Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria: A Historical Reflection

By

Wilson Eze Ehianu
Department of Religions, Faculty of Arts,
University of Benin, Benin City
destiny4real2@yahoo.com
08038073118
&
Belinda U. Bienose – Osagiede
Department of Religions, Faculty of Arts,
University of Benin, Benin City
bienosebelinda@gmail.com
08034766051

Abstract

The central issue in this work is to examine the role the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) played in the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria. To unravel this, we employed the historical and phenomenological method in our analysis and arrived at the finding that CAN ahead of the 2015 presidential election was divided along denominational and ideological lines and consequently could not speak with one voice. Given this finding, the paper maintains that the age-long denominational rivalry between the Catholic Church and Protestants is far from being over; hence the difficulty in arriving at a unanimous decision. C.A.N must have a defined scope and strategies in its interaction with the government. The paper concludes with Darrel Lee that "the body of Christ can only thrive when believers work together in harmony" (Ehianu, 2007:119)

Introduction

Before the emergence of Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country was already drawn along religio-ethnic zones of influence; namely, the largely Muslim (Hausa/Fulani) North and the Christian (Yoruba/Ibo) South. The latter is subdivided into the predominantly Catholic (Ibo) East and the West (Yoruba) with an almost equal number of Muslims and Christians. Islam and Christianity are therefore the two religions which not only arrogate to themselves the status of being sole dispenser of salvation but put their adherents under an obligation to canvas for followership. In carrying out this divine mandate, the faithful of these religions have in most cases employed strategies such as the formation of organizations, alliances with organizations with similar motive within and outside the country, politics of exclusion, intimidation, blackmail, manipulation of ethnic sentiment, seizure of state power through military coups amongst others in order to outdo the other and gain ascendancy. Of these methods, the capture of state apparatus, directly or otherwise is much preferred because it affords the man on the saddle the opportunity to employ the machinery of governance to feather the nest of his religion through funding of pilgrimages, erection of worship centers, linkages with foreign agencies, official policies and programmes to mention but a few.

Though Nigeria is a secular state, which presupposes that matters relating to religion are to be consigned to the private realm, the reality is that in the Nigeria nation, Islam and Christianity are better understood as two co-wives each employing various strategies to win the husband's attention. In this case, the husband being the Nigerian political space. The activities of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), an umbrella body of Christian churches in Nigeria in the buildup to the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria and the internal strife occasioned by ideological and denominational rivalries within the association's ranks is the focus of this study. We begin with the events that culminated in the birth of the Christian Association of Nigeria, hereinafter referred to as CAN.

Build Up to CAN

The apprehension of Christians in Nigeria is traceable to the 1804 jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio which was amongst other reasons to compel submission to Islam and to set up administrative institutions based on the essential elements of the jihad ideology (Qunin 2003:37). The success of this enterprise is enunciated by the fact that Uthman established forty emirates in the North and Middle belt states of contemporary Nigeria all of which formed a confederacy under his charismatic leadership. With absolute authority in the hand of Uthman and his associates, policies were put in place to coarse non – Muslims to embrace the faith. For instance, apart from exclusion from the political space, non- Muslims were forced to pay the jizyah and to accept an inferior status before their Muslim neighbours. This state of affairs continued until the establishment of colonial rule during which period the application of Sharia, the Islamic law code was somewhat narrowed down. Until the 1960's, it was limited to Islamic personal law (Quinn 2003: 39). It is trite to say that the colonial period provided a form of respite for non- Muslims in the Northern part of the country in the sense that at least they were protected from the jihad of the sword though other forms of intimidation was visible. For instance, Muslim preachers could propagate their religion wherever they chose; while Christian missionaries were denied access to certain areas in the North (Asemota 2004:5). Similarly, many Christian organizations have alleged discrimination against their members in admission policies, school fees, employment and in refusal of many state governments to grant them land to build churches in the Northern states of the federation (Ehianu 2002:220)

