

# **Christian Association of Nigeria:**

## **Politics and Ecumenism**

**by**

**Jordon Samson Rengshwat**

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) 'is an Association of Christian Churches with distinct identities, recognizable Church structures and a system of worship of one God in the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'<sup>1</sup> The Association might never have come into being were it not for the anti-mission activities of the post-independence Nigerian Government and the churches' fear of Islam. It was formed primarily as a Christian political pressure group or, euphemistically, a Christian 'interest-protection' group. Shortly after its formation some of its custodians tried to make it to be more than an 'interest-protection' group. The desire for Christian unity in CAN is still expressed by some people today. The dream of these people may not be realised in the foreseeable future.

This paper is not a treatise for or against CAN. It is an attempt to understand what CAN is, why it is what it is and why the concern for Christian unity in CAN will continue to be eclipsed by the political unity CAN is known for. To understand what the Association is, it is essential to begin with an overview of pre-1976 Catholic-Protestant relationship in Nigeria.

### **Mission-Church Relations in Nigeria from 1842 to 1975**

Before CAN emerged, Protestants and Roman Catholics in Nigeria were not on good terms. Some of the Protestant groups were also not on good terms with one another. This lack of cordiality among native believers from different Church denominations is traced to the time western missionaries came into Africa.

When the missionaries came, bitter rivalries erupted among them over mission territories. Protestant missionaries often settled this among themselves through agreements. But where the rivalry involved Protestants and Catholics, no such territorial agreements were made. Consequently there was a lot more tension between Catholic and Protestant missions than there was among the different Protestant missions. The tension was usually acute and prolonged, as observed by Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed in the following words:

For centuries the two competing confessions, Catholic and Protestants, treated one another with damning silence—plodding along on different sides of the same hill or river, relying on the same vernacular related to the same traditional African religion, dealing with similar daily experiences in the district in hot season and rainy season—yet never meeting. The other party did not or should not exist.<sup>2</sup>

This Catholic-Protestant tension was worse in East Africa than in West Africa.<sup>3</sup>

However, between 1965 and 1967 the Joint Christian Council of Uganda emerged. Again between 1965 and 1966, the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Tanzania adopted a Protestant translation of the Bible. It was also around this time that mixed theological discussion groups emerged. There were two such groups in Tanzania and one in Uganda.<sup>4</sup> Two factors accounted

for this improvement in Catholic-Protestant relations in East Africa. As the tension was chiefly over mission territories, the intensity of the tension slightly reduced throughout Africa when concern for mission territories also reduced with the increasing burden of pastoral work.<sup>5</sup> Besides, some Catholic Bishops in the region were beginning to put the decisions of Vatican II on ecumenism into practice. In West Africa there were no such attempts at co-operation between Catholics and Protestants despite the slight decrease in tension that was characteristic of this time.<sup>6</sup>

These small beginnings of Catholic-Protestant co-operation in East Africa and the slight decrease in tension across the continent were the only bright spots. Writing about ten years to the formation of CAN, Adrian Hastings describes the Catholic-Protestant relationship on the continent in these words:

Both Catholic and Protestant Missionaries were even up to recent times extremely doubtful as to whether the other side could really be said to be preaching Christ at all. Such missionary attitudes inevitably passed across to the new Christians and feelings of hostility, often even stronger than those to be found on a wide scale in Europe, developed among them. Such feelings, reinforced by loyalties to a particular school, become focused in a struggle for social and governmental domination.<sup>7</sup>

Hastings' expression here is far from one that is toned down. He has described the tension between the Catholics and Protestants on the continent in a way that helps the modern reader to come to an understanding of what the situation was like in those days.

