. A new convert to the JMCAC cited the gospel according to Luke in his sermon. That infuriated Nzira who stood up and admonished the man saying: ‘We do not talk Bible-talk here. The Bible is like toilet paper. The congregation should listen to the word live and direct.’ (Angelke 2007: 181). Christianity and the Bible are inseparably related. For the JMCAC to reject the Bible and still claim to be a Christian church was unthinkable. Any political demagoguery which made ZANU-PF get more votes was viewed as the word live and direct from God. Prophets were viewed as vessels through which the Holy Spirit spoke. The prophet was the animator but not the author or the principal of the message.
Prophets did not know what was said through them, and they claimed no authority over their actions or accomplishments when filled by the Holy Spirit (Angelke 2007: 182). When Nzira was filled with the Holy Spirit he was known as Pageneck which was an ancient Hebrew name for an angel that spoke through him (Angelke 2007: 182). When Nzira a polarizing figure in the church was filled with the Holy Spirit, he often reminded his congregation that he was not a human being, he was not Nzira, but an angel of God and he was Jesus (Angelke 2007: 183, 189). Masowe referred to himself as ‘Africa’s John the Baptist’ (Angelke 2007: 189). Mudyiwa said that he was Jesus and was equivalent to God (Angelke 2007: 183, 189); while Mwazha claimed that he was a Black Messiah.

The JMCAC did not like the Bible because it was going to be used by the laity to challenge the authority of the prophets (Angelke 2007: 245). Using the Bible was going to have members of the congregation referring to the Bible and thus leaving open an avenue of interpretive authority. The absence of the Bible was a way to focus attention of the laity on the presence of the prophet. ‘Focus’ forces us to see that the presence of the prophet was both theological and an element in the struggle for power. The JMCAC wanted a religion in which the material does not matter, but what people ‘want’ was not always borne out in practice. Church leaders were involved in politics and the accumulation of money and material wealth.

One cannot separate religion and politics. Kenneth Skelton argued that:

…I submit that to try to put religion and politics into separate compartments is impossible... For these truths, the Old Testament prophets stood and it is clear from their words and their experiences that no-one in their day was under any illusion about the tie-up between religion and politics. Amos was declared a prohibited immigrant, Isaiah became a Foreign Secretary and Jeremiah was detained under the law and order (maintenance) act of his day (Lapsley 1986:13).
The traditional teaching of the church was to critique the government of the day basing their pronouncements on political, economic, and social issues as they pertained to the poor, widows, and orphans. Many AIC leaders embraced the values and dominant ideology of ZANU-PF. There were no serious theological debates within AIC circles about structural issues such as the lack of social justice and human rights facing the society. That lack of critical theological thought left AIC leaders free to project ZANU-PF ideological prejudices and preoccupations as representative of Christian leadership. Part of the tragedy of AIC leadership was that they lived under the illusion that they were politically neutral even if they were demonstrably taking sides. While some AIC leaders, including Mwazha and Taguta, were never overtly ZANU-PF, they played important ideological roles in preserving ZANU-PF supremacy and giving it religious legitimation.

The author agrees with Juan Rosales Sanchez (2006:25), who asserted that politics is a game of power. This applies to religion as well. Both Zimbabwean political and religious leaders were interested in the power to control and exploit the people of Zimbabwe. ZANU-PF was not interested in the welfare of the people, but in its own political superiority and aggrandizements (Catholic Commission 1999). There was a unity of purpose between the political and the religious leaders in ZANU-PF, because, if they were divided, each group would not be able to control and exploit the people on its own.

When politicians came to power, they wanted to exploit the people of Zimbabwe in the same way some AICs leaders did. Politicians knew that without the support of the religious leadership, they would not exploit the people without revolt. They knew that any government
which did not have the backing of the religious leadership did not last long and hence forced co-optation of the religious leadership was a necessity. Whatever exploitation was done to the people by Zimbabwean politicians, both religious leaders and politicians regarded it as Christian, and forced people to support it. Zimbabwean politicians needed some AIC leaders just as some AIC leaders needed politicians to exploit the people. There was a symbiotic relationship between political leadership and church leadership. Both politics and religion were based on a power matrix; their aim was to get power which often translates into material wealth. Power was used as a mechanism to control people. The same can be said of political parties. They were interested in getting political power to control the affairs of the state and the people.

