

The History and Philosophies of Asafo, The Akan (FANTES) Perspective

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Abstract

This is one of the on-going discussions of the Asafo, companies found amongst the Fantes in Ghana. It is an episode that is targeted in bringing out holistic understanding of the philosophy of the Asafo Company.

This study employed the descriptive method through which enquiry-discovery and unstructured oral interview techniques was used to unveil some historical beliefs and the way they perceive and do things on their own in the Asafo groups.

The study also elaborates on some of the sacrifices done on their instruments of which the members of the Asafo groups do not just see it as instruments but gods that guide them in their various manoeuvres amidst their songs.

Most of the philosophies are orally transmitted from one generation to another, making them loose most vital information's as its been transmitted. It has therefore become important to document for future referencing.

Keywords

- Asafo: A traditional military organisation or group found in Akan traditional cultures in the central and coastal belts of Ghana.
- Asafo flags: a piece of cloth with applied pattern or picture on it that represents a traditional military organization of the Akan traditional areas.
- Philosophical interpretation: the way in which someone explains or understands the study of the nature and meaning of existence, truth, good and evil, etc.
- Symbolism: the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities.
- Youth: the period of time when someone is young, especially the period when someone is a teenager.

Preamble

The name Asafo was coined out of the mobilization of the youths of the Akans who settled along the Coastal belts of Ghana, they normally call themselves Fantes. They formed this traditional militant organization called 'Asafo'. The name Asafo is made up of two distinct words, 'Sa' which means war or path and 'Fo' which literally means people. So Asafo means people who go to war or clear paths. It was explained that in the olden days, the Asafo Company performed the functions of protecting and guiding towns and villages against enemy attacks, wild animals and clearing of paths. Hence, besides clearing of paths, it was their responsibility to defend or attack any opposing groups. Likewise, they also went to the forest to search for any wild animal that was terrorising the towns and villages and killed it, or searched for missing persons.

They also assisted in conveying of corpses to their destinations, carrying sick persons and pregnant women to the nearest fetish priests or priestesses for medical attentions. The duties of Asafo companies were many.

In recent times however, the Asafo companies perform social and cultural functions during festivals, durbar of chiefs, state functions, funerals and so on. Almost every Fante town or village has Asafo Company. Like any other organisation, the Asafo Company constituted varied personalities charged with different responsibilities.

Conclusion

History has placed the African Independent Churches to be very relevant to the Yoruba people in the South western part of Nigeria. The Yoruba people came from the spiritual, cultural and social background which was very different from those freed Africans during the abolishment of slave trade and the missionaries. Therefore, there was a difficulty in grasping the western laden Christianity introduces to the Yoruba people. It was in this light that the emergence of AICs became very relevant to them, as the churches put their cultural, spiritual and social world views in perspective.

The relevance of the African Independent Churches are however not limited to the period of the colonial masters or when the missionaries were still readily with us. The AICs have continued to play significant roles among the Yoruba people even in the contemporary society. Their relevance keep blossoming so much that, the history of Nigeria as a nation today cannot be complete without mention a good number of the African Independent Churches. It is to this end that the AICs can be said to have paved way to development of the Yoruba people as a total man.

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sickness is attributed to witchcraft or other metaphysical cause. Like in the traditional belief, the Yoruba believe that the witches or sorcerers can afflict people with deadly sicknesses, and such illnesses can be medically cured. More so, the cost of medical treatment becomes a burden on the long run for some people and they found these AICs as a way out of their predicament. Therefore, despite the little improvement in medical facilities in Nigeria, the African Independent Churches remain relevant in the domain of divine healing and alternative medicine.

Economic relevance of AICs

The African Independence Churches have been very relevant in the economical life of the Yoruba people in the South western Nigeria. The emergence of Native African Church in Nigeria in 1981 was not unconnected with the devolution of trade and commerce in the monopoly of the missionary. (Beyer, 1997) The contemporary AICs have kept the pace of the economic relevance of the movement in far broader way.

Several Pentecostal and neo Pentecostal churches today have become a very big enterprise with their leaders purchasing large expanse of land to build campground. For Instance, The 50,000 sitter church auditorium in Otta Ogun state called Cannan land, the Redemption Camp, Lagos express way, Ogun State, own by Redeemed Christian Church of God and many others own by other churches such as Deeper Life, Mountain of Fire, Ori Oke Taborah etc.

The churches have expanded their horizons into business such as micro finance banks, schools - providing education from primary level to the University, Insurance companies, studios and many others. Therefore, the AICs have extended itself in the employment of labour aside the numerous clergy services acquired by these churches. The Church also employ services of the other servicing industries in oil and gas, airline, transport, building, musical instrument, decoration, horticulture, and many others. These become imperative because of the growing enlargement of church buildings, use of a chain number of cars and aircraft for the ministry, generator servicing and many others.

In Nigeria today, churches are playing a key role in the educational sector. The Living Faith Church A.K.A Winners chapel today leads with two state of the heart Universities: Covenant and Land Mark Universities in Otta, Ogun State and Omu Aran, Kwara State respectively. Others include Redeemer's University, Benson Idahosa University, Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Mountain University and others. Therefore the AICs have remained a very big employer of labour in Nigeria today and by so helping to develop the nation's economy.

Aside, the direct participation in business and educational areas; the AICs have been noted for their faith based business seminars and prayer over member's trade and businesses. Several Yoruba converts believe that such prayer helps in enhancing their breakthrough in the business arena. It is common today to see fliers advertising as 'Anointing for prosperity', 'Deliverance from Business Hardship', 'Power for Business Breakthrough' and other captions around the street and television in Nigeria. People goes as far as getting anointing oil to sprinkle on their shops, offices and products in order to have a breakthrough.

The African Independent Churches organizes prayers for divine security of life, home and businesses. The fear of insecurity is a problem in Nigeria. People often resort in prayers of the prophets and other Christian Charismatic figures for protection. While some believe in prayers, some go further to pray on mantle or candle to hang on the door of their houses. Some others believe in their church stickers as a protection symbols from arm robbers and other devilish attacks. So the stickers pasted on their cars, houses, bags, door post home and offices.

Social relevance of the AICs

The AICs have largely become both a spiritual and a social group. They are social because they form a block of people with some similar identities and quest. Resulting from Church relationship and the fact of the communal nature of the Yoruba people, interactions extend to other areas of life. AICs organizes youth forum, single forum where youth seeking for marriage partners attend both for spiritual help and social interactions. Often time some of these churches encourage members to marry from each other. However, while some of the spiritual/Aladura churches encourage polygamy, most others refute polygamy as Christian form of marriage.

