

## THE CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH AND THE IMPERATIVE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

The beginning of the church in apostolic times has been a visible expression of unity in the catholicity of the church. Although the early church did experience divisions and conflicts, it was still a church that was united in mind and heart. If the gospel message is to be effectively preached, leading to far-reaching conversion of the world, then Christians must be united. Drawing from the ecclesiology of the early church, this paper seeks to challenge Christians to an ecumenical imperative and its implications for witnessing in Nigeria. While the scandal of disunity has been an affront to the priestly prayer of Jesus for unity, Christians, irrespective of their denominations, must be part of this genuine effort at reconciling differences. Although modest successes have been recorded in the trajectory of unity, much is to be desired of the ecumenical movement. This paper proposes that unless there is a collaborative effort across denominational divides, the search for Christian unity would be impossible. The unity envisaged here is not aimed at conformity and uniformity but a plurality of unity in which synergy is formed for the witnessing to the gospel. Christians can draw from the example of the early church in which unity was understood within the context of Christology and faith in the one baptism. This paper will highlight specific thematic areas in which Christians can cooperate in the bond of communion that speaks to the church's catholicity in our time.

**Keywords: Christian Unity, Social justice, Ecumenical Dialogue, Witness, Reconciliation**

### Introduction

The imperative for Christian unity in the last fifty years has gained traction with the official pronouncements of various churches. Documents such as *Decree on Ecumenism* (1964), *Ut Unum Sint*, (1995), *The Church as Communion* (1990), *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church* (1993), *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) promoted and accentuated the ecumenical spirit blowing in the church. Christians are unanimous in their affirmation that a communion of churches is necessary not only in answer to the priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17: 21-23 but for clarity in the witness of the mission of the catholicity of the church. If the Good

news is to be effectively witnessed in a hostile and sceptical world, it is only necessary that the communion of believers be a visible unity. In the words of Pope John Paul II (2008), evangelism can be effective “only when we are completely united in faith and when we speak his word with one voice, a voice that rings with that warm vitality which characterises the whole Christian community when it lives together in full communion.”

Although the movement to restore Christian unity can be traced more than a thousand years ago, ecumenism properly speaking began at the turn of the twentieth century. This movement found impetus in the various official/magisterial documents and the writings of theologians of Orthodox,

Catholic, and Protestant churches. While there have been points of convergence in ecclesiological teaching, there have also been contentious areas. This article seeks to explore the beginning of divisions in Christendom that brought about the emergence of the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant denominations. The paper also highlights the ecumenical movement that arose in renewing the church's catholicity and bringing about unity and cooperation. Finally, the paper examines the practice of ecumenism and the imperative of the church's catholicity for evangelisation and witnessing in Nigeria. This will be highlighted within the thematic areas of witnessing to the gospel, social justice, ecumenical dialogue, and the unity week of prayer.

The research will be contextualised within Nigeria which has a significant number of Christians from the five blocks of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). CAN is the umbrella body that unites Christians in Nigeria. Christians can draw from the example of the early church where unity was understood within the context of Christology and faith in the one baptism. The imperative for communion that speaks to the catholicity of the church in our time cannot be overemphasised.

### **The Meaning of Catholicity**

The word "catholic" comes from the Greek word *katholikos*, which is frequently loosely translated as universal. This meaning often connotes geographical spread and large membership of the church. However, as Henry De Lubac (1988: 49) states, the intrinsic nature of catholicity rests on the fact that the church is spiritual. De Lubac also asserts in the same writing that "the church would still not be deprived of this essential nature even if tomorrow apostasy on a large scale deprived her of almost all the faithful." This has been the understanding of the apologists of the early centuries of the

church. However, when the great treatises on the marks of the church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) came to be written, emphasis and importance were placed on the church's geographical spread (De Lubac, 50). The union of the church in Jesus Christ is brought about through the incarnation and the redemption on Calvary. Whatever the number of its members, and in whatever part of the earth she is to be found, all are gathered into a unique union to share in a spiritual bond and renewal. Therefore, in its fullest meaning, the word catholic brings into existence and gathers men and women into one whole in the bond of peace that is open to all and excluding none (De Lubac, 52).