The Way Forward

With great numbers of compromised persons - both in the political and religious spheres - and the degree to which those interests were entrenched, how to motivate and build a prophetic approach was a herculean task, which would take deep consideration all by itself. AICs could be a voice of moral reason. Their leaders could adhere to the biblical calling of being involved in a prophetic ministry- fight for social justice. As a result of co-optation, these AICs became overly loyal and uncritical of the actions, even wrongs, of ZANU- PF and MDC political leaders, to curry favour.

AIC leaders were supposed to be deeply influenced by the message of the gospel: social justice and individual ethical behaviour. The whole church leadership in Zimbabwe could turn the struggle against colonialism into an economic, social justice, and moral struggle. Genuine
AIC leaders would want the void filled by new democratic values, morals and cultures. They could reject being co-opted into the ideologies of political parties.

AIC leaders could lead a new revolution against corruption and for social justice by teaching Zimbabweans to be brave and go into the streets to demonstrate against tyrannical and corrupt leaders. Zimbabweans could be prepared to shed their blood in order to be free from despotic and corrupt leaders. Prayers alone have failed to remove them.

AICs could become more relevant to the changing society and its changing needs. AICs can at all times speak out firmly against injustices. They could actively hold government and political leaders accountable for their wrong-doing. AICs could refuse to defer to political leaders. AIC leaders could be more exemplary in their personal behaviour - to set an example of alternative ethnical, moral and value-based leadership and could internalise democratic values – fighting for human rights and social justice in order to be truly religious leaders worth their calling.

Conclusion

My research findings were that social justice issues were not considered by AIC leaders to be of much theological importance. I have observed that among AIC leaders there was little concern for structural matters which have caused poverty among Zimbabweans. The laity in AICs was wise enough to see the connections between such matters as poverty, unemployment, political violence, authoritarianism, and misgovernance in Zimbabwe. The findings indicate that relationships between political parties and some AIC leaders were based
on their mutual benefit, at the expense of religious devotees. Despite being given money and material benefits, no religious leader in Zimbabwe controlled the voting pattern of his followers. I conclude that AICs, political leaders, and others just like them, should be removed from power through peaceful demonstrations, and replaced with people who better served the well-being of Zimbabwe’s population. Also AICs should support morally legitimate political authority and at the same time fight for social justice and human rights.

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Selected Bibliography


Gender Issues Among the Yorubas

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Abstract:

In this essay, I critically look at the question of feminism from its theological and academic perspectives and how it has impacted women's lives around the world. I argue that pre-colonial and missionary incursion into Yoruba land in West Africa the question of feminism as it is argued today was none existent. From a historical purview, feminism among Yoruba women is examined from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras to locate the shift in perception and ideology of feminism among Yoruba women. In this essay, both colonialism and missionary activities during the colonial period are held responsible for whatever kind of feminism which exists among the Yorubas today.

Introduction:

Currently, the Christian Church in the western hemisphere has had to re-address the question of gender. Feminist writers have worked very hard across a wide range of disciplines to address this question. From a theological perspective, the fight against patriarchy by feminist theologians have been taking against what is generally described as a mostly male dominated hierarchy, an archaic homophobic clergy and the reliance on scriptural texts written mainly by a biased male dominated group of writers. The patristic era is as guilty as modern day Catholicism for propagating patriarchy and the subjugation of women.

The feminist/womanist ‘war’ against patriarchy has spread quite rapidly around the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, feminists abound within and outside of the academia. It is not clear if the
bone of contention is one and the same within European, American, Latin American and African feminist claims. However, what stands out, which is foundational to writing this paper is to call attention to the fact that historically, feminism is not one and the same from these different culturally perspectives. This accounts for why there exists a hermeneutical differentiation between a feminist and a womanist group. What theological claims can feminism when approached from different historical and cultural milieus offer a public intellectual theological conversation? In this essay, I look at the question of gender from a theological, historical and cultural perspective of the Yoruba women of the south west of Nigeria. Their history as it will be enumerated will show that any claim to gender differentiation is not only strange but exists only within the prism of post-colonial, post missionary and post-independence experience of Yoruba women.