Churches encourage their members to participate as a family when any of their members have occasions such as wedding, naming and funeral ceremonies. Some even call for the church to assist them in what they way they can. While they encourage members to moderate in spending, they do however identify with them.

African Independent Churches also contribute in social services such as catering for the orphanage and the motherless babies' home. They are involved in giving scholarships for the less privilege around them. The Synagogue Church of Nations headed by T.B Joshua has been noted for generous donations of money and other materials to the less privilege at the Ikotun area of Lagos State where the church headquarter is situated in Nigeria. Some of these AICs churches have also planted mission hospitals and clinics to help the poor rural people, extend gifts and education to imamatees and give scholarships to indigent students to further their education either in the secondary schools or tertiary institutions in the south western Nigeria.

then. It was on this ground that the Faith Tabernacle Church sort for an association with the Apostolic Church in Bradford .It was as a result of this association that the government reduced their persecutions of these AICs prophets and leaders for the fear of being exposed for highhandedness in their home country (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1997: 75-6).

The African Independent Churches have continued to play vital roles in the contemporary politics. Several political aspirants and leaders have sought the spiritual assistance of these AICs prophets and leaders in gaining political position in Nigeria. Some engage in the prediction for the political class and the citizen in general what lies ahead of the nation politically. They are also involved in educating their members on the qualities of the people they are to vote into position, encourage them to register for election and vote according to their conscience.

Politicians also in response to their victory associate with some of these AICs leaders. For instance, the swearing in thanks giving service of the incumbent Nigerian President- Dr. Good luck Ebele Jonathan on 28th May, 2011 witness the participation of a number of prominent AICs leaders of neo-Pentecostal movement such as pastor Ayo Oristejafor, Pastor E.A Adeboye, Bishop David Oyedepo, Prophet Uma Ukpai, Bishop Margret Idahosa and a host of others. Several Governors in the south western Nigeria has claimed that they sought for the spiritual assistance of some of these AICs leaders and prophets for sustenance of their political career. Hence, the AICs churches have contributed to the development of the AICs of politics and democracy in Nigeria.

AICs relevance in faith healing and alternative medicine

Healing is very prominent with the African Independent Churches. The first AICs of the Aladura extract in the south western Nigeria can be traced to the Precious stone group which began at Ijebu-Ode around 1918. The small group started consequent the “bubonic and small pox” epidemic-an aftermath of the World War I which was ravaging the world then. As a result many white missionaries left the churches and flee to their home country as the situation was very bad in the South western Nigeria. It was on account of the exit of Rev. Gansallo of Saint Saviour (CMS) due to the outbreak, that the small group that later became the Precious Stone started (Ayegboyin & Ishola 1997, and Beyer 1997) the group believed strongly theta through prayer the epidemic would be averted but the spiritual vision of miss Odunlami of praying on rain water was confirmed to have healed so many who had contacted the epidemic. (Ayegboyin, 1997 & Ishola: 67)

The belief in divine healing, use of ‘prayer water’ prayed upon by prophets or leaders became prominent with this group as they metamorphosised into Faith Tabernacle, Nigerian Apostolic Church, United Apostolic Church and to the present nomenclature, Christ Apostolic Church (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1997) Other AICs movement. Other movement like the Cherubim and Seraph cofounded by Moses Orimolade and Mrs Abiodun also held the belief of using water as a means of healing the sick. Oschoffa the founder of Celestial Churches do not only use ordinary but also introduce Green water as a means of healing diverse sicknesses. Oshitelu, (2007: 106) observes that:

just as in traditional religion, the Aladura offer the essential spiritual resources to help them achieve a satisfactory life’s destiny, which is very crucial to the Yoruba regardless of educational status. This includes wealth, children, long life and freedom from fear of evil powers and witchcraft. Like in the traditional belief, whatever is a man’s problem or predicament is seen as illness, which needs been healed.

The AICs of are often on the television today claiming the divine power of God to heal people of all manners of infirmities as they come to believe in Jesus Christ the Saviour. Healing of the medical incurable illness such as HIV&AIDS, cancer, diabetics and others have been claimed to have been healed by these AICs. While some especially the Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal and some Aladura churches like Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper Life Ministry, Living Faith International, church of God Mission, claims the miraculous power of God to heal in their ministry; some also organize healing schools for example Christ Embassy A.K.A Believer’s Love World to ensure that people receiving through faith in God’s world.

However, some of the Aladural/spiritual churches allow the use of certain rituals such as bathing in a flowing river, use of palm front, use of oil and others in the healing of sick people. Some of them also make use of the local herbs to cure sickness such as prostate cancer, stroke and paralysis successfully. There is very vital to the Yoruba converts because they consider their health and good living of great priority especially when such sicknesses can be attributed to a metaphysical cause. Cases have been heard of sick people discharged from hospital to seek spiritual assistance. While some have been successfully healed by these AICs; there are also cases where the sickness worsened or the sick later died in the process.

Interestingly, good patronages of timber and caliber have been noticed with the AICs for the purpose of their health in Nigeria either by seeking for divine healing or through alternative medicine especially when their

others like C.A.C and some of the neo Pentecostals like mountain of fire believe in going to some specific mountain of prayer popularly called *Ori Oke*. Oshitelu (2007: 107) observes opines that, “these are features of African traditional religion: the belief that the abode of *Olodumare* is in the high places.” Their prayers include the use of psalms, fasting which they believe hastens answers to prayers. They also believe in special prayers: for breaking ancestral curse, for the unemployed to get job, for overseas travelers to gain visa from the embassies, for the waiting mothers and others with some common spiritually induced social problems.