### **Ecclesiology in the New Testament**

The event that brought about the beginning of the early church was the post-Easter phenomenon. The risen Lord became the rallying point that animated and constituted the apostles and disciples into a community of believers (Gaillardetz, 2008:18). The resurrection was the proof that Jesus was the eschatological Messiah, and for this reason, the resurrection was associated with the giving of the Holy Spirit first to the disciples, and then also to 'all flesh' in the event of the Pentecost (Acts 2:17). Therefore, the church was regarded as the eschatological community in which the risen Lord would gather around him in his Parousia and with which he would identify himself fully. In this regard, the church as the body of the risen Christ and the Church as the communion of the spirit are one and the same thing (Zizioulas, 1985: 27, 28)).

Within a short time, the followers of Jesus started finding converts and creating small communities of faith at different locations. At first, this missionary drive was confined to the Jewish territories. However, with Paul's missionary endeavours the gospel spread to the Gentiles as well. While the communities were centred on faith in

Jesus Christ, there were varieties of ecclesiological trajectories and emphasis from community to community (Gaillardetz, 2008: 32). For example, the churches founded by Paul in Corinth, Rome, Galatia, and Thessalonica preached Christ crucified and risen, while Luke-Acts emphasise the trajectory of the universality of the message and the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church (Gaillardetz, 23). Gaillardetz warns that we must resist the temptation of romanticising the ecclesiology underlying the diverse traditions. While the first generations of Christians had a communal consciousness, such communal mindfulness was “marked by a startling diversity of theological points” (Gaillardetz, 32). In other words, conformity and uniformity have never been the hallmarks of Christianity even from its nascent form. Christian unity therefore in the nascent church needs to be understood within the context of a differentiated and relational unity. (Gaillardetz, 85).

Despite the diversity, the Christian life was always conceived as a life of shared belonging and discipleship. This shared belonging was often articulated in ‘a rich diversity of metaphors such as ‘the body of Christ,’ ‘a priestly people,’ ‘a flock,’ and ‘a fraternity.’ Each of these titles suggested a spiritually grounded solidarity among believers (Gaillardetz, 2008:32). Yet, the early church's ecumenical efforts do not suggest that the church was perfect. The communion of Christians has always been fragile and often put to the test.

### **Divisions in Christendom**

Although the summaries in Acts of the Apostles (2:42-27; 4:32-35; 5:12-16) present a semblance of a perfect *koinonia*, it is pertinent to balance this utopian vision with reality: the early church was also marked by divisions and

conflicts. Consider a few examples: the first deacons were chosen because Gentiles widows were overlooked (Acts 6:1); a fierce debate ensued on how best to receive Gentiles converts (Acts 15: 1-21); Paul challenged Peter when the latter would not engage in table fellowship with Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-14). These divisions, however, did not necessarily indicate a break or separation (Tillard, 1992: 33). Kelly (2002: 53) states that although the early church was not perfect, “there was a real rigour among them for truth. It may not have been true of every member, but as a community, they were rigorously seeking the best way to live the Christian life.” Unlike later generations of Christians, the early church saw these conflicts as wounds to the body of Christ and quickly took steps to restore unity in the ecclesial *koinonia* (Schreck, 2008: 95).

Nevertheless, the catholicity of first-century Christianity soon gave way to a major split in later centuries when Christianity took roots in diverse cultural, social, and political contexts. Between the second and the fifth centuries, the church was immersed in bitter Christological controversies. The debates worsened in the “volatile confluence of political, social, economic and theological factors” (Gaillardetz, 2008: 90). The disputes would attack the foundations of the faith, leading to the first major schism in the Christian church between the Greek (Orthodox) and Latin (Catholic) churches of the East and West respectively in 1054 CE. Attempts by the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 to heal the rift failed. The East and West will remain separate until another major blow was dealt to the unity of the Western Church by the Protestant Reformation in 1517.

The Reformation movement of the sixteen century marked the founding of

the Protestant churches. This movement had an “unparalleled impact on Christianity’s consciousness of itself as a united Christian church, one that it is still struggling to recover even after more than four centuries” (Gaillardetz, 101). The new movement, championed by Martin Luther, would split the Western church into the Catholic Church and Protestant Church.