This situation was further fueled by a wave of Pan Arabibism which began to sweep across the Arab world following the World Wars. A Pan Arabic ideology is the basis of various attempts over the past fifty years to unite various Arab nation states and people of the middle East (Asemota 2004:11), Nigeria was converted not only because of its vast Muslim population but because there abound in the country millions who were yet

to embrace Islam. In order to penetrate the country, an anchor was found in the person of Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto who incidentally was the great grandson of Uthman Dan Fodio. Sardaunan who in 1965 was officially the premier of the Northern Region understood his office as an opportunity to feather the nest of Islam. According to Peter Jatau, the Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna,

> Sardauna "became both a political as well as religious leader, his effort at that particular time up to the time he was killed was geared towards converting people, be they Christians or pagans to Islam", so he paid more attention to the conversion of the people to Islam than to actually running the state. Many people were afraid to oppose him else they lost their position or even their jobs (Enwerem 1995:77)

Jatau recalled that in order to resist the Sardauna's policy, Christians in the North and indeed non -Christians came together and formed what they called the Northern Christian Association (NCA) which was later changed to the Christian Association of the North (CAN) (Enwerem 1995: Ibid). With the death of the Sardauna in 1966, the Northern Christians must have heaved a sigh of relief, but later events were to prove that it was not yet *uhuru*. In the 1970's, there arose a wave of Islamic revivalism which sought to challenge every government, institution or ideology that was considered to be anti-Islam. In 1974, for example, a conference of the World Islamic Organization took place in Mecca. The conference agreed that in order to counter Christian influence, the following measures must be vigorously pursued:

1. Muslim organizations should set up a center to resist Christian missionary activities.
2. Islamic radio and television stations should be established.

3. All Christian activities, no matter what, be it secular expression, or otherwise should be stopped. For instance, Christian hospitals, orphanages, schools and universities should be taken over.
4. Muslim organizations should set up intelligence centers about Christian activities.
5. All Christian literatures should be banned in Muslim countries (Asemota 2004: 24)

Two years later, precisely in 1976, a follow up meeting was held in London to access the level of implementation of the Mecca resolutions. According to Asemota (2004:24), the Muslims in Nigeria received huge financial support from the Arab world to enable the Muslim leaders in the country to implement the Mecca resolutions. At this point, though Christians in the country saw the threat, they were too divided by ideological and doctrinal differences to stand up to it.

The Turning Point

On the 27th August, 1976, the Federal military government under General Obasanjo invited church leaders of diverse denominations to Dodan Barracks, Lagos. The government's purpose was to consult church leaders on the national pledge and the salutation of the national flag which the government intended to introduce into the nations primary and secondary schools. The church leaders were supportive of the move if only the usual morning devotion were allowed to remain. They spontaneously decided to hold another meeting and address themselves. The Catholic secretariat which was a stone throw was preferred. At the meeting, the leaders decried the unpreparedness and adhoc nature of the group that interacted with the government. They realized the need for an organization which would provide a forum where they could regularly meet and take joint actions on vital matters, especially on issues which affect the Christian faith and the welfare of the generality of Nigerians. Thus, was born the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). (Enwerem 1995, 179)

Initially, only two blocks of Christian churches were represented – the Catholic secretariat and the Christian Council of Nigeria which comprises mainly of protestant churches. As other Christian groups began to indicate interest in the body, there was the need to expand the organization. Churches of similar doctrine were requested to form groups through which they can be enrolled into the organization. Three blocks eventually emerged which the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) and the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA/TEKAN). These blocks were added to the already existing two blocks which brings it to total of five blocks. Though the first constitution was signed in 1977, the Association was registered on the 19th December, 1986 with (Rev) Fr. Anthony Okojie, J.G Sakpo, Charles Williams, John Ogbonna and Clifford Smith as trustees (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, accessed 7/7/2015). CAN has women and youth wing, the national executive council consisting of a hundred and five members (which elects the President) and a General Assembly of 304 members (which ratifies the President's election). The Christian body has branches at the national, state and local government levels. From inception, the following person have headed the group: His Eminence Cardinal Ekandem 1976 – 1986, His Grace Cardinal Anthony Okojie 1988 – 1995, Prelate Sunday Mbang 1995 – 2003, Premate Jasper Akinola 2003 – 2007 and Cardinal John Onaiyekan 2007 – 2010, Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor was the President of CAN was elected in 2010 haven defeated the incumbent, Cardinal Onaiyekan.

