

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT IN IGBOLAND

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Abstract

The inability of churches to co-exist peacefully has been an age long problem which was never God's wish for the church. In the most recent times the show of shame these churches (Anglican, Roman Catholic and others) exhibit in the war of denominationalism in Igboland makes one to wonder if really they are serving or worshipping the same God. Indeed, one can say that this situation is really affecting the Church and her testimony when non-Christians stand to watch two 'Christians' fighting and quarreling over church (denomination) business, many would rather not go to church than to join in this charade. Having discovered the various ills going on amongst churches in the name of denominationalism, this article studied the emergence of ecumenism in Igboland and ways of bringing it into play in the present day Christianity in Igboland wherein the work covers, so as to change these negative happenings amongst church denominations. It was discovered that this development is not the best for the Church considering the great commission which Jesus Christ handed down to the Church which must be carried out with love for one another. Therefore, this study recommends the need for constant dialogue among the various church denominations and their leaders, suppression of denominational supremacy, involvement of all church denominations in the matters of ecumenism among others.

Introduction

There is no gain saying that Christianity is at a crossroad in the world and it is seriously affecting Christianity in Igboland. People are seriously looking at the church with disdain and making mockery of her not just for some other issues that have bedeviled her but because of the in-house fighting, quarreling, bickering, and among others that are existing in her fold in the name of denominational wars. As against their preaching of love, peace, forgiveness, etc. the church has become the direct opposite of her message, the unbelievers that Christians were meant to evangelize now preach love, peace, forgiveness, and so on, making it very impossible for Christians to reach out to them with their gospel of division. There is need for commitment on the part of every Christian as regard the issues of ecumenism as opined by Francis (2018):

Commitment to ecumenism responds to the prayer of the Lord Jesus that "they may all be one" (John 17: 21). The credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions and the Church could realize "the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her children who, though joined to her by baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her". We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have a sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face. (p. 1).

Ecumenism, with its aim of promoting unity of all the Christian churches as one, is one of the desires of Jesus Christ (the Lord of the church) even as he was wrapping up his earthly ministry according to the gospel of John 17: 21 "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (NIV). As a matter of fact, the unity and togetherness of the churches and her members is one of the things that will make them and their Lord fully acceptable to the world, but this has not been so because if they cannot accept themselves how will the world accept them.

Right from the earliest beginning the church started as one on the Pentecost day (Acts 2) which is seen as the day of birth of the present-day church. This oneness yielded great harvest of soul to the church and the church continued as one up till the time of the reformation which led to a sharp break of the church giving room for other denominations which has continued to break into other denominations, thereby making it next to impossible for them to ever unite again. Anyacho, Bebia & Anyiam (2010), state that the church founded by Jesus Christ was one. He further has it that; Jesus Himself had wished that the Church remained one (John 17:21). The apostles worked and died for the purpose of maintaining the unity of the church. But with its exponential growth and expansion, and the many political as well as religious pressures that were brought to bear on it, the future of the church was reshaped. (p. 3).

Considering the bickering and fighting among churches especially in Igboland today this research noted that there abound several cases where different denominations fight bloody over ownership of schools or lands. One may begin to wonder if exactly these are the churches that are expected to be one and was there ever a time these churches worked together in Igboland so as to aid the spread of the gospel and make it acceptable to the people.

The issue of church face-off in Igboland has really become a very serious problem for the church today and this has led the church into so many seeming un-Christian activities so as to fight each other and gain unnecessary victory over the same body of Christ. This also on the other hand has seriously affected the church and her testimony negatively and has made the church to lose many of her members who incidentally could not reconcile their preaching and actions towards one another. Due to this recent development the church has not been able to work together as a common front to challenge societal ills facing her and the society at large, thereby allowing things that are not supposed to be to exist, while the individual denominations scamp for what they believe is of their own interest even if it affects the other churches adversely.

This problem of disunity, fighting, etc. among churches in Igboland has caused more harm to the church and will continue if nothing is done seriously to checkmate it especially in this twenty-first century.

Clarification of Terms

Implication can be said to be the conclusion that can be drawn from something although it is not explicitly stated that is the import from something. According to Hornby (2010), implication is “something that is suggested or indirectly stated” (p. 753).

Ecumenism is a conscious effort aimed at or targeted at uniting the Christian faith and fostering unity amongst Churches to a reasonable extent for a better relationship and understanding. According to Hornby (2010), ecumenism is “the principle or aim of uniting different branches of the Christian Church” (p. 466).