Within the gambit of the on-going dialogue and research, some feminists have wrongly included African women and lump them into the presupposed view that they also have suffered a history of patriarchy. In this essay, I will be drawing on the experiences of Yoruba women of the western coast of Africa to argue that Yoruba women have not always been subjugated as some western feminists would want us to believe. Research points to the fact that prior to the slave trade, colonialism and missionary incursion into Yoruba land; women enjoyed a great role with equal privileges as their male counterpart.

Pre-slavery and pre-colonial era, the Yoruba woman occupied a significant place in the political, economic, religious and family life setting. Traditional Yoruba culture gave pride of place to women under two designations: their status as daughters in their father’s lineage and as wives in their husband’s lineage. However, women are respected even more as mothers based on the
logic that all men are born of women. It is expected, therefore, that men pay the same maternal respects they have for their mothers to all women. With this understanding, pre-colonial Yoruba land rarely experienced violence against women or divorce. Divorce was considered only when both families have exhausted all means of arbitration. Consideration for divorce commonly included extreme cruelty, infertility, insanity, extreme promiscuity on the part of the woman, irresponsibility on the part of the man or indebtedness. British missionary records show that polygamy was practised among the Yorubas but mainly among the upper class. It is not clear if this is traditional to the people or an influence of Islam.

To support the position that gender was not understood as a tool of patriarchal oppression of women in the traditional Yoruba setting, I will proceed to present the historical development and paradigmatic shift in culture and the understanding of ‘gender’ in the following order: Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial Era.

The Yorubas: A Short Introduction

The Yoruba people of the western coast of Africa are considered to be the largest single ethnic or tribal group among the many tribes that make up what eventually became known as Nigeria. While the majority of the Yoruba live in western Nigeria, there are also a substantial number of people of Yoruba descent who live in the Republic of Benin and Togo, in addition to large groups of Yoruba migrants living in the United States and the United Kingdom. The Yoruba nation is also said to be the most widely dispersed around the world through the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The descendants of the Yoruba nation in diaspora are commonly referred to as
“Afro” cultures. They can be found in the US, Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad, Puerto-Rico, Dominican Republic, and Brazil. iv

The History of the inhabitants of the lower western Niger region, later referred to as the Yoruba race is traced to around the 4th century. Not much else is known except that they grew and thrived as a tribe. They built their cities and had market economy, a stable political system and were in contact with other kingdoms and empires in existence at the time. History locates the golden age of the Yoruba nation between 1100AD and 1900AD with the emergence of the great Ife kingdom, Oyo Empire, and finally Benin kingdom. v

Yoruba culture is mostly patrilineal and patrilocal with the wife(s) regarded as permanent member of the family she is married into. Unlike some other neighbouring cultures, a married Yoruba woman remains with her family of adoption by marriage even after death. The married woman, who dies, is buried with her own family where she is married into, and her corpse is never returned to her own family of birth. Marriage also unites two families, even though they are in-laws, the Yorubas relate more like family. The Yorubas did not practise polygamy in the sense in which we understand it today. A man had more than one wife usually because of his office, for instance, the king. At other times, rich and successful farmers take on more than one wife for reasons of man power to keep up the work load on the farms. At other times, brothers take on their deceased brother’s widow, because she remains a member of the family. To have children by her is optional and often times decided by the entire family.

Yoruba culture does not place women at a lower pedestal to men. It is clear that Yoruba men have a keen sense of protecting their women and providing for them. But Yoruba culture
does not discriminate against women participating in decision making within the home and political or public sphere. Although, Yoruba culture is hierarchically based with men on top of the ladder, respect is reciprocal and understood to work for the preservation of the community. For this reason, every member of the community knows his or her own responsibilities to the one or the whole. Differentiation is more likely to be viewed from age or position (respect) rather than gender in the traditional Yoruba society. Yoruba women are regarded as ‘orisa’- deity, and so are cared for and respected.