In sum, by the end of the sixteen century, Christianity had splintered into three major groups: Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. While there were various attempts at unification, all churches have not been in full communion. In the centuries after the Reformation, Catholic ecclesiology would be dominated by an apologetic impulse. The unity of Christians was increasingly understood as uniformity and conformity, and the institutional integrity of the church was seen as essential for the preservation of the church’s unity. The encyclicals letters *Satis Cognitum* of Leo XII (1896) and *Mortalium animos* (1928) of Pius XI would reject the ecumenical movement as relativising the claim of the Catholic Church to be the true Church of Christ (Kasper, 2017:29). Hence, salvation was taught to be only in the Holy Roman Catholic Church. The order to the separated churches, therefore, was to return to the Catholic Church for their salvation. Under such a hostile climate the ecumenical movement could not have been conceived by the Roman Catholic Church.

### **The Emergence of ecumenism**

Although there were attempts to restore Christian unity in different epochs, the ecumenical movement never gained traction until the twentieth century. The Protestant churches would be credited with the initiative, born out of a shared vision to restore visible unity among Christians (Gaillardetz, 2008:105). This began with the gathering of various church leaders in Edinburgh, Scotland for the World Missionary Conference. This bold move

was preceded by the initiative of the Episcopalian Minister, Paul Watson, who introduced the Octave of Prayer of Christian Unity, which was celebrated for the first time from January 18 to 25, 1908 (Kasper, 2017: 28). In deep sorrow and contrition, the churches realised that their situation of division, contrary to the will of Christ, was sinful and shameful. The Edinburgh ecumenical effort gave rise to sub-committees to facilitate the vision and mission of the conference. The convergent efforts of the various Conference gave rise to the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam in 1948. The work of the Council has constituted a great milestone in ecumenical efforts (28).

The Roman Catholic Church was averse to the ecumenical movement at its beginning in 1910. It regarded the movement as relativising its singular claim of being the true Church of Christ. However, there were writings of notable theologians such as Yves Congar and Henry Newman which became influential in steering the church in the trajectory of the ecumenical movement. Congar was instrumental in helping draft the conciliar documents on ecumenism. The benefits of ecumenism, Congar asserts, “besides freeing from narrowness, help us escape from a related problem – a certain complacency which thinks it has the answers to all the problems, be it an apologetic, even apostolic haste that is rather sordidly triumphant” (Catholic Sensibility, 2008). Newman’s ecumenical perspective saw him rejoice in the common heritage shared by all believers and sought to confirm Christians of every communion in those doctrines and practices that belonged to the general patrimony (Dulles, 1990: 729).

With the coalescing of theological and secular currents, Vatican II's conciliar Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) opened the doors for the

Catholic Church to engage in the restoration of Christian unity with the Protestants and Orthodox churches alike (Kasper, 2017: 29). In its introduction, *Unitatis Redintegratio* states that the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Council (Flannery, 1988: 499). Three decades later, this Vatican II document was followed by another important encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*. Although the new document drew its teachings from *Unitatis Redintegratio*, it went further to affirm that Christian unity was necessary because “what unites us is much greater than what divides us.” (John Paul, 1994: sec. 20).

While the Roman Catholic Church had always insisted on visible unity as a precondition for the unity of Christians, these later documents showed openness and a sincere attempt at embracing members of other churches as brothers and sisters, with respect and affection (Flannery, 1988: 502). It was a marked departure from earlier Catholic “ecumenism of return” of Pope Pius XI, and the non-recognition of members of other churches as members of Christ’s church by Pius XII (Gaillardetz, 2008: 106). The Catholic Church, embracing now the modern ecumenical movement, shifted its focus from multilateral dialogues to the both/and approach of bilateral and multilateral dialogues (Kasper, 2017: 29). The fruits of these efforts are evident in such watershed ecumenical documents as the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between Catholics and Lutherans* (1999); *The Church as Communion* (1990) of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission; and the *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority* (2007) of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue

Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Although the Roman Catholic Church continued with its policy of not being a member of the WCC, it became actively engaged in extensive discussion and collaboration with many churches and indeed is a full member of the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission (The Catholic League, 2014).