Strategies CAN Adopts in Pursuing its Objectives

As earlier mentioned, CAN is not a political party but pursues its goals through one or a combination of more than one of the following ways:

a. **Political Diplomacy:** This is one method CAN employ to achieve its objectives. This involves maintaining friendly terms with the government, helping to control social unrest in the country all with the aim of winning the government's full respect and trust. One

exponent of this strategy is Bishop Ganaka; Catholic Bishop of Jos (Enwerem 1995:179)

b. **Prayer:** Beside other strategies, CAN believes in the efficacy of prayer as a means to safeguard the interest of Christians and Christianity in the country. CAN organizes prayer sessions to request God to uproot whatever structures or policies that were perceived to be inimical to the interest of Christians. Many see the death of General Sanni Abacha (once the country's dictator) as an answer to the individual prayer of Christians and CAN.
c. **Mass Protest:** Here, the Christians match out in their numbers to protest against policies that are deemed to be inimical to their interest. Christians have in a number of times protested the introduction of Sharia law in some states of the federation.
d. **Lobbying:** Lobbying has been known to be an indispensable practice in politics. CAN achieves it set goals by lobbying Christians who are in positions of policy formulation and implementation. Just as CAN relies on its members in position of authority, the various Christian denominations do the same. This explains (as we shall see later) why Christian denominations would want to have their members in government.
e. **Communiqué:** CAN meet periodically to appraise developments in the country. Such meetings are usually concluded with a communiqué which are not only publicized but copies are sent to the government. Beside, CAN President is authorized to speak on behalf of Christians all over the country.
f. **Retaliation** (Balance of Terror): A number of times, Christians have been known to react spontaneously to attacks from their Muslim neighbours. In 2006, for instance, the then President of CAN, Jasper Akinola following an attack on Christians cautioned that Muslims should realize that they do not have monopoly of violence. The following day, Christians rioted in retaliation against Muslims, a

crisis which left more than 70 dead. Akinola, however denied inciting anyone to violence (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia)

Though, CAN is not a political party, its achievements according to Gaiya, is the political unity it has provided for Christians in Nigeria. The fact that Sharia legal system in Nigeria has not been elevated to the level of the Supreme Court is attributable to the effort of CAN. Similarly, Nigeria remaining a convert member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) owes much to CAN's watchdog posture. CAN provides a veritable platform for Christians to interact with government and other faith. Through the Christian Health Association of Nigeria (CHAN), CAN provides drugs for the wider society. The Christian body collaborates with the Bible Society of Nigeria (BSN) in the translation of the Bible into local languages. The organization is in the forefront in the quest for a well balanced Christian education that will protect the morality of the nation (Rengshwatt 2005:7). CAN at it national state and local government levels have been involved in peace building among Christian bodies, individuals and communities. It has also been involved in relief services to victims of natural and manmade disasters. The organization has been active in the political process through political awareness programmes. In fact, the history of the making of Nigeria's fourth republic is not complete without the role the Church played to bring it about (Ehianu, 2008:196)

The Place of CAN in 2015 Presidential Election

Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor in 2010 emerged the President of CAN after defeating the incumbent John Onaiyekan. There were insinuations that the then President Goodluck Jonathan had a hand in the emergence of Oritsejafor who was moreover from the same ethnic extraction with him. Jonathan's interest in who leads the Christian body was obvious. In the first place, Christians in Nigeria form about half the voting population and given the fact that religious sentiment cannot be divorced from politics in Nigeria, having the leader of Christians on ones side is surely an advantage. For Oritsejafor, having a Christian as President certainly makes his

watchdog role easier. Beside, a President from a minority tribe, like himself was an opportunity that may not come again in the foreseeable future; such a man deserves more than tacit support.