Contemporary implies a person or thing living or existing at the moment. According to Thompson (1995), contemporary is “a person or thing living or existing at the same time as another” (p. 288).

Christianity is a monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Igbo is one of the three major tribes that exist in Nigeria and they live at the South – Eastern part of Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Theory

The critical theory is a form of social and politically based theory that was introduced by Karl Marx who sought to correct the capitalist system he saw around him. He claimed that the capitalist system created powerless citizens who were trapped and exploited by money. Marx believed that people must recognize the oppressive system before they could free themselves from the explosion of the societal system. Marx laid the foundation for critical theory. (Barowski, 2021). Critical theory aims to address oppressive beliefs and practices that have become ingrained in society. If an oppressive practice is identified, these theorists believe it can be corrected to reduce the impact on marginalized populations.

According to Barowski (2021), in attempting a discuss for critical theory has it thus;

Critical theory is a social and political philosophy that focuses on identifying and overcoming social constructs that privilege some people and oppress others. A social construct is a culturally accepted reality that does not exist objectively, but arises as a result of humans interacting with each other and the world around them. Critical theory argues that social constructs, such as science and tradition, can be manipulated to dominate particular groups of people. Critical theory attempts to lessen the forces that cause disadvantages to certain people. (p. 1).

The issue of ecumenism harps on the issue of oneness of spirit which will in turn bring about equality to all regardless of the denominational affiliations. The general goal of critical theory is to enlighten the general public on the issues that can cause alienation and unequal opportunities within a population. By drawing attention to the unbalanced nature of the practice, critical theory hopes that amended behaviors can correct the unbalanced systems that favour certain groups of people.

Part of the problems in the Christianity today is the issue of supremacy and greed which is sin and breeds disunity. Kalu cited in Ekpunobi (2001) “identified the cause of Christian disunity as sin. Disunity is a product of our rebelliousness. Therefore, to return to unity is to be converted, to repent.” (p. 8). This theory therefore seeks to change over time the culture of supremacy and greed of one denomination over another. Rather, through the workings of ecumenism, unity and oneness would be adopted as a culture. This paper adopts the theory of Karl Marx. The theory is most appropriate for this research work because it changes the culture of unbalanced systems that favour certain groups of people who are meant to be one. Christians who are one but come in different groups (denominations) are

meant to be together without any trying to subdue the other and claim superiority. When this is done progress and more impact would abound.

Ecumenism in Igboland

The real effort towards ecumenical movement started in Eastern Nigeria which was initiated by the Presbyterians with a missionary conference in 1911 at Calabar of which the participants discovered how close they were which gave urge for a continued effort. (Ekpunobi, 2001). He further has it that,

The formation of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) was a motivating factor in the effort at Church Union. The CCN provided a forum for the member Churches to co-operate in various projects relating to pastoral education, joint ownership of schools and health institutions. The aims of the CCN include:

To foster and express the fellowship and unity of the Christian Church in Nigeria, to further the realization of its oneness with the Church throughout the world.

To keep in touch with the international missionary council and the WCC. (p. 69).

Asides this formal path to ecumenism some scholars like Mgbemena (2022) are of the belief that the relationship which existed between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church in the early missionary times in Onitsha was the beginning of ecumenism in Igbo land. The Anglican Church through the C.M.S. missionaries entered Igbo land, Onitsha to be precise in the year 1857 and after their reception and settling down they began the work of mission for which they came for. The leader of the mission team, Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther made a request to the Obi of Onitsha (Obi Akazua) for a land that will serve as the operational base for the mission in Onitsha which was obliged. This was captured by Dike (1957) thus;

The reigning Obi in 1857 was Akazua. His son Odiri was prominent in all the negotiations with the missionaries and traders; so also were two of the prominent councillors, Orikabue and Ayan-koha, described as "the King's brother and councillor." In the negotiations which led to the establishment of British trading posts at Onitsha and the founding of the Mission station, Simon Jonas and Augustus Radillo, both liberated slaves of Ibo descent, from Sierra Leone, acted as interpreters. Dr W. B. Baikie, leader of the 1854 and 1857 expeditions, spoke for the British Government, while Captain Grant dealt with commercial matters and the Rev. S. A. Crowther led the missionary group. Crowther, a man of great tact and common sense, worked amicably with all concerned. How far was the 1857 expedition successful in its aims? On the missionary side, Crowther achieved much success. After negotiations with the Onitsha King and his council he got them to allocate land for a Mission station. And he was very satisfied with the site of the land given to the Mission. "I am fully convinced," he said, "that there could not have been a better place selected as the headquarters of our Ibo Mission establishment, for salubrity, and elevation of the country above the swamps of the delta, as well as facility to communicate with the interior." (p. 1).