Some of the AICs churches also like invoking God through the names of their late Christian spiritual leaders believing in a spiritual covenant link with the names during worship and prayers. Such as mention include: God of Moses Orimolade, God of Joseph Ayo Babalola, God of Adeboye and others. Oshitelu (2007: 108) observes that:

in the Aladura Churches, one often hears references made to “*Olorun awon Baba- nla wa*”,(that is God of our forefathers)-Ahraham, Isaac, Jacob; “*Olorun awon woli igbani*,” (God of the Prophets of old)- Moses, Caleb, Elijah. *Olorun Mose Orimolade*. (God of Moses Orimolade); and *Olorun Oshitelu* (God of Oshitelu)

In this way the AICs appropriated the doctrine of ancestral reference in to their liturgical practice of the Yoruba people. “No one can hope to appreciate the thoughts and feelings of the black man who does not realize that to him the dead are not dead but living...” (Awolalu, 1979:53 citing Talbot 1926:298) Yoruba people believe in paying homage to their dead, who they believe live in the other worldly and they could be of help to them spiritually. Awolalu, (1979:64) asserts that, “we are convinced that the ancestors are included in the religious system of the Yoruba and that they play the role of being the immediate intermediaries between men and the ‘totally’ supersensible world.”

The Yoruba people therefore found the idea of venerating their ancestors and heroes in AICs’ mention of names of late spiritual covenant fathers a close ideology and found it very easy to switch. They believe that associating with such spiritual persons help them to believe God of the Bible more strongly. Ayegboyin, (2010:5) also asserts that, “The strong belief of the Aladura in God and the uniqueness of their fellowship with Him are evident in the claims of the divine calls of the leaders.” Observing, the Aladura Church in particular, he further comments that, “Members of the of the Church of the Lord refer to God as *Olorun Oshitelu*, *Olorun Adejobi*, *Olorun Oduwole*. (The God of the Primates Oshitelu, Adejobi and Apostle Oduwole)

The CAC usually refer to Him as the *Olorun Babalola*, while in the C & S, God is referred to as *Olorun Orimolade*”. These liturgical practices that closely associate with African Religion helped most Yoruba converts into Christianity to find the AICs an easy place to worship and appreciate spirituality and Christianity at the same time. They were able to understand the context more easily and flow along with them.

Political relevance of AICs

The African Independent Churches have played a key role in the political affairs of the Yoruba people. The Yoruba in south western of Nigeria were able to respond more effectively with the western traders, imperialists and subsequent colonialism through the missionary leadership. Ayandele, (1966: 178) observes that, “It was natural that before 1914 the Church was the centre of the social, spiritual and political aspirations of educated Africans and illiterate converts.” He further comments that,

Educated Africans, in our period, accepted Christianity whole heartedly and emphasized it apparently to the exclusion of purely political matters, not because they were not patriots, nor because they were not patriots, nor because they had no political vision of an independent nation. On the contrary they were intensely patriotic and they were intensely patriotic and believed that they were paving the way for the creation of the Nigerian nation by patronizing Christianity. But political independence, the vision of which they had, must be shelve because it could not come until Christianity was fully established and they, educated Africans, were in complete control of it; one independence in the management of Church affairs was secured, political independence would logically and automatically follow like cause and effect (Ayandele, 1966: 179).

However, the nationalism feeling and Ethiopianism were not achieved in the mission churches but in the AICs. One typical example of these churches is the United Native African Church in Nigeria. It was interesting that the Aladura movement like the C&S and Faith Tabernacle leaders were victimized by Colonial government because of their prophetic calls and publications that condemn heavy taxation which was dominant

created an inseparable union between the visible world of society and the invisible world of heaven".(Ijaola & Asojo, 2010: 40-41, citing T'shaka, 1995:90).

Onakpa & Akase (2008: 202) has defined culture as that which

... provides the society with the inherited transmissible code of conduct as both part and function of the total system of ideas, values, knowledge, philosophy, law, moral, believes system which constitute the content of life of a society. Culture provides order, guidance for social behaviour and stability amidst rapid change

Culture is therefore, "the totality of the way of life evolved by a people as they try to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms of an organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours." (Obasola, 2006:104, citing Nigerian Cultural Policy, 1989) It is obvious therefore, that the gospel brought by the western missionaries in to the Yoruba land was first of all western in all sense; second, was anti Yoruba view because during this period, Europe and America had separated the secular view of the world from the spirit with the later appreciably de-emphasized.

African Independent churches expanded their horizon of the gospel by reading if from the cultural glasses. The people are therefore free to dress in their native wears without and discrimination or being considered to be less Christian. The respect for traditions such as appropriate regards to elders, were carried on by the AICs. The vernacular language is being used by most of the AICs churches especially in the C.A.C, Cherubim and Seraph and others and use interpreters for their English audience. Yoruba from the southwestern Nigeria appreciate praying in their mother tongue either in their private or public prayers. They found themselves more expressive and therefore been able to channel their petitions. Songs were sung in the mother tongues and they are easily learnt and appreciated. Often these songs arouse them to a spiritual ecstasy as obvious in most Aladura churches.

Therefore, worship in the Yoruba language either during Sunday services, naming and marriage ceremony therefore makes more meaning from the beginning to the end for them; as they do not have to bother what a particular word means in English, or have to wonder what the English preacher tried to say either in English or Yoruba. The AICs allowed the people's culture to be relevant in the worship system as they coordinate most of their worship in their language.

Liturgical Relevance

The AICs churches allowed the use of many traditional musical instruments in their liturgy. Unlike the missionary churches where drums and clapping of hands in the praise of God is a taboo; the AIC incorporate the use of local drums such as *Gan gan*, *Iya-Ilu*, *Omele* and others such as *as agogo*, and *sekere*. Oshitelu, (2007 : 107)opines that, In Aladura Churches, liturgies such as music and prayer are lively unlike often abstract, inconceivable liturgies of western theology of the 'mission' churches. They make use of anointing oil, holy water, symbols. Oshitelu, (2007:106) observes that:

Omi tutu (cold /ordinary water) and Ororo Adura (blessed oil) are used for faith healing. Like Yoruba traditional believers, for the Aladura faith is not abstract. Like in Yoruba traditional religion, the Aladura believe that faith must be assisted with concrete objects like *omi Iye*, *ororo Adura* and *Abela* (candles).

The africaness of the AICs liturgy endears it to many Yoruba people. Ayegboyin & Ishola (1997: 88) observes:

The C&S Churches use indigenous instruments like drums, *sekere*(drum made from calabash netted with strings and beads or cowries), flutes and so on in their sermon which are usually less formal (a member can raise song at any time in course of the exhortation); they use Yoruba ideas to explain Christian Faith. The Christian God is even merged into the traditional figure of the Supreme Being: *Olodumare*.

Hence the AICs were able to provide a liturgical context that brings the people into a participatory worship without prejudice.