One area that the CAN president did not conceal his support for the president was in the fight against insurgency especially in the North East of the country. A group of Muslim terrorist had hoisted their flag in some parts of Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe states and appeared to be having the upper hand. Over ten thousand innocent lives have been lost in suicide bomb attacks which targets churches, mosque, motor packs, markets and densely populated areas. Many felt the attacks which escalated with Jonathan's regime were a reaction against Jonathan's presidency as the attackers were mainly Muslims.

In 2011, the United States Congress classified the Boko Haram, the insurgent group as a terrorist organization following an address to the U.S Congress by Oritsejafor in which he accused the American government of complacency on the happenings in Nigeria. The cleric asked the congress if they must wait until Christians in Nigeria were bombed out of existence before they take action. The historic address followed at the heel of the December 25, 2011 bombing of Saint Theresa's Catholic Church in Madella in which about thirty seven worshippers were killed and fifty seven others injured (Olajide 2012:16). We must add that Oritsejafor took side with the 2011 Federal Government subsidy removal policy for which many accused him of insensitivity in supporting what was perceived as anti-people policy. The wide spread resistance to the policy made the government to soft pedal and to enforce only partial removal of subsidy. It is however insightful to say that four years later, many who were against subsidy removal have turned a volte face and now pressure the succeeding government of Muhammadu Buhari to revisit the policy with a view to removing fuel subsidy once and for all (Olajide, 2012:18).

For Oritsejafor, he was elected to defend the interest of Christians all over the country, a task made easier when a Christian occupies the highest echelon of the country's political structure. Unfortunately, as was later revealed he did not have the support of a section of the body he presided over. Ideological and denominational interests were at play. According to Tony Nwaezeigwe, CAN (2015: 9) supported Jonathan's re-election in 2015 with the hope that come 2019 when the former might have served out his tenure, David Mark another Christian from the middle belt (generally classified as North) would be an undisputed frontrunner for the 2019 presidential election. But the Catholic Church according to Nwaezeigwe had a different calculation. The church, he said was rooting for Abubakar Atiku's (a Muslim) presidency with Rotimi Amaechi (a Catholic) as Vice President and George Akume (another Catholic) for the Senate Presidency under the platform of the All Progressive Congress (Nwaezeigwe, 2015:19). Catholic disappointment started when Atiku lost the presidential primaries to Muhammadu Buhari. From that moment, Catholic attitude appeared to be a case of if we cannot have our way, CAN must not have its way either. The church became increasingly uncomfortable with CAN under Oritsejafor's leadership as it perceived that the various branches of the organization had been fully mobilized to serve the president's interest. In order to weaken the organizations, the Catholic Church in 2012 suspended its membership of the Christian body, a move which threw up unprecedented hullabaloo and epiphany among Christians and Christian groups in the country. The Catholic Church said "its decision to momentarily pull out of CAN is due to the national body's undue association with the federal government" (Oyetimi 2013:53). Rev. (Fr) Ralph Madu who was Director of Social Communication at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria said the church will suspend its membership until the association goes back to the original purpose, mission and objectives for which it was established (Oyetimi 2013:53).

Cardinal John Oniayekan whose second term bid was aborted by Oritsejafor concord with Madu. To him, CAN has derailed from what it stood for, the Catholic Church cannot be party to what is unchristian (Oyetimi, Ibid). Others such as Kalita-Aruku and George Akume were blatant. In the words of Kalita–Aruku, since the Pentecostal churches took over CAN, it has been changed to a political movement (Oyetimi, Ibid). Akume is quoted as saying, "still trending a clearly criminal, immoral and unethical act is being whitewashed with religious grandstanding". (Oyetimi, Ibid). Again, penultimate to conclusion, he wrote, my appeal to my brothers in the North is that, what they see in CAN today has nothing to do with Christianity but everything to do with crass materialism and self seeking opportunism. Akume's address to the Christians deserves some comments. It goes to show that Oritsejafor was widely accepted in the North and Akume wanted to dissuade them from supporting the cleric. What Akume did not know was that the average Northern Christian was more comfortable under a Christian President for the reasons that a Christian President might be more disposed to protecting them than the President's opponent who many feared has Islamic fundamentalist tendencies. To the many opponent of Oritsejafor's leadership of CAN, the use of the Pastors private jet by the federal government to convey cash for arms in South Africa was a much needed confirmation of the cleric's romance with the government. The cleric's private jet was used by the government for an arms deal with a South African company (Olajide, 2012:15)