In 1885 the Roman Catholic Mission joined the Church Missionary Society in Onitsha all for the propagation of the gospel. Earlier on their journey they encountered some challenges with the officials of the Royal Niger Company which was in charge of the Niger, but for the intervention of Mr. Townsend who is supposedly an Anglican they were able to access Onitsha and consequently establish their mission. Father Jordan cited in Ozigboh (1988) recorded the event thus;

Like the other river ports, however, Akassa was not under the control of any European government, but of a band of traders known as the Royal Niger Company. The agent of the Company, rather incongruously named Captain Christian, refused them permission to move up-river. Fr. Lutz made his way to a second port, named Brass. Here he was fortunate enough to meet a kindly and accommodating English protestant trader, a certain Mr. Townsend. The latter not only gave them permission to explore but offered them a tiny and out-of-date motor boat. (p. 42).

After their settlement in Onitsha, need arose for them to get their own operational base in Onitsha. History have it that Rev. Fr. Lutz went to the Obi of Onitsha (Obi Anazonwu) to make a request for their own land just like the C.M.S. but he was directed by the Obi to go and meet their brother missionaries who have received a large expanse of land from his fore bearers for the same purpose, so as to plead with them for a share of the land to equally use as their own operational base of which they did and in the spirit of ecumenism and out of the magnanimity of the leader of the C.M.S. mission, the Rt. Rev. Samuel Crowther the said land was ceded to the R.C.M. mission as an operational base of which they should be eternally grateful.

Ozigboh (1988) captured the event from another angle but with the same ending thus;

Father Lutz had selected a 20-hectare piece of land bordering on the Niger River and the NKISI stream, about two Miles from the inhabited town of Onitsha. The contract for this land was signed on 6th January, 1886, after a near-disaster to the occupancy of the land was narrowly averted. In a dispatch to the Superior General in Paris, Fr. Lutz reported:

It was on our return to Onitsha that we learned that Bishop Crowther had earlier chosen the same piece of land. What were we to do? As we passed by the C.M.S. mission and the bishop was there himself, we went in to obtain precise information from him. The Bishop received us politely and confirmed that the King had promised him the land four years before. He said we could verify the truth of his statement from the King himself and report back to him.

We consulted the King and he confirmed that he had promised the land to the Bishop. The King, however, believed that the Bishop had no need of it since he had not hitherto put it into use. Besides, he told us that no deed had been executed for the land and that if the bishop would not cede it to us, he would take it away by force.

To settle the issue amicably, the King sent his messenger with us, with the instruction to beg the bishop, in his name, to leave the land for his white friends.

As we were set on starting work on the land, we also begged the bishop to do us the favour of leaving the land for us and that we would be ever grateful. At these incessant pleadings he was good enough to accede to our wishes. (p. 56-57).

Going on, it is important to correct this negative impression from Ozigboh (1988) which may be misleading;

If the R.C.M. was given the privilege to inspect the length and breadth of Onitsha in order to select the site they so desire for their mission post as was postulated, "Obi Anazonwu received the Catholic missionaries warmly and permitted them to inspect the town and select a site for their mission." (p. 56). With the R.C.M. mindset of positioning their churches at the choicest site of virtually all the cities they would not have gone for the waterside. It was given to them and it was received without any choice.

Whether the land was given to the R.C.M. mission directly or indirectly, willingly or unwillingly by Bishop Crowther or by the mandate by the King the important thing was that it was never fought for and somebody was seen extending a hand of fellowship to fellow brothers in Christ for the advancement of the Kingdom business without any hidden agenda or attachment.