Virtually all of the AICs believe in the efficacy of prayers. The emphasis on prayers is both theological and practical in these churches. However, they differ in some of their practices in prayer. While most of the of the Aladura believe in some sort of holy ground where they believe that prayer answers there more speedily,

Yoruba people of the south western of Nigeria has encouraged its dominance in the area; despite the existence of the missionary churches which were first founded among the Yoruba people.

Area of Relevance of AICs to Yoruba People

AICs relevance in provision of a homely setting for Yoruba converts.

The African Independent churches provide for the Yoruba people of the South western Nigeria a homely setting in which they can worship God. Homeliness in the sense can be describe as a native territory where they can get a home care without feeling of racial prejudice in any form which was apparent in the mission churches. Ayegboyin, (1997: 23) observes that, "These churches to some varying degrees are characterized by a desire for African self-expression and freedom from missionary control." The missionary churches were heavily westernized in expression and worldview, and having to conform to another worldview in the apparent denial of Yoruba worldviews makes it difficult for converts to express themselves in the world view they are brought up. Therefore, they do not really feel at home but rather like a visitor in the missionary Churches.

The compulsion of certain educational attainment in order to be relevant in the Establish Churches was one factor that was less considered in the AICs churches such as The Cherubim and Seraph, Precious Stone, Aladura Churches, C.A.C, Celestial Churches and others. While education is not discountenanced, it was not however a requirement to function as a church member. Yoruba Christians are allowed to speak vernacular in preaching and in prayer without any restriction, rather than reading prayers from the prayer books only. Putting Bishop Ajayi Crowther in perspective Ayandele (1966:206) observes that, "he refused to allow the vernacular to be taught in the Niger Mission. As late as 1890 he emphasized that the medium of teaching throughout the Mission would be English" it was also in this period that even the educated Africans who refused to change their names or cast away European dress was stigmatized nondescript, a libel on his country and a blot on civilization" (Ayandele, 1996 :259).

Therefore, the AICs provide that medium which the mission churches denied the Yoruba people in expressing themselves. They accommodate both the literate and the non-literate especially. The unschooled converts could fellowship without prejudice and a feeling of strangeness in the church. They could freely associate with themselves since there were less social or status discrimination among them as the communality way of life which was original to the Yoruba people was revitalized in the AICs churches. In the words of Ayegboyin, (1997: 24)

They held that by this they were breeding their own kind of African Church where African institutions would be recognized and respected. They felt that any religious institution, which did not meet Africans daily life's experience, would create a spiritual hunger. In the AICs, therefore liturgy was made more African, as they made use of dreams, singing, drumming and dancing, some which were ingredients of African cultural manifestation.

The African Independent Churches therefore brought the gospel into the African-Yoruba context, enliven African traditions and institutions with the gospel of the bible, and create a setting where the Yoruba people could worship. Most importantly they move the Yoruba from the known to the unknown rather than imposing the unknown to the people. It is from this background that, the African independent churches gained the heart, support and encouragement of the Yoruba people and become undeniably relevant I their society to date.

Cultural relevance of AICs

It is very difficult to alienate culture from religion but they must not be confused. Idowu, (1973: 5) observes that,

religion and culture are involved in each other and that it is often difficult to draw a precise line of demarcation between the two, if that is ever possible, especially in places where people still consider life as one indivisible whole and have not reached the stage of artificially dividing the reality in to the sacred and the secular.

"Therefore there seems to be that tendency of uniqueness of each culture's understanding of human person base on their religion, morality, arts and scientific understanding" (Asojo & Ijaola, 2008: 64) Hence, the Yoruba people in their cultural uniqueness perceived the world undivided but as a twin of the spirit and physical realms ; as for them, "every aspect of ancient and traditional African life reinforced a philosophy and cosmology that

The Relevance of African Independent Churches to the Yoruba of South Western Part of Nigeria

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Abstract

African Independent churches (AICs) have contributed immensely to the spirituality and preservation of values and traditional institutions of the Yoruba people in the southwestern Nigeria. Emerging from the missionary's and colonialist's imposition of western ideals, liturgy and life styles, African Independent Churches penetrated into the minds of the Yoruba people through contextualization of the bible's truth and de-westernization of the gospel. Hence, they prevailed in interpreting the bible from African's perspective. The relevance of AICs is therefore obvious in the entire life of the Yoruba people ranging from their culture, spirituality, politics, social life, economy, education and others. It is therefore evident that, the relevance of AICs has led to its proliferation and attracted a numerous membership from all walks of life in the South western Nigeria. Interestingly, a good number of the missionary churches have today taken a cue from the AICs to incorporate some of the ideals of AICs into their churches especially in the area of respect for some of the African culture they found compatible with the Christian Bible

Key words: African Independent Churches, Relevance, Culture, Colonialism, Liturgy

Introduction

The African independent churches (AICs) have played some key roles in the life of the Yoruba people in the south western area of Nigeria: especially, in bringing Christianity to the appreciation of their worldview, and their world view in appreciation of Christianity. The Yoruba converts who found Christianity in the garb of westernization appalling and exploiting resorted to the understanding of the Bible in the Yoruba context. It was in this manner that AICs brought the Gospel of salvation to the Yoruba people with a vivid attempt to de-westernize the gospel: a counter to what the White missionaries deem necessary as the acceptable Christian practice. Gaiya, (2002:3) therefore observes that AICs, "although a different sort of Christianity than the one planted by Western missionaries; it was by all standards an outgrowth from mission Christianity. The African independent churches were Africans' way of domesticating the Christian teachings."

The inevitability of African Independent Churches is evident today in the obvious relevance it plays in the preservation of Yoruba cultural traditions and institutions such as communality which incidentally, a way of life common with the biblical Israelite as against individualism entrenched in the western way of life. Communality as a way of life has helped the Yoruba people to protect their definition of family which transcends the nuclear family concept to the extended family relationship.

Spirituality as understood in the AICs is given a far deeper understanding because of their appreciation of the reality of the spirit world. The Yoruba believed in the world of the spirits, ancestors, and other metaphysical forces which often are ignored by the Orthodox missionary churches because of their scientific and secular orientation of the world. The Yoruba have always believed in the dualistic nature of the world where the forces of good and evil are warring. It was from this backdrop that the Yoruba belief in the reality of the existence of evil. Their experience of evil is real and no theology can explain it away. They therefore believe in the necessity of salvation as a deliverance from evil. Hence, the AICs appreciating the practical experiences of the Yoruba people makes it relevant to them as an alternative to Traditional Religion which was entrenched in idolatry.