Commenting on the situation in Nigeria in the first quarter of the twentieth century, E.D. Morel writes: 'there is the lamentable intolerance displayed by Christian proselytizers towards one another.'<sup>8</sup> This tension was particularly acute in Eastern Nigeria<sup>9</sup> where a rival mission could brazenly discredit the work of the others as seen thus:

Disunity was added to by the attitudes of some missionaries who discredited the work of their rivals in the presence of their own African congregations. This understandably bred mistrust and intolerance between the African members of rival denominations.<sup>10</sup>

About eleven years prior to the formation of CAN Michael Marioghae and John Ferguson summed up the Catholic-Protestant relationship in Nigeria in these words: 'on the whole, the story is one of regrettable tension.'<sup>11</sup> The tension was not confined to the adult population only. Having been passed from missionaries to native believers, native parents handed down the hatred to their children. Consequently, school children from either camp often sang rude songs about one another.<sup>12</sup> In the midst of these tensions in both Africa and Nigeria, bright spots which were forerunners of the better days that were to come continued to emerge.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Remote Causes of the Formation of CAN**

Here we are considering those factors that prepared the ground for the emergence of CAN or made its formation easier. While the aforementioned tension was going on, a number of events were unfolding within and outside the country which helped to prepare the minds of both Catholics and Protestants to welcome CAN when providence thrust the idea on them.

Until Vatican II the official position of the Roman Catholic Church with respect to co-operation was:

Unless other Christian 'sects' agreed to accept the authority and teaching of the Roman Catholic Church which was alone in possession of the full truth, then there was no point in co-operation at any level.<sup>14</sup>

But Vatican II, one of the most important councils in the history of Christianity since the fall of the Western Roman Empire, brought a profound change to this official position. Vatican II, the 21<sup>st</sup> council of the Roman Catholic Church,<sup>15</sup> began in 1962 and ended in 1965. During this council, one of the things that took centre stage was the discussion on the relationship of the Church with other Christian confessions and with Jews and people of other religions. This discussion led to the Decree on Ecumenism parts of which read:

The concern for restoring unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talents of each, whether it be exercised in daily Christian living or in theological and historical studies. The concern itself already reveals to some extent the bond of brotherhood existing among all Christians, and it leads toward full and perfect unity, in accordance with what God in his kindness wills . . . there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion. For it is from newness of attitudes of mind (cf. Eph. 4:23), from self denial and unstinted love, that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way. We should therefore pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others and to have an attitude of brotherly generosity toward them.<sup>16</sup>

Undoubtedly, the formulation of this decree is a watershed in Christian history. From this point the hearts of Catholics began to warm up towards their brethren from other denominational folds. In this way Vatican II prepared the ground for the emergence of CAN, and it gave the Catholic clergy in Nigeria the impetus and permission to lead their people towards co-operation with non-Catholic Christians.

While Vatican II prepared the minds of Catholics, the emergence of the World Council of Churches, All-Africa Council of Churches, Christian Council of Nigeria, Tarayar Ekklesiyyin Kristi a Sudan (The Fellowship of the Churches of Christ in the Sudan [later, in Nigeria]), New Life For All, and the Northern Christian Association prepared the minds of many Nigerian Protestants to love those of other Christian folds outside the four corners of their denominational walls. In this way these Protestant international, regional and national associations prepared the ground for the birth of CAN.

Both Vatican II and the Protestant ecumenical associations were largely a preparation for CAN 'from above'.<sup>17</sup> But the one thing that practically prepared the minds of the masses of the Churches for ecclesiastical co-operation was politics. Peter B. Clarke points this out clearly:

While many Churchmen continued to think in terms of what distinguished one Christian denomination from another, and in particular Catholics from Protestants, more and more African politicians, journalists and others involved in the independence movement began increasingly to emphasise the need for solidarity and unity. This had an effect on the relations between the different Christian churches...<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, when CAN emerged later, the masses from both camps were able to embrace it because the idea of solidarity and co-operation was not new to them. Perhaps it was against this background of general willingness for solidarity at the time of independence, that a prominent African leader made this prediction in the 1960s, 'When you missionaries leave, our churches will all unite into one body.'<sup>19</sup>

Thus, on the eve of the birth of CAN the cradle of co-operation was already in place. The minds of both the clergy and laity were prepared to welcome the idea of Catholic-Protestant co-operation. But neither side was bold or humble or optimistic enough to take the initiative of extending the hand of fellowship to the other. Neither camp was able to overcome the shame of about a century of tension to reach out to the other. Such was the situation on the eve of the birth of CAN. And were it not for the anti-mission activities of the Nigerian government in general, and the fear of Islam in particular, Catholic-Protestant co-operation might have remained elusive to this day.