In agreeing to this Mepaiyeda (2018) states that;

Another evidence of the ecumenical nature of the Missions was the relationship that existed between the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Missionaries. Crowther was said to have extended the bond of friendship and brotherhood to the Missionaries of other denominations in his days. Typical of such gesture was his offering of free accommodation to the Catholic Missionaries who arrived at Lokoja in 1884. They were housed at the Holy Trinity Anglican Church as a take-off point for their Mission work. Crowther was said to have been driven by the conviction that working together will speed up the work of Mission, since no single denomination can evangelize the entire nation. This action fostered unity between the Anglicans and the Catholics in Nigeria, a factor that was responsible for Christian unity in later years in the establishment of the Bible Society. The most spectacular of inter-denomination cooperation, understanding and assistance occurred when Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther an Anglican, in 1885 willingly gave the Roman Catholics under the leadership of Father Joseph Lutz a parcel of land given to him by the Obi of Onitsha. All the aforementioned relational collaborations among the missions at the inception of Christianity could be referred to as precursors of modern ecumenism in an organized form. (pp. 67-68).

From these submissions one cannot but agree that the C.M.S. (Anglican Church) was indeed ecumenical in their approach to the matter in the spirit of oneness and togetherness which is the ecumenism talked about, unity of purpose. This has been seen as the origin and the high point of ecumenism in Igbo land as opined by Ozigboh (1988), "this generosity of Bishop Crowther is, possibly, one of the happiest episodes in the chequered history of Anglican-Catholic relations in Igbo land." (p. 57). He further has it that whatever bad blood relationship that existed between these two churches as they continued in their various mission activities in Igbo land happened post – Crowther.

Ecumenical Bodies and their Formations

Presently, there are a whole lot of Churches scattered all over the land and there is every need for the functionality of ecumenism at this time so as to bring about a smooth and better working relationship among these Churches. Hence Mepaiyeda (2018) argues that Christianity in Nigeria is a widely scattered family of denominations, all of them professing some kind of faith in Christ. In his taxonomy of churches, he submits that there are probably not less than six main church traditions now in Nigeria. These are the Roman Catholics, the mainline Protestant congregations, the Ethiopian or African Churches, the Indigenous African Churches, the Pentecostals and the neo Pentecostal assemblies. The first ecumenical body that came into existence was the Christian Council of Nigeria which was formed in 1930 having Churches like the Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and so on with a view to promoting the Great Commission, and work towards ecumenical unity. According to Kalu (1978) the world-wide ecumenical revolution was a significant impulse in the union movement in Nigeria. He further has it thus;

It gave a new lease on life to the Christian Council of Nigeria, an association of missionary-oriented Protestant churches founded in 1930. They cooperate in various projects-education, pastoral training, medical, and urban ministry. As article 2 of the constitution of the C. C. N. puts it, their aims are, among others:

to foster and express the fellowship and unity of the Christian Church in Nigeria, to further the realization of its oneness with the church throughout the world;

to keep in touch with the International Missionary Council and the W.C.C.;

to preserve comity among churches and missions;

to be a medium for public statements and joint actions among the churches on social, moral, religious and educational matters;

to be a forum for discussion of matters regarding the stability and expansion of Christianity in Nigeria.

The activities of the C.C.N. have provided the framework for cooperation and dialogue about unity. (pp. 11-12).

Considering the fact that some other churches were not part of the formation of the C.C.N. with some others springing up there was need for a body that will eventually unite all the churches as one under one umbrella. Hence, the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria which presently houses all the Christian churches in Nigeria. Mepaiyeda (2018) has it that,

With the passage of time the impact of the CCN became dwindled and in the face of lack of effective common platform by the various Christian bodies in the country, each denomination acted independently until the formation of Christian Association of Nigeria which emergence was politically and apologetically motivated. The association resulted from the meeting of a group of Church leaders of diverse denominations at the National Catholic Secretariat, Lagos, on August 27, 1976. CAN is designed to defend the general interest of Christians in the nation as it serves as the watchdog of the spiritual and moral welfare of the nation. (p. 71).

So many church denominations began to come together to form different alliance for their own interest, these formations then came together to bring about the Christian Association of Nigeria which became a common platform for all Christians in Nigeria considering its objective of promoting understanding, peace and unity among the various peoples and strata of society in Nigeria through the propagation of the gospel.

In discussing the Christian Association of Nigeria, Enweron (1999) states that what is now known as Christian Association of Nigeria was an adaptation of Christian Association of the North formed in 1975 amidst Sardauna's phenomenon in the area. He puts the claim thus:

To a large extent, what is known today as CAN was started in the North by Christians who saw what the Sardauna was doing. He wanted to Islamize the North and the Christian in the North came together as a group to resist the Sardauna's Mission. (p. 27).