From Oritsejafor's sympathizers arguments and statements in defense of the embattled leader was not in short supply. While some denied that Oritsejafor was partisan, others admitted it and argued that his partisanship was inevitable if he must protect the interest of Christians and Christianity. Those who denied the Pastor's alleged romance with the government cite instances of the cleric's attacks on the government. One of such cases was the leader's call on the government to protect Christians

from incessant bombardment of the Boko Haram sect. Oritsejafor requested that laws be made permitting citizens to own arms and to defend themselves since the government could no longer protect them. The cleric was in fact urging the government to act or the people will resort to self help (Olajide, 2012: 15). The cleric's words did not go down well with the government which felt the Pastor was not only calling for anarchy but equally passing a vote of no confidence on the government as it could not perform its primary responsibility of protecting lives and properties of its citizens. The church leaders attack on Northern leaders whom he accused of doing little or nothing to stem the Boko Haram onslaught equally provoked indignation. To the leaders, CAN was covertly accusing them of complexity in the carnage which had engulfed the region.

Those who defend CAN's partisanship insist its leader must not be vilified. They aver for instance, that no Muslim group in spite of the deep sectarian divide that pervade Islam will have the audacity to question whatever the relationship the Sultan of Sokoto (leader of Muslims in the country) decides to have with the country's leader. The Sultan of Sokoto is alleged to have played a role in the emergence of Dagora as Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives. In this school of thought is Rev. Ogor who argued that whatever CAN was doing was in line with its mission. According to him, we live in a society where Christians are meant to serve as advisers to those in the government. Ogor recalled that in 1993, the government of South Korea called the Church to advice her on a matter which the country's senate did not have solution to. The church, he said, gave advice and the government followed. In the words of Ogor, we are not expected to be anti-government, we are expected to advise the government and be think tank of the country (Adebamigbe 2014:19)

CAN and its leadership accused the Catholic Church of insincerity in its decisions to suspend its membership of the organization. In the

words of Felix Omobude, the President of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), one of the five blocks of CAN;

> The accusation that CAN is too close to government is frivolous. Everybody has been attacking Oritsejafor for being too volatile, especially on the attack on churches. I don't see any leader that has spoken as much as he has. He has not taken up any government appointment, has not committed any moral flaws. They (that is the Catholic Church) should not make us believe that if they are not in charge of CAN, then things wouldn't be right. The Catholic Church has never been satisfied since Oritsejafor won election to CAN Presidency. They are playing the blame game, only trying to whip up sentiments to regain the lost office, to be reelected. (Oyetimi 2013:53)

In the same vein, the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of CAN in the eighteen Northern states accused the Catholic Church of arrogance. He lamented that when they were in leadership (that is the Catholic Church), other churches co-operated with them. But because, as he said, power has changed hands, they are causing confusion. Oibe, spokesperson for Terayar Ekklisiyar Kristi, a Nigeriya (TEKAN) a conglomerate of thirteen church groups in CAN said the Catholic Church should not mislead the public even if they want to pull out. Responding to the allegations that CAN has derailed from its mission, he said the Catholic Church does not know how CAN came about let alone of its mission. To Oibe, it was the Christian Association of the North (CAN) which was formed by the Northern Christians that metamorphosed into the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).(Ikhilae, 2002:53)

According to Ikhilae et al (2003:53), Oniayekan was even closer to the government than Oritsejafor. He accused the Catholic Church of "always displaying arrogance … they don't want to be under anybody but they want everybody to be under them …it does not work like that because there is no seniority in CAN, (Ikhilae 2015:53). Indeed, for those on the side of CAN's leadership, Catholic suspension of its membership was a mere calculated distraction that must be ignored by CAN.