### **The Immediate Causes of the Formation of CAN**

The one thing that brought CAN into existence was the activities of the post-independence Nigeria Government. Within the first fifteen years of the government, many mission schools and hospitals were taken over by the government. This was not peculiar to Nigeria: mission schools and hospitals were also taken over in Ghana and Guinea (Conakry).<sup>20</sup> The taking over of mission institutions in these other lands shows that there was a power, other than the power of Islam, behind the taking over of the mission schools and hospitals in Nigeria. Alongside the taking over of mission schools and hospitals, the Nigerian government denied visas to many Western missionaries, and gifts to the churches from abroad were unusually taxed.<sup>21</sup> These difficulties produced the first step towards Catholic-Protestant solidarity and co-operation. In the words of Bishop Alaba Job of Ibadan,

. . . the take over of schools and other institutions of the Voluntary Agencies by the Federal Government had already created an atmosphere of social ecumenism among us.<sup>22</sup>

The next step towards solidarity and co-operation was the invitation of the government. In February 1976 the Nigerian federal government invited Christian leaders to a meeting.<sup>23</sup> The meeting was presided by Brigadier (later Major-General) Shehu Yar'adua, the then Chief of Army Staff.<sup>24</sup> At this meeting an incident took place which showed to the Christian leaders in graphic terms the scandal of their disunity. Musa A.B. Gaiya narrates the incident in the following words,

At this meeting, Yar'adua had asked Muslims to both open and close the meeting with prayers. One of the Christian leaders stood up [and] asked, "Can't you asked a Christian to say a prayer?" Yar'adua replied, as reported by Jolly Tanko Yusuf, "There are so many denominations represented here, how can I ask any Christian to say a prayer?"<sup>25</sup>

This aspersion was perhaps a timely and appropriate homily to the Christian leaders. It no doubt pricked their conscience and made them to hate their disunity. Thus, they were moved a step further towards co-operation. If the homily never touched their hearts, if it never moved them a step further towards co-operation, at least the meeting itself did that. As this was perhaps the first meeting of its kind where Catholic and Protestant leaders sat under one roof to look at

issues that concerned all of them, the force of inertia which had for some time prevented a people whose minds were already prepared for co-operation was overcome.

As one meeting often carries in it the seed of another, the Christian leaders had to meet again to deliberate 'on how to respond to the issues raised by Shehu Yar'adua.'<sup>26</sup> For this second meeting, the leaders met at the Catholic secretariat in Lagos on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1976.<sup>27</sup> Having been admonished and given the go-ahead to pursue co-operation with other Christian confessions by the decision of Vatican II and having seen the need for co-operation in no uncertain terms, the Catholic Bishops became the first to extend their hands of fellowship to the Protestants by offering their secretariat for the meeting. It was at this meeting that CAN was formed. According to Bauna Peter Tanko,

It was during this meeting that it was decided that there has to be one central body for all Christians in Nigeria *to safeguard their interests in dealing with the government* . . . . At the end of the meeting of these Christian leaders, Cardinal Dominic Ekandem was elected as President of the CAN while Mr. C.O. Williams, the secretary of the CCN, was elected secretary of the CAN...<sup>28</sup>

From this quotation the reason for the formation of CAN, as its 'midwives' saw it on that day, was '*to safeguard their interests in dealing with the government.*' In this, E.P.T. Crampton is in complete agreement with Tanko as seen below:

Undoubtedly the 'takeover' of schools and hospitals by the Governments and fears, whether justified or not, that Government recognition of the *shari'a* was giving some sort of preferential treatment to Islam were primary reasons for its formation.<sup>29</sup>

Besides the anti-mission activities of the post-independence Nigerian government, the growing fear of Islam among the churches was a factor in the formation of CAN.<sup>30</sup> Thus, CAN was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of August 1976 as a Christian pressure group or, euphemistically put, a Christian 'interest-protection' association. The member churches of CAN during those early days were mainly the Catholic Church and the member churches of the Christian Council of Nigeria.<sup>31</sup>

### **CAN, Christian Unity and Politics**

Shortly after its birth some of its custodians, disturbed by conscience, were not happy about the parochial reason for the formation of CAN. Therefore, during the drafting of the constitution, their influence made the constitution describe the Association in the following words:

The Association is a fellowship of churches, working together to promote the glory of God by encouraging the growth and unity of the churches, and by helping them to salvation and all its fruits.<sup>32</sup>

The activities of the unity-conscious custodians have slightly moved CAN from a gathering to protect interests towards more Christian ecumenism. This slight movement towards Christian ecumenism has enabled CAN to play some non-political roles. CAN often collaborates with the Bible Society of Nigeria in the translation of the Bible into local languages. Through the Christian Health Association of Nigeria (CHAN) CAN produces drugs for the wider society.<sup>33</sup> CAN has also been working on 'a well balanced Christian Education that will protect the

morality of the Nation.<sup>34</sup> Apart from these roles, CAN sometimes arbitrates for member churches in dispute with one another.

Today, in spite of the efforts of the unity-conscious custodians, CAN is better known for its role of defending Christianity than for its ability to unite Christians to a level of spiritual interaction and fellowship. This is evident in Gaiya's record of the achievements of the Association. According to him,

The greatest achievement of CAN is the political unity it has provided for Christians in Nigeria. Furthermore, CAN has influenced Christian politicians to fight against the inclusion of *shariah* courts in the constitution since 1978. The opposition to Nigeria's membership in the Organisation of the Islamic Countries (OIC) has been waged by CAN since 1987. As a result of the Kafanchan religious riot of 1987 in which churches, lives and property were destroyed, concerted efforts have been made by CAN to ensure the protection of the rights and safety of Christians in Nigeria.<sup>35</sup>

CAN's preoccupation with the defence of Christians and Christianity, rather than Christian ecumenism, makes the Association repulsive to a handful of people. Such people think that CAN is not valid in the light of Jesus' words in Luke 6:29 which reads, "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either." (NKJV)<sup>36</sup>

Since its formation the association has not lacked unity-conscious custodians who wish that individual Christians in CAN should be deeply and genuinely united in Christ without losing their denominational identity. Such custodians are obviously not in the majority. Two examples of such unity-conscious custodians in Northern Nigeria are Professor Adamu Baikie and Rev. Father Bauna Peter Tanko.

Baikie's desire for the deep and genuine unity of Christians in CAN is obvious in the speech he delivered at the launching ceremony of CAN in Kaduna in 1987. Some parts of the speech read:

Let it not be mistaken that our gathering here today is merely to demonstrate our numerical strength, neither are we gathered to demonstrate against any assailants we may have; we are here to not only concretely reaffirm our faith, but also to start a journey that would lead us to peace, unity and fellowship with ourselves and our fellow man. Endless divisions in the Christian Church have diluted the sense of oneness Christians once shared . . . . I believe that Christ and His way of life is central to our determination to get rid of our old selves so that a kind of oneness, a kind of fellowship that is unique and exciting, exhilarating and satisfying can be achieved as we march forward together as Christian soldiers.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, Bauna Peter Tanko is not comfortable with CAN's chief concern of defence of Christianity in the political arena. He wants to see more of Christian unity than political unity, the like Jesus prayed for in John 17:21. Some portions of the concluding part of his book give us a glimpse of the kind of unity he has in mind. The portions read:

The impetus of this work has been the desire for Christian unity in Nigeria, in keeping with the prayer of Jesus for unity of Christians as he is in the Father and the Father is in him (John 17:21). The CAN, as we have also demonstrated, needs a more positive

concept of Ecumenism in order for it to recognise, expand and deepen all that they as Christians have in common. . . . To bring about a more positive concept of Ecumenism in the CAN therefore, we have suggested interior conversion of hearts. . . . We have also suggested the formation of an ecumenical spirit from a theological perspective. This suggestion is based on the fact that with a proper formation of an ecumenical spirit, Christians will gradually dissolve their differences as they begin to think, reason, speak and act ecumenically. . . . It is our hope that the suggestions we have made will, through the help of the Holy Spirit, bring about that Christian unity which Jesus Christ prayed for: “May they all be one” (Jn. 17:21).<sup>38</sup>

At the moment, despite the efforts of the unity-conscious custodians, it may be difficult for CAN to move beyond its current status of ‘co-operation for defence’ into the realm of genuine spiritual or Christian ecumenism, the kind which the likes of Baikie and Tanko wish to see. This is because key obstacles, traces of pre-CAN tension and quest for control, may not allow this to happen. Currently, some Protestants in CAN still look down upon Catholics. They consider them as drunkards, and therefore not pious Christians. Some Catholics in turn do not consider some Protestant clergymen in CAN as properly ordained. They feel that the ordination of such leaders do not have historical link with first-century Christianity. To such Catholics, such Protestant clergymen are not qualified to lead ecumenical worship services. This trace of pre-1976 tension may not allow for genuine Christian or spiritual ecumenism.

The quest for power is another obstacle in the way of genuine Christian ecumenism in CAN. This problem is almost endemic in CAN, and it has a long history. Bauna Peter Tanko gives us an incident where the quest for control was brazenly demonstrated. According to him,

At a CAN national convention in Ibadan prior to the second Assembly of the CAN which was held in Kaduna from the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> November 1988, only specific delegates were invited to attend. But some came with a retinue of the members of their Churches and some who have never appeared at any national meeting made their way to the high table and sat there. At this convention, the National Secretary of the CAN took a back seat far away from the high table because there was no place for him on the high table. What happened was that the main actors became observers. This convention was rowdy because “the uninvited guests” were anxious to talk and be applauded by members of their Churches as a warming up in preparation for the election that was to follow.<sup>39</sup>

A similar incident occurred in 2004. During the 2004 election of the National Secretary of the Association, ‘sectional politics was played out.’ At a point some people threatened to walk out. At another point it was as if some people would exchange blows. This quest for control is not limited to the national level.<sup>40</sup> The issue of control seems to be the over-riding concern in many CAN elections. Undoubtedly, the seedling of genuine Christian ecumenism cannot grow to maturity amidst this quest for power.

Perhaps it is the persistence of these divisive factors and the like that has led to the change in the constitution’s definition of the Association. The old constitution defines the Association thus,

The Association is a fellowship of churches, working together to promote the glory of God by encouraging the growth and unity of the churches, and by helping them to salvation and all its fruits.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, the amended version of the constitution says,

Christian Association of Nigeria is an Association of Christian Churches with distinct identities, recognizable Church structures and a system of worship of one God in the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This Association makes Christ the centre of all its works and shall promote the glory of God, by encouraging the growth and unity of the churches, and by helping them to lead the nation and her people to partake of Christ's salvation and all its fruits.<sup>42</sup>

From this contrast it is easy to see how the word fellowship, a more appropriate word for Christian ecumenism, is dropped in favour of the word association, a rather loose term. There may be no genuine Christian ecumenism without the friendly atmosphere which the word fellowship denotes. One wonders whether this change in words (Fellowship displaced by Association) is a sign that unity-conscious believers are no longer in the mainstream of CAN.