Mepaiyeda (2018) also states that;

Its Membership comprises five main blocks: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigerian (CPFN) / Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) / TarayyaEkklesiyoyin Kristi a Nigeria (TEKAN) and Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC). Virtually all Christian denominations in Nigeria have today come under one umbrella, CAN. Through its national and state leaderships, CAN has over the years expressed the desires, anxieties and hopes of Christians. The association's pronouncements have gone a long way to call genuinely concerned people to reason in the area of dialogue, evangelism, education, social, economics, religious and sensitive political issues. (p. 17).

Challenges of Ecumenism

Despite the achievement recorded through ecumenical work in Nigeria, it has persistently encountered difficulties, which has made its work incomplete. Many Catholics see ecumenism as a step to syncretism. In fact, Nantes (2007) condemns the Vatican II Council's document on ecumenism "*Unitatis Redintegratio*". According to him, bringing both Catholics and non-Catholics together for the purpose of unification means joining both real and quasi-church together which is real syncretism. This often makes the whole effort null and void. Although syncretism does not have only negative connotation, still the argument here is that seeing ecumenism as syncretism makes the people to shun it or view it as evil. Sequel to this is that some Catholics also see ecumenism as false Pan-Christian Unity. Conservatism and intransigence on doctrinal matters, by the Roman Catholic hierarchy, also hinders the ecumenical action in Nigeria. Change is consistent in life and is not easily accepted by any system. When the Vatican II Council's message on ecumenism came on board, majority of the clergy were reluctant to let go of the old order because they were at ease with it. It was believed *ab initio* that salvation can only be found in the Catholic Church, but Vatican II Council changed that. Mepaiyeda (2018) has it thus;

The Catholic tradition has maintained right from early times the famous axiom: *Extra ecclesias null salus*, meaning “Outside the Church there is no salvation”. Or, in the words of Origen “Let no one persuade or deceive himself: Outside this house (that is, the Roman Catholic Church) no one will be saved”. In consequence of this position, the Roman Catholic Church refused to participate officially in ecumenical discussion or action; a stance that subsisted till probably late 21st century in Nigeria. (p. 66).

But the problem till today is that majority of the Catholics still refuse to accept to partner with these Protestants. Continuous denominational prejudice and rivalry have also made the message of ecumenism to be peripheral. According to Ozigbo (1985) ...Ecumenical efforts in Nigeria had been long though largely cosmic. This was against the backdrop of bitter memories of strife and rivalry in Eastern Nigeria between the Catholic Mission on one hand and all the Protestant Churches on the other, from 1890's right up to the 1960's. The memories of hate, hostilities, mistrust and suspicion were still fresh and raw. They had not been able to make Catholics and Anglicans see themselves as comrades of the same Christian religion. In a similar way, Ndiokwere (1994) maintains that rivalries, unhealthy competition, mutual distrust and skepticism are bane of ecumenism in Nigeria. While Okeke (1997), concludes that the denominational rivalry is worst between Catholics and Anglicans at least in Eastern Nigeria, where each target the other in their relentless criticism and attacks. Mepaiyeda (2018) opines that;

The implication was that on the mission field, Catholics and Protestants presented two rival social groupings struggling with each other for positions of power and influence. The Catholics accused Protestant missionaries of leading easy lives with their families and more importantly of lacerating each other through many sects. The Protestants on the other hand maintain that the Catholics have missed the way. They, contrary to the Roman Catholic tradition, insist on the principles of *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), *solo Christ* (Christ alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone) and the priesthood of all believers to show that they are uniquely on course. On the mission field Protestants accused Catholics of preaching man's word, instead of God's, of despising the dictates of conscience, adoring Mary and indulging in the fetishism of medals. (p. 66).