### **How Ecumenism can enhance the mission of the church in Nigeria**

As noted earlier, Christian unity is imperative if the witness of the church in the world is to have any credibility. Differences in church doctrines notwithstanding, the body of Christ needs to act in a concerted way to demonstrate the unity of mission and purpose. This paper will discuss four thematic areas the ecumenical movement can bring about unity and strength to the body of Christ in Nigeria.

### **Ecumenical dialogue in sincerity**

Openness and sincerity in dialogue among Christians are essential in enhancing the mission of the church. The Second Vatican Council encourages dialogue among all Christians so that everyone can better appreciate the faith practices and beliefs of each other. In this regard, Christians need to demonstrate a willingness to appreciate diversity in unity (Fosarelli, 2008: 537). Pope John Paul II (1995: sec. 23) writes:

It can be said that the ecumenical movement in a certain sense was born out of the negative experience of each one of those who, in proclaiming the one Gospel, appealed to his own church or ecclesial community.

He further warns that the only hope for reconciliation is a true dialogue, which also serves as an examination of conscience. This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, according to Benedict XVI, “should be regarded as the soul of the

whole ecumenical movement and merits the name ‘spiritual ecumenism’ (*Aparecida Document 2007*). Through this openness and sharing of truth, so much can be achieved as John Paul II (1995: sec. 36) notes:

Dialogue is also a natural instrument for comparing differing points of view and above all, for examining those disagreements which hinder full communion between Christians. . . With regard to the study of disagreement, the council required that the whole body of doctrine be clearly presented. At the same time, it asks that the manner and method of expounding the Catholic faith should not be a hindrance to dialogue with our brothers and sisters. Certainly, it is possible to profess one’s faith and to explain its teaching in such a way that is correct, fair, and understandable, and which at the same time takes into account both the way of thinking and the actual historical experience of the other party.

However, cautionary measures must be taken to prevent all forms of reductionism or facile agreement. Such false irenicism can cause serious setbacks to the successes already recorded in the path of ecumenism. (John Paul II, 1995: sec. 36). Consequently, openness and sincerity in ecumenical dialogue are key if any progress is to be achieved. There are times of real disagreements in matters of faith, but these can be confronted in a sincere spirit of fraternal charity and respect for the consciences of both parties in a spirit of humility, love, and truth (sec. 38). The sincerity and openness need not only be the primary work of Church officials. Meetings at the local level can also be fruitful for promoting Christian unity. Father Cantalamessa, in Williamson, 2009: 112) writes:

At the level of ecumenism, we must work patiently to remove enormous barriers that have been built between the churches. This work has to take place at the capillary level: between the communities and denominations; within each Church – for

example, between the clergy and laypeople – and finally between individuals.

Christians in Nigeria can achieve unity when members ask in a friendly and sincere manner the faith practice of one another. When we engage in castigating the beliefs and faith practices of others, we limit the possibility of pastoral encounter and dialogue in the body of Christ. On the contrary, when one creates intentional spaces for fruitful encounters in humility, the possibilities abound in which one can appreciate the faith practice of others and draw closer in unity of purpose. Onaiyekan (1996: 216) in a reflection paper at the African Synod, challenged the men and women of Africa with this statement:

If we cannot relate well with one another within the Church, how can we manage with those outside the Church? Every segment of the Church, including the laity, is challenged to examine itself in this regard. This means a readiness to acknowledge whatever is good in others and allow them to be different while promoting all those things that unite.”

We may not be responsible for the historical divisions in Christianity. However, we can become iconoclastic agents of evangelisation breaking down walls of prejudice, bigotry, and intolerance.