AICs emergence in the history of Christian churches in 19th century can therefore be said to be largely linked with the idea of making the bible relevant to the entire life of Africans, spiritually, culturally, politically, economically, and socially even in their very challenging situations(slave trade, imperialism and colonization) (Kalu, 2000:11).The AICs championed the course of preaching the total gospel to the total African man unlike the missionaries that only consider some biblical truths relevant and decline on others such as faith healing, loud prayer and others.

The African Independent Churches have been variously categorized as observed by Ayegboyin (1997) and Gaiya, (2002). However, this paper is considering AICs as Churches that are independent of the missionary churches, founded by Africans, and initially established for Africans before taking mission to overseas countries. Nevertheless, the main argument of this paper is that, the relevance of AICs to the multifaceted life of the

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vision for visible unity in terms of its nature and goal. This vision can then be the expression of its constituent members.

Ecclesiological issues hindering unity in CAN include ordination of priests, hierarchy of offices and differences in polity. For example, the standard of theological education for each denomination is different from the other; this often creates a social complex at meetings, and affects respect accorded each other.

The CAN is in a position to facilitate unity-oriented philosophy. This is best done by setting ecumenical objectives that chart the course for their unity. Evangelization of the Muslims could be an ideal objective for unity, rather than territorial defence that has not reduced the onslaught on the church especially in the North of Nigeria.

Though each leader talks about unity of the Nigerian church, the will to redirect the CAN from the political pressure group and watch dog to a more dynamic ecumenical movement is absent. This can be achieved if leadership emergence is depoliticized, and government recognition is played down.

So far CAN has achieved a lot for Christians in Nigeria, its vibrancy depended largely on the charisma of its presidents. Presidency has been rotated principally between the CCN and the PFN; it was only in 2005 that it achieved a location in Abuja. Undoubtedly, it enjoys more loyalty now than before, thus, it can become more ecumenically relevant by confronting primordial missiological issues that divide the Nigerian church. The same could become a basis for unity, in other words, mission could become the goal of the unity of the church in Nigeria. Evangelization of Nigeria cannot be achieved by a divided church neither can a politicized confront the terrorism and radicalization of Islam that has engulfed the North.

The Bible presupposes a church united in diversity, it is one body with many parts, universal yet territorial, eternal yet temporal. The church is one, and the Lord prayed for that unity as recorded by John the Apostle. The mandate to the church is in recognition of its unity, the Great Commission is not to a local assembly or just a union of congregations. The different denominations in Nigeria and the world over are implicated in the great command to love, and implied in the great commission to disciple all nations.

With this mandate, the Pentecostal must appreciate its place as been naturally located within an ecumenical world. The protestant needs to embrace the *solas*⁵ in every other tradition. The Catholic has witnessed the result of early missionaries and ought to learn from history. The OAIC can become a strong promoter of ecumenism by stepping out of sectional interest and appreciating the impact of theological hermeneutics on the future of the church as a whole. This wholistic view of ecumenical agenda could help to achieve the “two cardinal objectives for unity stated by WCC, CAN is fit for promoting a Nigerian round table on this issue and representing same to the global body. Apart from the WCC agenda of 1. The need for a common creed, and 2. A common position of Eucharist, ministry and baptism” (Robeck, 1990, 349), is the need for a definite apologetic statement rigorously arrived at by comparative ecclesiology. This must respond to many questions asked by non-Christians that see the many bodies as a sign of fragmentation.

It can facilitate is a consensus contextual theology that gives a biblical foundation to many practices of the OAIC's. An ecumenical body must develop theological and philosophical frameworks for the training of ministers and accreditation of theological institutions.

CONCLUSION

The Christian Association of Nigeria holds a great future for ecumenism in the world; first as a national body, it has the privilege of promoting robust interfaith and intrafaith dialogue on theological and service issues. It can serve as a rallying point for the West African sub region and sub Saharan Africa for ecumenical movement that furthers the discourse at the global level. This vision will put CAN in a broader ecumenical relevance.

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⁵ The *solas* embrace the theology of the Reformers captured by the concept of *sola fidei*, *sola scriptura* and *sola gratia*.

“Both catholic-protestant missionaries ...were extremely doubtful as to whether the other side could be said to be preaching Christ at all.” (Rengswat citing Hasting, 1967). Issues such as this dominated the theological thought of early Christian leaders who were to move for practical and visible unity of the body. This suspicion was rife in the East of Nigeria that had a majority of both Catholics and Pentecostals. Many Christians of this period sought the theological differences in the belief of their denominations. While Christianity was growing at the expense of African Traditional religion, questions were asked as to what are the theological positions of each tradition on issues like marriage, baptism and the church. Accepting the OAIC members was fraught with theological exclusivism, bothering on soteriology, ordination, hermeneutics and syncretism. The deficiency is that ecumenical dialogue to harmonize or adopt, examine or understand each other’s theological position has yet to take place. The theologians often meet with a focus on theological education rather than at the level of ecclesiastical discourse.

10.2. Practical Aspect

It is not peculiar that CAN was a child of practical not theological unity, the 1967 dialogue of the Roman Catholic Pentecostal dialogue did not have unity as its goal, that of the WARC-RC was vague as well. Yet the fact that consultation took place was a pointer to a fruitful future (Creemers, 327).

Several practical consultations held between 1950 and 1965 towards the formation of united Nigerian church, the Lagos churches asked for postponements, the Northern churches withdrew and this crippled that initiative (Falk, 345).

10.3. Merger and Integration

Steps to integrate the international missionary society with the world council of churches began in Evanston, 1958. It was not unanimously accepted. In 1961, at New Delhi India it was ratified. No respective society was present at the assembly of the WCC. It later moved to enlarge its cooperation with African churches, Roman Catholic and other independent churches.

The merger of the international missionary society caused a strain in the WCC relationship with the Christian council in some countries. This gave rise to the formation of other continental bodies like all Africa conference of churches, and the association of evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, most of the Protestants churches are members of any one of these two (Falk).

The first all-African Christian conference was held in Ibadan in 1958, it provided for fellowship, and understanding for African churches (Falk). All- African council of churches seeks to give guidance to all aspects of the life and ministry of the church, the Association of Evangelicals for Africa and Madagascar was formed in Limuru in 1966 by delegates representing evangelical churches and mission societies in 23 African nations. It met in 1969 and 1973, as a cooperation of churches not inclined to the merger with WCC (Falk). Its concern was the development of theological education, seminars on church growth and mission. Both seek intimate cooperation in the task of the Great Commission (Falk). In summary, the cooperative efforts by churches gave rise to educational development and appointment of educational counselor (Falk).