In her book, *The Invention of Women*, the leading Yoruba ethnologist, Oyeronke Oyewunmi argues strongly that there is a flawed assumption about the relevance of gender issues in Yoruba history, pre-colonial era due to the imposition of Western thought and categories on the discussion of Yoruba women feminism. According to Oyewunmi, until the arrival of the colonialists, in Yoruba land, there were no women or men because in the Yoruba language the categories ‘okunrin’ which she translates as ‘anamales’, or ‘obinrin’, ‘anafemales’ were never “neither binarily opposed nor hierarchical”, they were persons whose anatomy “did not privilege them to any social positions and similarly did not jeopardize their access.”\(^{vi}\) Oyewunmi critiques what she calls Western ‘soma-centricism’ in gender studies. She counters Western feminists’ assertions that gender categories and the subordination of women are universal and timeless, seen as an organizing principle in all societies. Arguing from a linguistic and cultural analysis point of view, Oyewunmi demonstrates that gender in Yoruba culture pre-colonial era, was inconsequential. She insists that “Yoruba social identity was, and is, fundamentally relational, changing, and situational, with seniority the most crucial determinant of ranking.”\(^{vii}\)
Pre-Colonial Era

Missionaries, colonialists, western feminists and modern historiographers all agree that the traditional Yoruba society focused on women within married life as the grounds of accessing social, economic and political power. Yoruba women were never confined to their domestic roles only. The ability to exercise freedom in trade implied also the woman’s ability to take care of her children. Through known history, Yoruba women wield economic power since the market sphere is considered strictly the domain and political hegemony of women. The market days were seen to be ‘holy days’ and observed in very specific and meticulous order. The women choose a president who directs the affairs of all the traders. Usually in Yoruba land, the *Iya L’oja*, (President of the Women Market Association) also seats on the king’s ruling council, and wields tremendous political influence and power. Missionary accounts from the 1800s show clearly the economic independence and business acumen of Yoruba women who engage in in the tie and dye trade, cotton spinning, pottery, processing of the palm produce into oil and soap. Women also engaged in household production of crafts, petty trade, weaving, bead making, mat weaving, beer brewing, home economics and management; all of these starts early under the mother’s tutelage. At the early age of seven or eight, girls are already sent out to hawk various household commodities.

Yoruba women translated their economic power into political power as noted already. Specifically, it is important to note that at some point in the history of Yoruba kingdoms, a woman regent has reigned as the king. There are records of Yoruba women warlords and founders of kingdoms, i.e. Moremi (Olurounbi), who is said to have sacrificed an only child to
save her people. The great kingdoms of Oyo, Ife, Ondo, Ekiti and Ijebu were all ruled at one point by a woman. It is not uncommon that within a variety of Yoruba cultures, a hierarchy of female chiefs existed. Most popular among the female titles includes; Iya Oba (The King’s mother), Ayaba (The Queen), Iya L’ojia (women President in the market), IyaL’ode (women’s Prime Minister usually also on the king’s council). At all levels, and for this point in pre-modern history, the Yoruba society had evolved in their understanding and respect for gender way beyond their contemporaries in Europe and North America.

Women also played a great role in the rituals and cultic religions of Yoruba land even though it is arguable that this role is limited to certain and specific cults. Mostly, Yoruba women priestesses are associated with fertility cults and young women’s initiation rites into womanhood and marriage. In this instance, note again how the role of ‘motherhood’ is closely associated to what makes a woman a woman. She is the harbinger of new life, of kings and noble men. She is the nurturer and the care giver who sustains this life until maturity. In Yoruba philosophy, she recedes into the background when her son becomes a man yet remains a pillar of wisdom and support especially as he starts his own family.

In Yoruba philosophy and religion, names given to a child at birth often times designate among other things tribal or clan affiliations, family ties, religious/deity affiliations or even the hopes of the family for their child. These names tie neatly into family praise singing known as ‘oriki.’ One of the popular poetries of Yoruba culture states in praise of a woman as a mother: “Iya ni Wura, baba ni digi. Ojo ti baba ba ku, digi omo baje, sugbon ojo ti iya ba ku ni wura omo wo’mi…iya ni wura ti a ko le fowo ra!” (Meaning: Mother is a jewel of inestimable value, father is...
a mirror. The day father dies, my mirror is broken, and the day mother dies my jewel of inestimable value is lost.... Mother is the precious jewel that cannot be bought with money.)