CAN desires to be the conscience of the nation. This is evident in one of its objectives which run thus, '(d) to act as watch-man of the spiritual and moral welfare of the nation.'<sup>43</sup> This desire may, at the moment, remain largely in the realm of wishful thinking. CAN has a tendency to be 'at ease in Zion' with the political culture of Nigeria instead of criticising it. Perhaps a reason for this tendency is that some of the ill-gotten or stolen money of the corrupt office-holders ends up in the pockets of some CAN officials. Thus, CAN has not always spoken loud and clear enough against corruption and corrupt office holders. Commenting on CAN's tendency to settle into the political culture of Nigeria instead of criticizing it, Caleb Ahima said, 'CAN is not existing in a vacuum, she is part of the corrupt Nigerian society.'<sup>44</sup> Besides, there is the problem of love of money in CAN. The sum of about ten million naira that was given to CAN to build its ecumenical centre by the Babangida administration may not be adequately accounted for.<sup>45</sup> Some CAN officials often collect money from political aspirants with a promise to influence their followers to give such aspirants votes. An example of this took place in Plateau State during two presidential campaigns. When General Shehu Yar'adua and chief M.K.O. Abiola came to Plateau on separate occasions, CAN officials allegedly collected huge sums of money from both aspirants in order to influence their followers to give them votes. It was during the sharing of the ill-gotten money that the cat was let out of the bag.<sup>46</sup> If the foregoing is anything to go by, CAN may not make the needed impact as a watchman to the Nigerian state. She cannot easily make a clarion call for a national moral sanitation with these skeletons in her cupboard.

Despite all these problems CAN has welded itself into a great Association. Since 1976 zonal, state and local government chapters of the Association have been formed across the country. Currently, CAN has eight organs namely: the National Assembly, the National Executive Committee, the President-in-Council, the Zonal Assembly and the Zonal Executive Committee. Others are the State Assembly, the State Executive Committee and the Local Government Executive Committee.<sup>47</sup>

From 1976 until 2005 CAN had no national office. All these years the Association was using the facilities of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) and the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN).<sup>48</sup> In 2005 the national office, National Christian Centre, was dedicated in the Federal Capital. Today, for a new church denomination to be a member church of CAN, she is expected to show evidence of registration with the government of Nigeria. She is also expected to

...belong to one of the five Church Groups namely i. Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) ii. Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) iii. Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN)/Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) iv. Organisation of Africa Instituted Churches (OAIC) [and] v. TEKAN and ECWA Fellowship.<sup>49</sup>

CAN has won the loyalty of the majority of Christians in Nigeria today. However, its widespread nature and its popularity may not mean that Christian ecumenism, the kind that unity-conscious custodians like Baikie and Tanko advocate, is realized in Nigeria through CAN.

## **Conclusion**

There are two competing voices in CAN: the voice of political unity and the voice of Christian unity. At the moment the voice of political unity is louder and clearer than that of Christian unity. Genuine Christian unity may be hard to come by because of the quest for power that is almost endemic in CAN and because of the persistence of traces of pre-CAN tension. At the present, there seems to be nothing concrete in place to give hope for better things to come. In the foreseeable future the churches in CAN may not reach the level of Christian ecumenism that is obtained in modern Algeria where,

In the center of Algiers, the Protestants and Catholics Parishes have for three or four years united their Bible study and scouting movements. Pulpit exchanges are the rule rather than the exception. Joint services are held several times a year, at Christmas, Easter and during the week of prayer for Christian unity . . . . In Thenia, thirty miles to the East of Algiers, pastoral care is an entirely ecumenical project, involving the co-operation of the Catholic priest and Protestant pastors in ministry to the French–and English–speaking communities. In Tizi-Ouzou, bi-weekly Protestant services are held in the Catholic chapel, and joint services are held once every two months. Since there is no pastor in residence, day-to-day pastoral care of Protestants is in the hands of the Catholic community, and the pastor is kept informed.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the likes of this can happen in CAN. For the like of this to happen perhaps member churches need to hear anew the admonition of the great Catholic missionary statesman who says,