11. Future And Ecumenical Relevance

Inspite of proliferation of churches as independent churches, the mainline churches have expressed Christian love and recognized the vitality and the contribution of these churches to the integration of Christian faith in African culture by the indigenous churches (Falk). The differences in theological positions on some long-standing issues should be brought up for robust discussion. Relevance of CAN covers its contribution to secular ecumenism in promoting peace and reconciliation in the Country, to spiritual ecumenism by encouraging (spiritual ecumenism); CAN rally and crusade, and interreligious ecumenism on a national scale.

Mimicking the WCC will not be a bad idea for the CAN especially that it has a multireligious milieu that needs intellectual engagement. The Women and Youth wings of CAN would be help foster equality, opportunity and unity among themselves thereby opening up a forum for dialogue with each represented denomination or body on topical issues of unity.

The CAN as a mouthpiece of Christians on the council for interfaith matter must consider a consensual position on enigmatic religious issues in Nigeria. Issues like the doctrine of the church, witness and service.

Within the framework of ecumenical reality, CAN can get the Pentecostal, the Catholic and the OAIC to make a common statement through organs similar to the F&O of the WCC. It can deliberately adopt as her agenda, a

10. The Project From Ecumenical Perspective

Ecumenical movements in their various shades are underdeveloped in Nigeria, theological or practical ecumenism seems conjoined in purpose and operational. Doctrinal positions are at best derived by collective responsibility from the WCC. Commenting on ecumenism in the Nigerian context can only be in the light of WCC; therefore, the methodology applied here begins with an examination of the ecumenical blocks that exist, instead of denominations as present in the West. Strictly speaking, participant observation reveals that each of these bodies under mentioned promote cooperation rather than unity. Another snag in the development of ecumenism in Nigeria is the lack or paucity of intellectual dialogue, this failure may be due to the lacuna between the academic and the church, due primarily to identity issues.

According to Falk, there was no continent based council in Africa but for inter fellowship consultation with International Missionary Council and meetings of missionary conferences in Europe. The mission agencies did not have ecumenical agenda for their congregations such that when they withdrew, there was no platform for such dialogue. Each country's council assisted its churches by facilitating the formulation of strategy, methods to help create a sense of unity of purpose. They also presented the concern of the Christian bodies to government, thereby facilitating their ministry.

The independent churches formed the African independent churches; later coined as Organization of African Independent Churches, some have become members of WCC. Until Vatican II, the Catholic Church has not taken interest in ecumenical relation as the Protestants commissions have. In Africa and Asia the catholic has lagged behind from the ecumenical viewpoint, the Anglican have made efforts in the past to bring unity among African Christians in East Africa.

In Nigeria before the creation of CAN, the Catholic secretariat in Nigeria had no relationship with Protestants; similarly, there was no healthy relationship among the Protestants. This was due to the discrimination and segregation instituted by their foreign missions. The coming of Pentecostalism worsened the rivalry and broadened the gulf.

Another challenge to the ecumenical project was the regional nature of denominations, also a natural consequence of the impact of the respective mission agencies that planted the churches. Reception of missionaries determined the general development social and religious development of an area, so also the religious orientation of the churches to unity and communion.

Among the Protestants, polarization and polemics subsisted beyond the colonial era, churches with political protection from the colonial powers felt superior to others, and avoided any call for unity. The mentality greeted the advent of Pentecostalism, most pioneers of the Pentecostal movement were treated as deviants and some excommunicated from the mainline churches. Such maltreatment did close the door for rapport and opened up that of accusation, rivalry and name-calling. Into this hostility, the charismatic movement was borne. Thus between 1842 and 1975, there were many councils, unions and cooperatives of denominations and traditions, but no singular ecumenical project was on ground for the Nigerian church (Rengswat).

10.1. Theological Aspect

Theological ecumenism as a paradigm has yet to take form in the quest for spiritual and visible unity of the churches of Nigeria. The non-dialogical pattern of the CAN internal relationship is an intellectual deficit that exempts it from being a dynamic body of theological ecumenicists. When theological dialogue is absent, it may assume a simple cooperation and uniformity is achieved, but on the contrary, it is that there is fear and sentiment in engaging on what should be the binding theological position collectively discussed, albeit, what should be conceded to the other ecclesial entities.

In representative capacity, CAN cannot advance any joint theological declaration except as is common knowledge to any superficial Christian understanding. Perhaps, the political focus of CAN as a pressure group is sufficient for its wellness, while it retains its identity with WCC, as its purely Ecumenical partner.

Pentecostal mission in Nigeria can be traced to 1930 when Igbo Christians invited the Assemblies of God.(Falk). By 1950, Catholic mission established its full hierarchy in Nigeria, in the same year the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian proceeded to propose the formation of a church union in Nigeria after the 'South India scheme', the Anglican Diocese of Northern Nigeria was the first to withdraw because of the difficulty it faced in presenting the gospel to the Muslims.

cooperation with some mainline churches that broke off with Western Missions due to leadership and moral issues. The United Methodist Church from the Methodist Mission, the African Baptist church from the American Baptist Mission, Christ Apostolic from the Faith Tabernacle are a few of those the breakout form foreign mission (Oshitelu, 1997).

7. The Theological foundation of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria

The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria binds together all Christian churches, organizations and believers who believe; experience, practice and cherish the Pentecostal experience, as found and described in Acts 2:4. These believers accepted as valid for today the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the physical initial evidence of speaking in other tongues as it was spoken of those who experienced it in the Bible days. (Acts 10:45-47). In addition, they are those who accepted the evangelical truth of 'justification by faith' as propounded by Martin Luther, the experience of holiness as preached by John Wesley and the heat of evangelistic zeal of fire and blood trailed by William Booth of the Salvation Army. In essentials, there shall be unity, liberty in non-essentials of true Pentecostal believers. The PFN is not a union of churches brought together for a certain administration and control; rather it is a body of believers having identical unity of purpose and co-operation in agreed programmes². To provide representation for the Pentecostal movement to Governments, Ecumenical bodies and serves as defender of the faith for the Pentecostal believers.