From the foregoing, it is clear that within Yoruba culture and tradition, a woman is held in high esteem especially when she achieves the role of wife and mother. Motherhood in Yoruba culture is cultic-ally associated with the womb of the earth which produces life and the ability of a mother to carry a child in her womb. Sometime the Yorubas will say: “Orisa bi iya ko si!” Meaning: There is no deity as great as mother. Even though it is not usually stated, in old age, the mother assumes a matriarchal role where she is revered and respected for all her years of labour of love.

The Colonial Era

Not many scholars and historians are able to agree on the impact of colonialism on indigenous cultures. The contention is usually as to what extent did the colonialist’s culture positively or negatively impact the local culture? Overall, when this same question is applied to gender issues within the traditional Yoruba cultural milieu, it can be conclusively said that colonialist culture negatively impacted Yoruba culture. In very minimal ways, the colonialists benefitted some women causes but on the over all, it caused the decline of women’s status.

The Colonialists positively impacted women’s role within marriage in their ability to have a say in the process of divorce which hitherto was limited to decisions taking between families which was mainly men dominated. In Kristin Mann’s study of this phenomenon, she posits that the educated elite men engaged in extra-marital affairs by having “outside wives”. This was done as to avoid being labelled a polygamist in the light of the quick spread and impact of Christianity.
Polygyny in some sense became the in thing- having more than a wife but not living together in the same house as in polygamy. The effect and influence of the colonial administration on the native law and customary courts was far reaching. It prohibited forced marriage, child marriages, woman to woman marriage and permitted easier access for women to divorce. It is recorded that between 1939 and 1947 the number of divorce cases in the customary court had risen so much that another court had to be instituted to handle the over flow.\textsuperscript{xiv} From this point on, Yoruba culture and tradition had clashed with the colonialists’ culture. The understanding of marriage evolved, divorce took on a new meaning, and gender above all things took on a new but negative meaning.

Between this political and social change, the first negative impact was women’s political power that was unrecognized by the colonialists. The British dealt directly with the men in the day to day affairs of the state. The British, acting from their own cultural perspective totally failed to notice, study or recognize women’s economic and especially political power. The Colonizers’ attitude, coupled with certain cultural attitudes also helped to put women in a second class position.\textsuperscript{xv}

In the field of education, the colonizers gave the missionaries the free hand to operate schools. Unfortunately, based on the attitude of the Europeans, the local community subtly bought into the idea of educating boys more than girls. On the part of the indigenous people, they reasoned that Western education for girls benefited her future family. They also argue that the girls are needed to learn home management and understand petty trading. It was popularly believed at the time, that western educated female become arrogant, immoral and promiscuous.\textsuperscript{xvi}
The British also put in place a highly effective government machine of offices but fully staffed by British civil service men, while clerical work was initially under the control of British women. It was not until the 50s and 60s that indigenous women began to break into employments in clerical and government office work. It was therefore, understandable that parents were not willing to spend money training young girls who could not work beyond teaching, nursing or secretariat level within government employment.

The British patriarchal culture was embraced by the Yoruba men who suddenly found themselves in-charge. This factor played a huge role in the relegation of women into the background in education and politics especially. The work of the missionaries also contributed immensely into creating a dichotomy in gender and subjugation of one gender to the other which was almost none existent prior to the arrival of the missionaries and the colonialists. An example can be found in the seating arrangement in the various churches for Sunday worship. All the men sat on one side of the aisle, the women and children on the other side.

With the expanding possibilities in government paid work, came decline in private women industry. Most young educated people now looked down on what until now were indigenous enterprises. The urban areas witnessed a huge shift in population of migrants, male and female into the cities. Majority of the older women or the ones who did not achieve western education kept mainly to trading. The mass exodus of young men from the villages into the urban centers in search of white collared jobs created newer opportunities for these women to expand their horizon of trading. Unfortunately, this only led to more freedom and lack of cohesiveness and security found in structured family life.
The effects of the slave trade, colonialism and influence of the two main religious incursion into West Africa at the turn of the 17th to early 18th century is a topic of continuous studies among historians. The effects and impact of this collusion has changed the course of the black man’s history and perhaps destiny for ever. The scope of this paper does not allow a detailed analysis of this clash of cultures. It suffices to point out the highlights of how history was forced to change its course, particularly as it reflects gender differentiation and understanding. The first and most important influence has to do with how the Yorubas now view, understand and interpret familial relationships which hitherto formed the foundation and bedrock of every relationship. Gustav Jahoda notes;