Indeed, in the buildup to the 2015 Presidential election, the voice of CAN was louder in the northern part of the country for obvious reasons. In the first place, Christians in this area are in minority and so live with the pervasive threat of marginalization in socio-political and religious life. The fear of Sharia in the north for instance, is a source of concern for non-Muslims in Northern Nigeria and the country in general (Owojaiye, 2015). Jonathan's presidency was a better safeguard against the threat of Islam and Sharia than Muhammadu Buhari who is largely believed to be a zealous if not fundamentalist Muslim. CAN and its affiliates especially in the North were at work for Goodluck Jonathan. Pastor Owojaiye in obvious move to secure the vote of Christians for Jonathan stressed for instance, that whenever their churches were burned or bombed by the Boko Haram sect, only CAN President condemned it. No Muslim leader did, according to him (Owojaiye 2015). Even though the cleric said CAN has not adopted any candidate, his body language pointed to the contrary. In his response to the allegation that the country's president had turned churches to his campaign sites, the cleric said the President is a Christian and therefore free to worship wherever he wanted (Owojaiye 2015). Owojaiye drew the attention of Nigerians to what he called the inability of Christians in the North to collect their Permanent Voters Card (PVC), an attempt, he said, was to disenfranchise them. He said Christians who go to collect their PVC are usually told that such cards had been collected by their family members on their behalf.

While the Christians were harping on the religious chord for Jonathan in some areas, some Muslims were doing the same for him. The running mate for Jonathan, Namadi Sambo at one of his campaign in a predominantly Muslim area in the North informed the Muslims that Muhammadu Buhari, Jonathan's main political rival had chosen a Pastor, Yemi Osinbajo who has five thousand branches of his church as his running mate. He emphatically said Muslims should not vote for Buhari for picking a Pastor as his running mate (Fafowora 2015:64).

Indeed, religious sentiment was stressed beyond limit. Jonathan became guest at several churches and retreat venues tactfully asking for votes. Fafowora (2015:64) summarizes the situation thus:

> Mr. President starts a new round of Southern churches electioneering blitz from Winners Chapel to the Redeemed Christian Church of God to the Lords Chosen Church vigil, the message was the same, my people, I have not come to campaign but to do thanksgiving. Your President worships in your midst … surely that should count for something in raw votes? Surely, it makes Christian sense to vote for a Christian brother

While most churches received the President with open arms, there is no record of his visit to any Catholic Church. But the President's reception in churches was cause for concern. Something must be done to keep CAN and its affiliate blocks and churches in mutual suspicion and distrust. From Rotimi Amaechi, the Director General APC campaign team came the accusation that CAN's leadership received the sum of seven billion from the President to facilitate campaigns for him. The accusation which was well publicized expectedly split the CAN leaders into two camps. Pastor Kallamu Dikwa, Executive Director, Voice of Northern Christians Movement confirmed the allegation and said each chapter of CAN

received three million naira. He said the money was received on January 26th, 2015 (Alabelewe 2015:5). Josiah Idowu was in agreement to him. Those who received the money must repent and ask for forgiveness (Alabelewe 2015:5). From CAN's General Secretary Rev. Musa Asake came an outright denial. In the words of Asake

> … revered men of God including Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor , CAN President, Bishop David Oyedepo of Winners Chapel and Pastor Bosun Emmanuel, Secretary General of National Christian Elders Forum are too upright to be linked with such scandal, (Omokhunu 2015: 62).

Indeed, the trajectory of CAN ahead of the April 11, 2015 Presidential election was a rough and tortuous one, decked with antics and innuendos. Needless to say the outcome was not unpredictable. Religion played a pivotal role in the voting pattern as the incumbent President got the chunk of his votes from predominantly Christian dominated south of the country while his opponent made a clean sweep of the Muslim dominated north. By and large, Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress APC defeated the incumbent with vote margin of about 2.5 million votes. Many believed that if CAN had gone into the election as a united force; the outcome would have been different.

Recommendations/Conclusion

In view of the enormous responsibilities placed on the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the debilitating effect of division within its ranks as shown in the outcome of the 2015 Presidential election, the following are recommended:

In the first place, the role of CAN involves some measure of struggle with the country's leadership. But how this struggle will be effective without politics remains to be seen. The leadership of CAN must be clear

on the strategies to adopt in dealing with any given situation. This will help forestall controversies over approaches to adopt in addressing issues with the government.