8. WCC MEMBER CHURCHES IN NIGERIA

Churches in Nigeria function severally and collectively within the World Council of Churches, the opinion is that ecumenism is more than membership of WCC. The historical condition precedent to the formation of each confession contributes to the choice of fellowship. Within the WCC, CAN members are as listed³

Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN)
Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide
Methodist Church Nigeria
Nigerian Baptist Convention
Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria
The African Church

9. Factors that Favoured the Birth of CAN.

Until the creation of CAN neither Catholic nor Protestant came together for any form of cooperation, from 1850 to 1975, there was no fellowship between the Protestant churches and the Catholic ones.

The creation of the World Council of Churches, The devolution of power on the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria and Vatican II are factors that forged a new relationship with non-Catholics in Nigeria. The All-African Council of churches and the Christian Council of Nigeria also prepared the ground for practical ecumenism. On regional level, the northern Christian Association and the fellowship of Northern churches (EYN⁴) prepared the ground for Protestants to break the barrier against other Christian bodies in the north. These bodies also came together to withstand the threat and terror of Islam.

From the political angle, there was the call for patriotism and solidarity after the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. Further to this was the take-over of schools by the government, this also coincided with the denial of visa to foreign missionaries and the tax placed on foreign aids for mission in Nigeria. The disunity of the Nigerian church took a dramatic turn when the church was asked to be represented before the Federal Military Government in February 1976 (Rengshwat, 2012) Events during and after this meeting culminated in the invitation by the Catholics to the Protestants for a meeting at their secretariat in Lagos August 1976. That meeting formed the Christian Association of Nigeria primarily as mouthpiece and safeguard for Christians' interest in Nigeria.

² www.Pfnkd.org. accessed on 21/05/2012 @17:14GMT

³ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/africa/nigeria/can.html>. Accessed on 21/05/2012@17:44 GMT.

⁴ TEKAN/HEKAN/EYN Cluster. Commonly bracketed in Hausa as Tarrar Ekklisiyoyin Kristi a Sudan meaning the Church of Christ in the Sudan.

and has assumed a basic formula in order to avoid a repeat of the 1952 Willengen Conference. From the foregoing, must be given to this sequence of events that gave rise to CAN.

According to Peter Falk, creation of missionary societies in Nigeria was a response to the Edinburgh 1910 recommendation. Though each foreign mission agency sought to protect its territory and congregation, the CCN, was formed in 1928 to represent missionary society and churches of the Central part of Nigeria. The Evangelical Union of Missions represented Christian agencies serving in the East of the Nigeria. The Miango conference represented the Christian communities in the Northern provinces. These bodies merged in 1928 to form the United Conference of Protestant Missionary Society of Nigeria. This means that the initial alliance of 1928, was between mission agencies and churches in the North, central, Eastern and western parts of Nigeria irrespective of their originating territory. Another observation is the regional nature of their establishment, which later gave ethnic, tribal, and regional outlook to their activities and structure.

6. Ecclesial And Interecclesial Bodies In Nigeria

Ecumenical movement in Africa exists among African theologians under the aegis of Ecumenical Association of African Theologians, and churches as All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), which was founded in 1963 (Fahlbusch and Bromiley, 1996).

While CAN has a part of its official responsibility, a symbol of Christian apologetic in Nigeria, it has not from available, record been involved in any serious apologetic inspite of the series of verbal and media blasphemies. The CCN in its functions includes evangelism, as an ecumenical organ for member bodies and for social responsibility. The OAIC is for contextualization of Christian belief and the decolonization of texts and polity. The PFN is for promoting the ideals of the early Christians in any context, especially to for revival and pragmatism. All this work severally and collectively within the CAN.

The Miango (Jos) conference of 1926 was the first inter-mission consultation for a united church for Africa, it dissolved without a consensus, in 1929, there was the formation of the Federation of Missions of the Northern Nigeria, which later became the Council of Evangelical Churches of the Northern Nigeria (CECNN), it is an interecclesial body in CAN. The CECNN has transformed into EYN, which is a Hausa rendition of the Church in Nigeria.

Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) is the umbrella body of all Pentecostal Christians in Nigeria. PFN, is divided into six zones with each zone been led by a Vice President. The body started in 1985 after the "Greater Lagos for Christ" crusade. This fellowship was inaugurated on the 14th day of November 1986 in Lagos by eleven different churches; they were the Assemblies of God church, Foursquare Gospel Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Gospel Faith Mission. Others are The Church of God International, Deeper Christian Life Ministry and 5 other national organizations. It held its first conference in Lagos in 1991. Going by their name, they share a common Pentecostal belief, unlike the CECNN that united from a missionary foundation along regional lines, the PFN formed out of a desire for a common body to unite all churches with Pentecostal leanings and a forum for fellowship

6.1. Christian Association of Nigeria

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has five blocs made up the Christian Council of Nigeria, the Organization of African Instituted Churches, the Roman Catholic, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, and its youth and women wings. Evangelical Fellowship of West Africa, Therefore, a denomination must be a member of any and only one of these blocs to become a member of CAN.

6.2. Organization of African Independent Churches

These mainline churches form the CCN, the OAIC did not have any connection with Western Missionaries, and they largely have strong contextual theologies and peculiar historical development.

Some minor groups exist as part of the major councils and yet part of the World Council of Churches; an example is the Association of Aladura Churches, which functions within the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC). The middle term "instituted" was later adopted in place of "independent" used to designate only churches of African origin, it does not suggest that some of the mainline churches are dependent in any way. Politically, the mainline churches represented by the Baptist, Anglican, Catholic and Methodist have become independent also. They may retain a form of identity in name and doctrine, and relate on ecclesiastical platforms, they are self-sustaining and self-governing. The birth of OAIC began with the Aladura movement in

Evangelicals position as many traditions and confessions joined the movement (van Beek). The Roman Catholic Church did not join until 1965, after the second Vatican council.

Many evangelical groups and interdenominational bodies have continued with the movement in specific ways, an example is the Evangelical World Alliance formed in 1951, which was instrumental to the development of the Lausanne Covenant.

3. Christian Mission in Nigeria

Christianity came to the western region in 1841, and proceeded to the northern region in 1885. The pattern of entry of each Mission characterized its dominance and coverage area, this development had a ripple effect on the formation of a united representative body. The challenge was not of doctrine but feelings of animosity, prejudice and political influence of the British Government of the time.