….the ties of kinship, which are rooted in the old cosmology, have always been close and powerful in West Africa: and the feelings of respect and dependence towards the family of origin have not weakened in proportion to the acceptance of new norms in other spheres…. Even educated Africans derive comfort and security from the knowledge that they can confidently look forward to help from their kin if they should happen to fall upon evil days; it requires a very independent cast of mind to be able to cut oneself loose under such circumstances. Therefore it becomes necessary to tread an uneasy middle path between following the time-honoured customs as expected by one’s elders and pursuing one’s own goals and aspiration."

With mass movement of people from their homes and families to bigger cities, with the new ‘freedoms’ brought about by western education and ‘liberation’ from the old ways came the destruction of family values and control. Men and women started to look at each other differently, it was precisely at this moment in Yoruba history that patriarchy and subjugation of women was born! Closely related was the immediate but not lasting effect of the new religions (Christianity and Islam). While the new religions were based on a philosophy of separate spheres where men were associated to the public world of work, women were associated to the private sphere of home. This ideology, which was totally strange to Yoruba culture, suddenly became the legitimate,
religious and imperial justification for gender differentiation. Even though Christianity can easily be accused of engendering this ideology of separate spheres, paradoxically, this impediment also became grounds by which women, decades later will claim their liberation.

Closely related to the paradox of the effects of Christianity on the traditional Yoruba culture and society is the same kind of ambivalent effects of western education. On the one hand, it limited the possibilities of what women could achieve within a British patriarchal set up. At the same time, it setup the possibilities for women who will eventually excel by breaking boundaries and barriers, especially after independence to begin to fight for women’s rights.

It is important to note that a few women within the Yoruba enclave were actively involved in the process of struggle for independence. There were two political movements in Yoruba land actively engaged in the struggle for independence; the Action Group (AG) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). From the early 50s to independence in 1960, there were a few women in party politics whose main role was to support the men. They organized rallies, fundraisers, prepared women organizations pre-elections, etc. There were two iconic women leaders (among a host of others) back then: Mrs. H.I.D. Awolowo and Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. They are iconic for the roles they and their families played in pre-colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. As for the women, in one word, generally, they were relegated to a second class position until post-independence, especially in the 1980s when women began to contest for elections and win seats in the high government offices or public boards.
Post-Colonial Era

In the few years immediately after 1960, the year of Nigeria’s Independence from British colonial rule, the new nation started to evolve its own history and destiny. Unfortunately, the entity created by British ingenuity called Nigeria was a miss-mashed of many cultures and peoples. The new nation could not divest itself of its British heritage. As such, in Yoruba land, as in many other tribal cultures of Nigeria, a clash of cultures had occurred with greater repercussion than anyone could have anticipated at the time.

The post-colonial experience of women in Yoruba land contributed to a newer understanding of gender differentiation among the Yorubas. The traditional notion of marriage also changed structurally as an after effect of and influence of British culture and the Euro-centric culture of Christianity preached by missionaries of various European extract and persuasion. Mercy Oduyoye surmises that Christianity as preached from Western lenses in Africa does little to challenge sexism even though the Christian Church constantly mouths rhetoric of equal worth of persons. For her, “Christianity reinforces the cultural conditioning of compliance and submission and leads to the depersonalization of women.” She articulated further that African men and women are well aware of the impact of colonization and Christianization of Africa. But that, women particularly, accuse the Church of capitulating to Western norms which then is garbed in Christianity and presented to African women.

As women’s power and influence waned in the society, the African Independent Churches, (and later on the Anglican and mainline orthodoxy will follow suit) by creating offices within the church to cater for women’s needs. These Christian women leaders were commonly referred to
as *Iya-Ijo* (mother of the faith community), *Iya Egbe* (mother of Associations), *Iyalode* (mother at the forefront) etc. They were opinion leaders and represented the interests of women in decision making at the church council level. The early missionary churches also found out that the women responded and converted more quickly than men responded, (A phenomenon which is true till date in the Yoruba society). Women also converted for a barrage of different reasons, fear of witchcraft, infertility, success at trading etc. and because once the women were converted, most times their children came with them, the missionaries concentrated on converting women before the more sceptical men. Even though this worked for the missionaries, it did not help the women in understanding their role in the new post-colonial era. The church preached women’s subordination to their husbands in all things and in all ways. Here we find another instance where western culture negatively impacted Yoruba traditional norms. The Yorubas are a deeply religious people; therefore, women’s subordination to men as a religious injunction was accepted as sacrosanct. D. McCall in his essay referred to this situation as one of “superordination and subordination.”

