



**A History of  
Anglican / Methodist  
Collaboration  
in Nigeria  
within the Yoruba  
Socio-Cultural  
Context**

**Olubunmi Taiwo Olumuyiwa**

Peter Lang

This study seeks to investigate the history of Anglican/Methodist cooperation among the Yoruba-speaking peoples of Nigeria during the missionary era and after. The intention is to show that the institutional and doctrinal form of unity inherited from the missionaries, although very useful, was predominantly designed and structured for a Western way of life. Thus, this imported ecumenical method was inadequate in enabling churches in Nigeria, particularly Anglican/Methodist ones, to deal with the overwhelming contemporary problems facing Nigerian society. Therefore, new ecumenical theologies are propounded within a Nigerian context to meet this goal.

“Dr Olumuyiwa’s original research is both illuminating and challenging to those working in the fields of mission studies and theological education. (He) deserves to be congratulated for his contribution to scholarship.”

— DR MARK J. CARTLEDGE, University of Birmingham, UK

“The assumption of this unique study is that imported models of church unity are of limited use in the Nigerian post-independence context. Olumuyiwa’s African or Nigerian form of ecumenism offers a vision of unity in which the local can be respected without being idolized.”

— DR WERNER USTORF, Professor em. of Mission, Birmingham University

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*I would like to dedicate this book to Almighty God,  
the author of unity.*



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## Foreword

Two of the most significant topics in the Christian world today are Church Unity and the impact of African Christianity. This work is a valuable contribution to both themes.

In a study of relations between the Anglican and the Methodist churches of Nigeria, especially in the Yoruba area, which many would hold to be the most spiritually vibrant part of the country, we read of a Christianity that is a by-word for spiritual vigour and intensity. The author examines specifically the working out of Christian denominational differences in the influential Immanuel College of Theology in Ibadan, which is jointly run by Anglicans and Methodists. His study is based upon both extensive field work – he interviewed no fewer than thirty-five church leaders and officials – and critical use of the most up-to-date published and online sources. The book reveals both a tough-minded realism concerning the difficulties of ecumenical co-operation and an optimism based upon the seriousness with which Nigerian Christians accept the authority of the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ.

Altogether this is an impressive and encouraging example of how to be theological and ecumenical in the context of one's own cultural heritage.

I, who myself came to Christian faith in Africa, commend it warmly, in addition, to anyone interested in examining how the approach of African Christians could help to revive the tepid Christianity of the West.

The Rt Revd David A. Urquhart  
Bishop of Birmingham



## Introduction

The history of Anglican/Methodist cooperation in Nigeria dates back to the beginning of their missionary enterprises, particularly as demonstrated in a joint Christmas service conducted at Badagry in 1842 by Thomas Birch Freeman of the Methodist mission and Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Further collaborations included the formation of a committee that was invested with responsibility for boundary designation and settlement to avoid overlapping missionary activities between the two missionary organisations. In subsequent decades, the churches also collaborated in many areas such as the joint training of ministers, medical establishments, and the establishment of ecumenical places of worship such as the Chapel of the Resurrection at the University of Ibadan. The collaboration reached a climax in 1965 when arrangements were concluded towards the unification of the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches.

Although attempts at unification failed owing to external and internal factors, the Anglican and Methodist churches learnt vital lessons from the experience. The leaderships of the two Christian denominations have since continued to play prominent roles within the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), not only in acting as a religious mouthpiece to the Nigerian government, but also in facilitating many practical activities towards strengthening the ecumenical spirit among the different Christian organisations involved in CAN. Such activities include joint services, the exchange of pulpits and the formation and operation of the Bible Society of Nigeria.

In spite of these many activities and the seeming desire of these Christian churches to work together, it is evident that genuine ecumenism is yet to be achieved. Why? This is a vital question that was explored in this study. The argument is that the approach that the early foreign missionaries bequeathed to the indigenous church has been a particular

problem inhibiting the emergence of a truly African or Nigerian form of ecumenism.

While differences are to be found in the styles and strategies employed by early missionaries throughout the continent, this study holds that the ecumenical vision of unity can only flourish as a contextual one.

The history of Anglican and Methodist church cooperation in Nigeria has been patterned along the missionary foundation of both institutional and doctrinal cooperation. While this collaboration is commendable, it does not go far enough, especially in attaining its potential to positively affect the socio-cultural and political challenges facing contemporary Nigerian society. The collaboration of these two churches, if properly harnessed, has the potential to achieve much more than has been witnessed so far, especially in contributing to the present debate of the problem of disunity among Nigerian Christians.

A critical evaluation of ecumenism in Nigeria would suggest that what has been obtained is institutional and doctrinal unity introduced by the missionaries. What is this institutional and doctrinal unity? Doctrinal unity can be defined as unity in a common confession of faith, baptism, Eucharistic celebration and recognition of each other's ministries. Institutional unity, on the other hand, can be defined as unity which involves the establishment of joint ministerial training colleges, joint secondary schools, and joint medical work, etc. By examining the collaboration between the Anglican and Methodist churches and its weaknesses, this study argues that the institutional and doctrinal unity is inadequate to enable the two churches to act ecumenically in dealing with the overwhelming contemporary problems that have eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. These contemporary problems have been identified as poverty, corruption and mismanagement of public resources, lawlessness which creates injustice and insecurity, political bigotry, inter-tribal wars and inter-religious strife. These problems are enormous and overwhelming; it will require huge resources to enable the collaboration of churches, particularly Anglican and Methodist, with their strong base in the western region of Nigeria, to make an impact while taking into account indigenous beliefs and culture. That is to say, ecumenism in an African shape is required to enable the churches to make effective contributions towards addressing Nigerian socio-cultural problems.