### **A life of witness: The example of Christ**

In his Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II (1996: 260) draws the attention of the African Church to the enormity of the challenges to Christian witness. Christian witness in holiness is an essential element of Christian unity. Christian unity requires the eloquent testimony of holiness in imitation to Christ who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Christian witness in dialogue is not only about matters of

doctrine. It involves the whole human person because it is also a dialogue of love (John Paul II, 1996: no 47, 54). John Paul II (#48) invites Catholics to appreciate the witness in the lives of other Christians who at times have shed their blood. In the Decree on Ecumenism, the Fathers of the Church at Vatican II decried the absence of this Christian witness amongst many Catholics. "As a result, the radiance of the church's face shines less brightly in the eyes of our separated brethren and of the world at large, and the growth of God's kingdom is retarded" (Flannery, 1988: 458). The words of the Pope could be applied to Christians in Nigeria. The imperative for Christian unity will bear bountiful fruits if we heed the exhortation of our Lord to live as brothers and sisters. Benedict XVI states that "brotherhood (sisterhood) among all Christians has been rediscovered and re-established as a condition for dialogue, cooperation, common prayer, and solidarity" (Benedict XVI, 2006).

One of the obstacles to achieving unity is when Christians become hardened and complacent in belonging to their church or communion. They fail to reflect and recognize their sinfulness as part of the problem (Tanko, 1991: 178-9). Of course, there is nothing wrong with being faithful to one's confession. The problem is when we fail to bear witness to our faith before others who do not belong to our fold. Christians in Nigeria need to address the yawning chasm between their pious hopes and practical realities otherwise unity becomes not only difficult but impossible to attain.

### **The challenges of social justice as it affects our world: common action**

Creating a just society where God's children can realise their potential is a great way of collaborating and manifesting the unity of faith. Essential

for the gospel is witnessing in justice and peace where the Christians demonstrate their solidarity with those who are outcasts (Tillard, 1992: 30). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994: 461) states: "Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design." More than five decades ago the Second Vatican Council (Flannery, 1988, 207) articulated this basic fact when it declared:

In pursuing its own salvific purpose not only does the Church communicate divine life to men (women), but in some way, it casts the reflected light of that divine life over the earth, notably in the way it heals and elevates the dignity of the human person, in the way it consolidates society, and endows the daily activity of men (women), with a deeper sense and meaning. The Church, then, believes it can contribute much to humanising the family of man and its history through each of its members and its community as a whole.

One of the primary goals of the WCC is witness and service to the world. The WCC "seeks to accomplish this through, among other things, expressing its commitment to '*diakonia*' in serving the human family in justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation, so that all may experience the fullness of life" (Waweru, 2008: 236). True, there have been areas of collaboration within the Christian Association of Nigeria in Nigeria such as in health services. For example, the formation of CHAN (Christian Health Association of Nigeria) is commendable. CHAN is an interdenominational organisation of Christian churches whose purpose is to address the health needs of Christians. The organisation forms a collaborative network to resolve the menace of prevalent diseases in Africa such as

malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, among others. During his first pastoral visit to Nigeria, His Holiness Pope John Paul II (1982) applauded the ecumenical spirit behind the initiative of this body in his address to leaders of different religious Christian families. In partnership, a cluster of churches can team up to promote such transformation in the people's social, political, and economic milieu. This will be a powerful witness of the mission of the church which will speak volumes. Waweru (2008: 236) writes in this regard:

This language of action to change communities for the better is a good point of departure in the search of unity, for it knows no denominational or religious boundaries. People touched by the churches in their hour of need will understand the message of Christian love better. Service to humanity can bring together members of mainstream Churches: Pentecostals and Evangelicals, as well as Roman Catholic churches.

Other kinds of church collaboration have been made in joint political statements issued on behalf of CAN during the persecution of Christians, presentation of memoranda to the Federal Government on the implementation of the *Sharia* legal system, and common Christian syllabi for schools, to mention but a few. These are highly commendable and need to be sustained.

### **The unity week of prayer**

The week of prayer often celebrated in January by Christians in Nigeria is a great source of ecumenical strength. The primacy of prayer in the ecumenical gathering is at the core of the Christian mission and its credibility. Pope John Paul II, (in Sheerin & Hotchkin 1981: 90-10) encouraged all Christians not to lose hope but to work toward the unity that is an integral part of our calling as Christians:

But if it inevitably shows that unity, unfortunately, is not yet reached and that divergences remain among Christians, it also indicates, however, that the Lord and the Holy Spirit are present and working among Christians, who are proving to be more and more attentive to the question of unity. Particularly this week, Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants meet to pray together. This placing of ourselves before the Lord in this way is already a positive reply to his appeal for unity and is the expression of common will and the common commitment to continue in obedience of faith, toward full unity.