Schism was a chief cause in the decline and extinction of the great African churches of the early centuries. Let their fate warn us so that we turn in time from our divisions to unity of communion and common witness to the Lord in whom we all believe.<sup>51</sup>

For CAN to meet the expectations of those Nigerian Christians that are more concerned about Christian unity than political unity, more should be done in the area of joint fellowship services at all levels of CAN. Such services should be held during every Christian festival, and during the week for Christian unity. The leadership of CAN can constitute a Christian unity committee that would be saddled with the task of promoting the fellowship of member churches. Member churches of CAN may include the organisation in the curriculum of their seminaries. The focus of such curricula would be the identification of what the different denominations have in

common and the exploration of Scriptural texts that encourage Christian unity. Such curricula should also stress respect for the member churches of the organisation. When these are implemented, more ideas on genuine Christian unity in diversity may break forth.

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution of Christian Association of Nigeria, Amended version, 2004, p.1

<sup>2</sup> Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.5

<sup>3</sup> Michael Marioghae and John Ferguson, *Nigeria under the Cross* (London: Highway Press, 1965), p.46.

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Hastings, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), pp.244-246.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.240.

<sup>6</sup> Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1986), p.210.

<sup>7</sup> Adrian Hastings, pp.239-40

<sup>8</sup> E.D. Morel, *Nigeria: Its Peoples and Its Problems* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1911), p. 216. Morel is perhaps the first major writer on Nigeria.

<sup>9</sup> Marioghae and Ferguson, p.46.

<sup>10</sup> E.A. Udo, 'The Missionary Scramble for Spheres of Influence in South-Eastern Nigeria 1900-50' in O.U. Kalu (ed), *The History of Christianity in West Africa* (Essex: Longman Group Ltd, 1980), pp.177-79

<sup>11</sup> Marioghae and Ferguson, p.46.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.43-46. Also see Sundkler et al., p.5, and Hastings, pp.239, 247.

<sup>14</sup> Peter B. Clarke, p.210.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas F. Stransky, 'Roman Catholic since the Council' in Robin Keeley (ed), *Christianity: A World Faith* (Herts: Lion Publishing plc, 1985), p.35.

<sup>16</sup> Bauna Peter Tanko, *The Christian Association of Nigeria and the Challenge of the Ecumenical Imperative* (Rome: N. Domenici-Pecheux, 1991), pp. 11,12,60. This book is the offshoot of the author's doctoral thesis.

<sup>17</sup> Those whose minds were most prepared by these developments were the Clergymen.

<sup>18</sup> Peter B. Clarke, p.211.

<sup>19</sup> Sundkler and Steed, p.1025. We don't know where this leader was coming from. His comments help us to take the pulse of the time.

<sup>20</sup> Peter B. Clarke, p.239.

<sup>21</sup> Bauna Peter Tanko, p.125.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.143.

<sup>23</sup> The reason for the invitation is not ascertained. This was the month in which the Head of State, General Murtala Muhammed, a Muslim, was assassinated by Lt-Col. Z.B. Dimka and some junior officers among whom were many Middle Belt Christians.

<sup>24</sup> Bauna Peter Tanko, *op.cit.*, p.125.

<sup>25</sup> Musa A.B. Gaiya, 'Further Reflections on Christainity in Northern Nigeria 1975-2000' in E.P.T. Crampton, *Christianity in Northern Nigeria*, rev. ed. (Bukuru: ACTS, 2004), p.260.

<sup>26</sup> Bauna Peter Tanko, *op.cit.*, p.126.