Within the dynamism of change the Yoruba culture experienced a post-independence/colonial era creation of an elite class of educated and ‘society’ women. Tension therefore grew between the Yoruba local and uneducated women with the socialites. The class transformation of women city dwellers as against the uneducated women who lived in the suburbs or villages grew. The ability of these women to speak with a unified voice was broken once and for all. Notably, the elitist city dwellers created associations and groups which were meant only for educated women. This situation, according to Ifi Amadiume raised further questions of leadership, legitimacy, representation, accountability and corruption which
eventually marked various women organizations post-independence. It is not only that this natural ‘selection’ and stratification was culturally a taboo among the Yorubas, but that it shows clearly gender differentiation even within the women fold.

The new political parties in post-independence Yoruba land, (The Action Group which metamorphosed into the Unity Party of Nigeria UPN), especially between 1960 and 1985 proposed egalitarian reforms which will give equal opportunities to women in education and government service. These efforts have failed woefully, successive Nigerian government have kept women firmly in subordinate roles to men, in public service, in applying for academic seats, breaking new grounds in areas traditionally assumed to be men's jobs, i.e. the military, transportation services, and priesthood in Christian Churches, etc. Denzer encapsulates it thus:

Women employees suffered many inequalities. Pay scales were lower than for men, for example, and there were fewer chances for promotion. Until the 1950s government policy concerning the promotion of female civil servants specified that women should not be placed in positions of authority over men. They had to resign upon marriage, the customary practice then in the west, working after that on contract, renewable on a monthly basis. Young Nigerian professionals coming into positions formerly reserved for the British frequently faced racial discrimination from their white superiors.... Young women also experienced sexual discrimination both from their white male superiors and Nigerian male colleagues.

Evaluation

The world has become a global village and cultures have collided and inter-mixed, and there isn’t much anyone can do about this. It is a phenomenon that will continue to evolve as long as there is human society. We can only continue to learn from these interactions who we were, who we are now and the possibilities of who we can be in the future. The issue of gender, especially as it relates to marital union, differ from culture to culture. From the Yoruba world
view, gender did not exist in the sense in which we understand it today. From the Yoruba myths of creation and evolution of human race, the tradition has a didactic model of equality of understanding maleness and femaleness as a unique attribute of oneness. Yet, within this kind of conversation, I find disconcertingly, that there are too many issues at stake so much so that at every point of the discussion, we stand close to contradicting the previous thesis. Mercy Oduyoye summarizes the situation thus;

The dichotomies of dualistic thinking we Africans usually associate with Western thought begin to resemble male thinking: a scheme that enables those in power to legitimize their authority over those not in power. Dichotomies enable the “distancing” of issues and challenges, while theorizing postpones action for change. We African women observe the divide-and-rule strategy of paternalism and we see a strategy we formerly taught to denounce as exploitative and domesticating, part and parcel of colonialism. Western approaches to feminism may differ, but the goal—an end to the marginalization of women—is sound.

Gender discussion within the academic circle has gained a momentum in the past two or three decades, especially among feminists and womanists circles. This debate has taken off in different directions; emancipation of womanhood, fight for equality of genders, breakthrough in feminist spirituality, self-identity and intellectualism, marriage and family life etc. This reflection is interested in understanding the issue of gender from a particular tribal point of view so as to understand a theological explication of gender and Christian marriage. After the analysis above, it is legitimate to ask “what now?”

First, it is necessary that the African can re-claim some of their ancient practices which are of value and can add to the quality of their integral human development. I do not suppose it is wrong to learn from a culture that places equal value on men and women especially as society claim to be more civilized and more advanced intellectually? Part of societal intellectual growth and
maturation is the ability to appropriate and synthesize moral and ethical conducts from past traditions, civilizations and cultures.