Prayer must be at the centre of church life and in every activity organised to achieve Christian unity. In Nigeria, Christians have certainly given this prayer week a well-deserved place in their calendar of spiritual events. The beginning of the year is always welcomed with an ecumenical gathering of the different denominations. Christians gather to address common concerns, fears, worries, and anxieties while prayerfully seeking common solutions to these problems, united in the one faith. I always look forward to this week as it affords me the privilege of meeting and collaborating with other Christian leaders and members of other denominations. It also enables the sharing of places of worship among believers. During the week, Christian division gives way to mutual understanding, love, and peace. Friendship among believers rises to a new level. In addition, there is an understanding of our common destiny as Jesus' disciples, committed to the actualisation of the kingdom on earth.

However, some soul-searching questions would be begging for answers as Klaus (2007: 423) opined. What happens after the week of prayer for Christian unity? How does the week impact the life of the churches? Can it be a source of renewal or a pointless



ecumenical ritual? Where do we go from here? How can we build on the momentum and spiritual energy generated during the week? These are challenging questions that should occupy the mind of Christians in Nigeria as every Unity Week of Prayer draws to a close.

An instructive study by Fosarelli (2008: 539-541) of three Baltimore (MD) churches in the United States of America can provide some insights into how Christians can move beyond the week of prayer. The three churches in this case study – Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian – were located a few blocks from each other. They had co-existed in the neighbourhood for over a hundred years. During this time, they maintained a respectable distance from each other. Sometimes two churches co-operated on a particular project but never have they come together. Then in the year 2000, an unusual situation occurred. All three churches received new pastors. The pastors saw an opportunity to move beyond the decades of indifference and belligerence that had become the norm among their faithful. They then set to work in the spirit of ecumenism. The pastors viewed themselves as role models for their congregations and encouraged their members “to get to know each other, to mourn with each other and celebrate with each other” (541). The pastors did not just tell their congregations to unite. They got acquainted with each other at monthly lunches and organised joint ecumenical services on Good Fridays and Ash Wednesdays. Moreover, all three Churches convened at a joint ecumenical service in a particular Church to mourn the victims of September 11, 2001. And the three Churches met again when the Catholic Church celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> year, with the Catholic Cardinal presiding. The example of these pastors is a powerful

witness for all seeking the path of genuine Christian unity. This example may be a world away from the context of this paper. However, it demonstrates that Christian unity is a possibility, the circumstance, and context of the local church notwithstanding.

Both the clergy and faithful need to understand the necessity of taking concrete steps towards the goal of unity. Words are not enough and certainly example better than precepts. When pastors of nearby churches meet and fraternise only at formal ecumenical meetings, this is far from the ideal. Church leaders must move beyond the formal, interact and embrace each other in true brotherhood and sisterhood.

### **Conclusion**

Christian unity is a matter every Christian need not only desire but must work assiduously to further, no matter how minute the result may be. Paying lip service to ecumenism has done far more damage than good. All must work towards this goal with due diligence and sincerity of purpose. The biblical foundation of unity demands Christians come together irrespective of denominational divide. Unity in the body of Christ should not be an issue forced upon us by circumstances from without, but something that lies at the core of our calling as disciples and children of the one Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. How then can we challenge ourselves in the ecumenical movement of today to the realities that confront us? How can we respond positively to them? Is there any way out of the situation for us as Christians? This paper opines that the Church in Nigeria can move in the right direction when it takes steps to eliminate stumbling blocks on the path of unity. While many Christians deride the call to unity as an exercise in futility, the fact

remains that united we stand and divided we fall.

Since Christians have been justified by faith in baptism and made children of the one God, they have so much that binds them together. This can be that catalyst to propel them on the path of unity even if it is imperfect. As a matter of ecumenical imperative, Christians need to break new ground and extend the frontiers of Christian unity beyond what it is today. No one should be satisfied with what obtains at the moment because division does not conform to the will of Christ, and definitely weakens the Church in the exercise of its mission. So much needs to be done and so much can be done. The church can take solace in the fact that while the lack of unity among Christians is certainly a wound in the body of Christ, the church is never deprived of her unity.

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