The various blocks represented in CAN should accept the fact that the association is not a platform for liturgical disputations but a launching pad for addressing vexatious issues bordering on the discrimination, disenfranchisement and persecution of the Nigerian Christian. Humility, tolerance and understanding are needed for the smooth running of the body.

Pre-CAN tension among Christian groups, sectional politics and the quest for control appear to be the overriding concern in many CAN elections. For instance, the mutual distrust and acrimony between the Catholics and Protestants is yet to abate. On the other hand, the attitude of the Catholic and Protestant groups towards Pentecostals leave much to be desired. The fact that some Protestants like His Eminence Sunday Mbang support Catholic suspension of its membership of CAN attests to the point being made. Ordinarily, one would have expected the former leader of CAN to prevail on the church to tolerate Oritsejafor at least in order not to expose the body to odium and ridicule.

If the mantra of change which the present government parades is to be meaningful, church leaders must be in the forefront. They must first and foremost purge themselves of corruption. It is only a corrupt free union that can be the light of the world. Many clergy have been known to collect money from politicians to influence votes in their favour. Some have also been known to receive huge amount of tithes, offerings, alms and properties from their faithful not minding how it was acquired. A corrupt church or body of Christians would not be taken seriously by government. As in times past, so also today and in the future, the task of safeguarding and expanding the gospel is bisect with formidable challenges and efforts at

surmounting them become more daunting when believers speak in the cacophony of divided voices. Only a re-united CAN can achieve the set goal of providing a platform for public statement and joint action on issues that affect the Christian faith and the welfare of the generality of Nigerians.

Works Cited

Adebamigbe, A. et al (2014) "Gods Judgment will Begin from the Church: in *The News* Vol. 43 No. 16 see also Oyetimi, K. (2013) "CAN/Catholic Row: CAN has Lost Focus" in *Sunday Tribune,* 27th January.

Alabelewe, A (2015) Alleged 6 Billion CAN Scandal: There is no Smoke without Fire in *The Nation*, March 9

Asemota, S.A. (2004) *Challenges Facing Integration in Nigeria,* Benin City: Christian Social Movement of Nigeria

Ehianu, (2002) "Religious Crisis in Nigeria and their Implications for Good Governance and Development" in J.A. Ayantayo et al (eds) *Religion and Governance in Nigeria*: Religious Studies Series Vol. 4 Ibadan: Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan.

Ehianu, W.E (2007) Ecumenism in Benin and its Environs in the Light of Vatican II *Unitatis Redintegration* 1965 – 2005. Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

Ehianu, W.E (2008) "The Church and the making of Nigeria's Fourth Republic" in *The International Researcher,* Vol. 1 No. 2

Enwerem, I.M (1995) *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* Ibadan: IFRA

Fafowora D. (2015) "North Muslim; South Christian; Middle Belt? Take a Guess" in *The Nation* February, 12th

Nwaeziegwu, T. (2015) "Akume, Oritsejafor: Lessons from Catholic Conspiracy" in *Vanguard*, July 22, 2015

Olajide, T (2012) "Controversial Pastor: Leader of Nigeria's Christian Community and Fierce Preacher, Ayo Oritsejafor has made a Career of ruffling Feathers Every Step of the Way" in The News Nov. 26

Omokhunu, G. (2015) "7 Billion: CAN Denies Allegation, seek, probe of Faceless Group in *The Nation,* February, 21

Owojiaye, P (2015) Channels Television on "2015 Election" Saturday 14th February

Oyetimi, K. (2013) "CAN/Catholic Church Row: CAN Has Lost Focus" in *Sunday Tribune,* 27 January

Quinn, C.A. and Quinn, F (2003) *Islam in Nigeria: Seeking a Competitive Edge,* New York: Oxford University Press

Rengshwat "Christian Association of Nigeria: Politics and Ecumenism" Accessed on 25th September, 2015, www.carefronting.org

Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, accessed 7/7/2015 www.wikipedia.com