Instead of seeking a way of unity, each denomination spends time protecting her denominational boundary almost to the detriment of other denominations. The proliferation of Churches in Nigeria has continued to hinder the dream of Christian unity. The problem here is that despite the evils inherent in proliferation, some protestant groups justify it in the name of church planting. But regardless of their claim, the church has continued to disintegrate thereby making the dream for unity an unrealizable dream even with the relentless effort of both CAN and PFN. In fact, majority of the non-Catholic Churches claim to be living churches while others are dead. They thrive only by destroying other churches through vitriolic criticism. According to Okeke (1997), outside the call to repentance and acceptance of Jesus as one's personal Lord and Saviour, some of these new religious movements/sects have no other doctrines to preach. As a result, there is hardly any basis for meaningful dialogue on doctrinal matters with such groups. Indeed, the problem here is that as long as this mindset is not removed, the whole noise about Christian unity will be a wasted effort. Mutual suspicion is another thing that hinders ecumenism in the country. Each denomination avoids the other as one does to a leper. Ignorance of the context of ecumenism also hinders the efforts towards ecumenism in Nigeria. In Christendom today, many are ignorant of the context of ecumenism, even with the level of awareness created by both Vatican II Council and World Council of Churches. As a result, there has been persistent infighting, and character assassination among the hierarchy and lay faithful of both traditions. Okeke (1997) has it again that doctrinal differences also affect negatively the move for church unity in Nigeria. This is because most of the Christian Churches in Nigeria have doctrines which kick against the unity of the Christians. And the problem is that these doctrines are difficult to change because their churches have their headquarters elsewhere. Therefore, in matters that affect those doctrines, they find it difficult to touch them or if they must, it may take a long time, thereby slowing down the speed of the ecumenical work in Nigeria and Igboland in particular. Finally, governmental indifference also draws the hand of clock of ecumenism back. The government knows that a united Christianity will positively affect the sociopolitical unity of our country. Even the freedom of worship enshrined in our constitution supports the continuous proliferation which is against the spirit of ecumenism. But instead of correcting these anomalies which will enhance Christian unity, the government chooses to stay aloof.

Conclusion

In bringing this research work to a conclusive end, it is important to review the topic of ecumenism, having known that ecumenism has to deal with the unity and working together of churches for effective ministry. Unity here does not necessarily mean collapsing all churches to become one under one central administration rather churches existing in their own with their own administration but yet working together for the success of the general common good of

the church seen as mission and evangelism which is the heart beat of God. As earlier established by Hovorun (2014), ecumenism is not necessarily collapsing all churches to become one rather he saw it as the churches still existing but working together as one.

Having this in mind will help in reducing the rancour that exists among these church denominations. Members regardless of the congregation they belong to will see and treat another Christian brother or sister as the same. The political wars, property disputes and many other absurd stories among different denominations will be a thing of the past as churches will begin to change the narrative. For instance, in the north, where there are no established church buildings two to three church denominations make use of one venue for services as they take turn according to time allotted without any quarrelling or bickering. With this kind of relationship existing among churches making converts will be as easy as it was in the church of the New Testament.

Therefore, the leaders of the church and her members in Igbo land are advised to come down from their high horses of supremacy and are all invited to take this journey of oneness in a bid to uniting God's church knowing full well that we are one in Christ serving one God. At least if not for any other thing that our society, both the present and generations unborn will live in a peaceful environment devoid of bitterness and rancor as brothers and sisters without any religious denominational wars. A society where people will not be judged because of their religious affiliations before getting married, jobs, contracts, political offices, etc. but will be judged by their content and what one can deliver in equity and fairness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research work, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is a very urgent and serious need for all churches especially in Igboland to sit down and dialogue with a sincere intention of charting a proper course for the church in Igboland. Constant dialogue towards unity
2. There is a need for a conscious and concerted effort to relegate the issues of denomination to the background, even though it may at this time be very difficult to collapse all churches to one and end denominations but serious efforts must be made to suppress denominational supremacy.
3. Every church should have an existing ecumenical committee which meets from time to time to discuss issues that should unite the church and manage those grey areas that have the ability of causing divisions in their fold.
4. For a lasting peace a chart must be drawn up with the interest of everybody represented in the way and manner things must be shared because that is where almost every trouble begins.
5. Observing the communal nature and lifestyle of the Igbo nation who exist in families, kindred and clans yet work for the common good of the community, the church should emulate and teach her members that way of life so that the community can exist together and work for the common good of all regardless of the denominational affiliations.
6. The church should organize and set aside a Sunday called Ecumenical Sunday for the purpose of enlightening her members on the subject of ecumenism and how necessary and important it is to God. They can even go the extra mile by allowing ministers from other denominations to preach at churches other than their own (exchange of pulpit). Finally, the church is challenged to make the message of ecumenism as popular as possible just like the over rated message of prosperity, which has no ability of presenting the church as one as Christ desired.

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