<sup>27</sup> B.E. Merriman-Johnson, 'Brief Statement on Christian Association of Nigeria' in *Christian Association of Nigeria: Order of Service of Inauguration*, (CAN, 1980), p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.126-127. Emphasis is mine. Gaiya puts the date of the formation of CAN at 27-8-1976 while Crampton puts it at 1977 (for both references see Crampton, *op.cit.*, pp. 93 and 260). Gaiya's date is confirmed by B.E. Merriman-Johnson in his 'Brief Statement on Christian Association of Nigeria' (in *Christian Association of Nigeria: Order of Service of Inauguration*, (CAN, 1980), p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> E.P.T. Crampton, *Christianity in Northern Nigeria*, p.94.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Some churches outside these two groups were part of CAN from its inception. Bauna Peter Tanko refers to them as "'Others,'" mainly Evangelicals' (Bauna Peter Tanko, p.126). It may not be easy to know the "'Others'" mainly Evangelicals' by name today.

<sup>32</sup> Bauna Peter Tanko quotes the old Constitution on page 127 of his book. The Constitution could not have preceded the formation. And the impromptu nature of the birth of CAN—as seen in the following words: '...the non-preplanned and almost adhoc nature of the origin of the CAN explains the somewhat informal nature of her administration' (Bauna p.134)—could not allow the Association and the Constitution to emerge at exactly

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the same time. Therefore the wording of the citation is most likely to be an after thought. The wording came after the parochial reason for the formation had been agreed upon. These custodians are those who contributed in whatever way to see that CAN became more than a gathering of church denominations to protect their interests. It is not easy to mention them by name but, obviously, they came from both camps. What some of these custodians probably had in mind was Christian ecumenism in line with John 17:20-23. A prominent heir of these custodians in the 1990s was the Rev. Fr. Bauna Peter Tanko. In his book, cited in this paper, he argues for more Christian ecumenism as against the political ecumenism in CAN.

<sup>33</sup> Bauna Peter Tanko, pp. 128-31.

<sup>34</sup> Constitution of Christian Association of Nigeria, Amended Version, 2004, p.16. It is not ascertained whether this is taking place or whether it has been accomplished.

<sup>35</sup> Musa A.B. Gaiya, 'Further Reflections on Christianity in Northern Nigeria 1975–2000' in E.P.T. Crampton, pp. 260-61.

<sup>36</sup> A couple of years back the writer of this paper heard a critical remark on the identity and validity of CAN from a Christian senior civil servant who was also a church leader. He said that CAN was the retaliation outfit of the Nigerian church against militant Islam, and therefore not valid in the light of Luke 6:29. Perhaps this man is not the only critic of CAN.

<sup>37</sup> Leadership in Nigeria: Enlightenment Series 1 (Kaduna: CAN Publicity Committee-Northern Zone, n.d.), pp.37, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Bauna Peter Tanko, pp.211, 216-17.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.137.

<sup>40</sup> Caleb Ahima, Interview, Jos, 10-10-2006. Rev. Dr. Ahima is the secretary of the North Central Zone of CAN since 2004. He is also the current General Secretary of TEKAN.

<sup>41</sup> Bauna Peter Tanko quotes the constitution on page 127 of his book.

<sup>42</sup> Constitution of Christian Association of Nigeria, Amended Version, 2004, p.1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.2

<sup>44</sup> Caleb Ahima, op.cit.

<sup>45</sup> Caleb Ahima.

<sup>46</sup> Justin La-Nibetle Snr, Interview, Jos, 10-10-2006. Rev. Dr. La-Nibetle was Plateau CAN secretary from 1987 to 1991. He is currently the managing editor of the Lightbearer newspaper.

<sup>47</sup> Constitution of Christian Association of Nigeria, Amended Version, 2004, p.5.

<sup>48</sup> Bauna Peter Tanko, p.134. Perhaps the length of time it took to construct the centre is evidence that not all the stakeholders of CAN are interested in the project of the unity-conscious custodians.

<sup>49</sup> Constitution of Christian Association of Nigeria, Amended Version, 2004, p.2.

<sup>50</sup> Musa A.B. Gaiya, Christianity in Africa: A Study in the Christian Presence in Africa up to 1900 (Jos: Jos University Press, 2002), p.23.

<sup>51</sup> Adrian Hastings, op.cit, p.248.