Secondly, within the academic, economic, political and religious spheres, women no longer should be defined in the narrow, restrictive and patronizing terms of biological function; wife, mother, sexual partner or even in their domestic role; house keeper, children rarer and chef. According to Pauline Webb, she points out that women’s identity should not be limited to the physical difference of skin, colour or sex so that the question of equality is not over simplified to merely treating everyone the same, rather, “how to recognize the several identities and affirm the diversity of race or gender whistle at the same time affording equal value and opportunity to these different kinds of human beings.”

Additionally, women themselves must overcome a self-limiting identification and classification. Women should no longer define themselves by relationships, i.e., mother, wife, aunt etc. The racialization of social relations which creates different molds of being a woman either as a “white woman versus a black woman”, “first world woman versus a third world woman”, or even the class and elitist separationism common in developing nations among women. All of these give credence to the way the rest of the world interprets what womanhood means and where she is placed within the order of things, as the popular Yoruba proverb goes; “bi onigba ba se pe igba e, la se nба pe.” - “It is the way you hold yourself in high esteem that others will hold you.” Or “If you put a small value on yourself, rest assured that the world will not raise your value.” Women have to be more convincing in their arguments for what feminism/ womanist really means different from a mere quarrel with semantics and a pursuance of an academic ideal which is trending right now but soon enough will be cast upon the heap of ruins of such novelties and dead ideas.
Finally, to be able to reclaim a gender equal society akin to what was obtainable in the traditional Yoruba society pre-colonial era, there is an urgent need to re-address social discrimination of women especially in the home and work places. There will be the need to re-evaluate gender roles within the family especially in the ways we carry out responsibilities as male or female within the family. The former ways in which ‘manhood’ and ‘womanhood’ is approached as a place of power must be dismantled. Power will have to be re-translated to mean devotion, protection and mutual submission. Womanhood also will be willing to rise to equality in social, political and familial responsibilities.

Conclusion

Most researchers and historians of Yoruba/West African cultures agree on the overall that slavery, colonialism and missionary activities changed the cultural and social life of the peoples inhabiting the Western shores of Africa. The impact continues to be felt even today in many different ways. Arguably not all of it is negative. But when viewed from the point of view of gender differentiation, marriage and marriage customs, European culture has negatively impacted Yoruba culture. I have carefully enumerated this in the economic, political, social, and familial settings. Pre-arrival of the colonialists and missionaries, Yoruba women had no notion of gender subordination. Yoruba men were not thinking in terms of patriarchy, because everyone understood relations in terms of family, tribe or cultural unity. It will serve the Yoruba community well to reclaim that aspect of their past history so as to re-invigorate family life and ties and to once again give women the place of respect they deserve as wives, sisters and above all, as mothers.
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Notes

2 Samuel Johnson. A History of the Yoruba: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate, (Lagos: CMS Bookshops, 1960) P.113
3 For lack of space and time, this period will also designate pre-slave trade era.
7 Ibid. Susan Geiger, p.30
9 The fuller accounts can be found in the published works of missionaries, travellers and colonialists, i.e. Hugh Clapperton (1826), Richard and John lander (1830), Thomas Bowen (1857), William H. Clarke (1854-55)
12 Oriki is a form of Yoruba poetry which recants the valour of one progeny and applauds the achievements of ones ancestors. It also points one to trying to walk the paths of virtue trodded by one’s ancestors. Hen this poetry is done by those who hold the tradition, the praises and style of singing is so poignant that people have been known often to emotionally breakdown and cry, some others respond by giving gifts, especially cash reward to the bard and dancing in frenzy to his or her praises.
xvi This became a sub-culture when educated women were seen at the dance with gentlemen, smoking and dancing the waltz which included holding unmarried young girls in what the locals considered too close proximity to married or unmarried men. It was simply cultures clashing.
xx Ibid. p.129
xxvii LaRay Denzer, p.28
xxviii Ibid. Mercy Amba Oduyoye. P.214
xxix Pauline Webb. “Gender as an Issue.” A Paper Presented University of British Columbia, Vancouver, for University Counsellors and Student Services Conference, June 1986. p.6

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