When Lord Lugard's British government occupied Northern Nigeria in 1900, Christianity was prohibited from Muslim areas, this stopped the advance of the Southern Missions like Methodist Church Missionary Society (1846), the Baptists mission (1850), and so on. It was in 1917 through the effort of Roland Bingham of SIM and his associates that indigenous churches were planted in Northern Nigeria, these Churches and the mission agencies formed the CECNN.

The Dutch reformed church mission of South Africa came to the central belt in 1911, ministered among the Tiv people group around Mkar. The limited number of churches founded minimized their influence and role on both regional and national ecclesial community. The churches of this mission are still localized around the Benue basin of Nigeria and are referred to as the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria. It is a member of the World Association of Reformed Churches and the Christian Association of Nigeria.

In the Eastern part of Nigeria, the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland worked through Calabar. At Uyo, the Qua Iboe mission and the Presbyterian enclosed the Methodists in a triangle. It was in Calabar, in 1919 that the first call for a united church in Nigeria was made by Dr. J.T. Dean; a Presbyterian minister. This was not accommodated by the Lagos ministers, so in 1923, an Evangelical union was formed, which metamorphosed to the Eastern branch of CCN in 1932. In a meeting of this union in Onitsha in 1947, the Qua Iboe and Sudan United Mission withdrew because the aim of the union was organic only.

4. The Origin And Development Of Ecumenical Initiative

The origin of ecumenical initiative in Nigeria reflects the ecclesiological and missiological development of the Nigerian church, It began with the formation of mission societies, Western oriented and affiliated unions. If the Edinburgh 1910 meeting is regarded as the beginning of modern ecumenism, its ripples gave birth to ecumenism in Nigeria. If that conference precedes the birth of the global ecumenical body –the World Council of Churches, then ecumenical initiative began before the birth of the largest ecumenical body in Nigeria – the Christian Association of Nigeria. With a vision for organic and organizational unity, each confession retains its particularities.

5. Christian Council of Nigeria

The Christian Council of Nigeria was founded in 1929 as “fellowship of churches in Nigeria working together to promote the glory of God”.¹ It officially adopted an ecumenical posture as a body that promotes harmony, justice, peace, love and unity in Nigeria. It has an autonomous non- hierarchical structure in affiliation to CAN.

The Christian Council of Nigeria took form in 1930 through the vision of the mainline Protestant churches, the Christian Association of Nigeria in 1976 by Protestants and Roman Catholics, the Nigerian Association of the Aladura Churches in 1960. The Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria was formed in 1955, it comprised churches free from the control of the West but distinct from for the Instituted or Independent Churches.

CAN is “the [a]ssociation of Christian Churches with distinct identities, recognizable church structure and a system of worship of one God in the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” . This body is aware that “trinitarianism as a missiological issue has dominated ecumenical discourse since 1952” (Tai Wong Lee,143),

¹ Constitution of the Christian Council of Nigeria as approved revised in 2011, approved by the Council's 27th Assembly.

doctrine and philosophy, that agree to work together according to a common structure for their mutual and corporate advantage.

An ecclesial body is a local visible church or Christian congregation present within a geographical location. An interecclesial organization is body of many ecclesial bodies (denominations) sharing similar or the same theology an example is the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria. An ecclesial union is a pseudo ecumenical body, which retains its membership and aligns with another local ecumenical movement. Christian Council of Nigeria is an ecclesial union of mainline churches in Nigeria.

The specific focus of this paper is on the origin and development of ecumenical bodies in Nigeria whose flagship is the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Some of the members of CAN are also members of the World Council of Churches. Origin of these ecclesial unions would be stated accordingly in no particular order. A major feature is their link to one foreign mission or doctrine, the only exception being the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC's). as the name implies are churches of non western origin.

The paper reviews a history of ecumenical initiative this is followed by the structure and function of CAN and other ecclesial unions, which is inextricably linked to the emergence of local missionary societies. These societies laid the foundation for the birth of the first interdenominational body called the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN). In viewing these developments, the practical steps and theological suppositions would be espoused. The final section of this essay is on the future of CAN and its ecumenical relevance.

2. Ecumenism In Global Perspective

Paul, an apostle in the early church indicated the discursive theme of unity, writing to the Ephesians. He said

4 [There is] one body and one Spirit—just as there is also one hope [that belongs] to the calling you received—

5 [There is] one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of [us] all, who is above all [Sovereign over all], pervading all and [living] in [us] all (Ephesians 4:4-6, The Amplified Bible).

This follows the aspiration of the Lord and Bishop of the Church in John chapter 17; he said amongst many things, “they may be one”. The oneness of the disciples is a prelude to the oneness of their followers in the faith. From this point on, the church has been in search of unity, both theologically and physically. The idea of religious harmony as a form of unity is a later accretion borne out of historical exigency, Neither Jesus nor Paul would have thought of interfaith unity in their statements.

the word *oikonumene* signifies the goals of ecumenism to include ecclesial unity and missions. This refers to “the multidimensional movement of the churches and the Christians whose goal is both the visible unity of the church and an integration of mission, service and renewal” (Rusch 2001).The goal of ecumenism depended on the perspectives of participating bodies.

The 1910 Edinburgh conference has “unity of Christians for the sake of the mission of the church to the world” as its goal (Rusch 2001). This is consistent with the foundation of the World council of Churches’ *Nature and Mission of the Church*. The Free Church finds glorifying Christ as the goal for unity, the Orthodox Church believes that unity must be visible. This unity in the church of the Reformation depends on the proclamation of the Gospel and the freedom of the church to sustain its order and actions. The goal of ecumenism can be mimicked by the idea of a common ecclesiology. The interecclesial unity of the church demands a critique of the doctrines of the different religious traditions, this method of comparison is the basis for comparative ecclesiology.

Ecumenism may be understood as the practical and visible convergence of both secular and spiritual ecumenism. Secular ecumenism is the participation of the Christian community for the reconciliation and renewal of humanity, interreligious ecumenism generally includes other religions theology, spiritual ecumenism is the unity of the church in worship, prayer and association. (Rusch 2001). Scholars and ecumenists alike have defined ecumenism from various points of view. A historical view of the ecumenical movement has led to new definitions consistent with different Christian traditions. Some of these are mentioned as working definitions in this paper. Ecumenism as the unity of the church derives from the unity of Christ with the Father.

1910 was the beginning of modern ecumenical movement, its goal as a mission-oriented movement established on the objectives of global evangelization. The creation of the World council of Churches in 1948 softened the