Such an effective ecumenical spirit is, however, achievable only when it is contextualised, employing local and indigenous approaches including indigenous theological education.

This study investigates the history of the collaboration and practice of church unity between the Methodist and Anglican churches during and after the missionary era within the Nigerian socio-cultural context and with particular reference to the Yoruba speaking region of Nigeria. This will provide useful information with which to analyse and describe how effective this collaboration has been in relation to ecumenism in Nigeria. This will create the background for the discussion of contextual unity, and its significance, which will require local theological education and its subsequent transmission to, and adoption by, Christian churches in Nigeria.

The World Council of Churches, the Vatican and other such organisations may give Nigerian churches the lead in ecumenism, but this needs to be suitably adapted to Nigeria according to the country's own local needs, situations and environment. The study seeks to deepen the roots of ecumenism in the Nigerian Church in Nigerian ways, so that ecumenism in Nigeria will reflect and be more adaptable to local conditions and situations.

## Background History of Cooperation Efforts in Nigeria in the Missionary Era

A number of detailed studies have appeared over the years on the history of Christianity in Nigeria. At least some of these have sought to trace the emergence and expansion of Christianity in Yorubaland and their cooperative activities. Taking into consideration the enormous amount of valuable work that is readily available on this field, this section discusses attempts made by the missionaries towards church cooperation. The aim is not only to discuss this dynamics of church cooperation among mission-orientated churches, particularly the Anglican and Methodist churches, but also to

demonstrate the impact of this attempt within the socio-cultural setup of the Yoruba.

In doing this, I have highlighted briefly the activities of the foremost mission agencies, particularly the CMS and the Methodist mission. I have also shown how the missionaries, both indigenous and foreign, through their evangelistic and civilising efforts, brought about not only a significant turning point in the socio-cultural life of the people, and also how they have, through their method of cooperation, knowingly or unknowingly, brought about radical ideological change to Nigerian socio-cultural values, particularly in Western Nigeria. The argument here implies that the general Yoruba Christian understanding of unity and attitude towards the Yoruba socio-cultural tradition can only be fully understood if we look back at the impact of missionary cooperative efforts from the post-independence era up until the present day.

The various Christian missionary efforts at evangelisation in Western Nigeria can be classified into five main stages. The first stage, 1485 to 1841 marks the earliest record of contact with Portuguese Roman Catholic missionaries in Mid-Western Nigeria, which was flawed by the activities of the slave trade. As a result, Christianity did not survive. The second stage, from 1842 to 1888, saw a renewed effort through the presence of various missionary movements (WMM, CMS, BMS and RCM). During this period, African (Saro) Christians in Sierra Leone, coupled with European missionary resources, enabled a fresh start. The third stage, from 1888 to 1922, saw a turning of the tide in socio-political and religious activities in Yorubaland. With this came the movement towards religio-cultural nationalism and a paradigm shift from Euro-American missionary efforts. The strong resistance to the paternalistic attitudes of western missionaries during this period resulted in the formation of secession groups, which eventually led to the formation of a number of independent churches. The fourth stage, 1910 to 1970, witnessed pragmatic steps towards church unity. The Edinburgh conference in 1910 was a landmark in the history of the mission. After the meeting, the desire to be united on the part of both the indigenous population and the missionaries became an issue of urgent concern. This period, apart from resolving the major issue of boundary demarcation among the mission churches, gave rise to various ecumenical unifications

of joint colleges, joint medical work, joint theological institutions and a host of others. This is quite an impressive institutional and administrative achievement; the impact of this so-called achievement shall be discussed later in this chapter. The fifth period, from 1970 until today, signals various areas of collaboration among Christian churches in Nigeria, particularly the Anglican and the Methodist churches and their involvement in CAN.

In discussing these five stages of Christian mission in Nigeria, I have examined a brief history of the mission churches with emphasis on their efforts at cooperation and the subsequent effect that this has had on church unity between the Anglican and Methodist churches.

The church in Nigeria as a worshipping community was not created by Nigerian indigenes: rather, it was brought to Nigeria by missionaries from Europe and America who came from different denominational affiliations. But the competition for converts among the churches was noticed by church leaders, hence attempts were made very early at unity and cooperation.

The initial sustained evangelisation of Nigeria dates from the early nineteenth century, when Protestant missions from Europe and North America began their activities. A Portuguese Catholic mission had come to the kingdoms of Warri and Benin in the sixteenth century, but its work had only been intermittent, and by the eighteenth century when the Roman Catholic Mission returned some time after the arrival of their protestant counterparts, they found little trace of the work of their predecessors.

In the early 1840s, emigration from the community of liberated slaves from Freetown, Sierra Leone, to Nigeria became considerable. Most of them were small traders in search of a living further along the coast of Sierra Leone. Some of them hoped to penetrate the interior of their homeland and find their relatives from whom they had been separated by the slave traders.<sup>1</sup> The biggest concentrations settled in the port of Badagry in the

1 There was a reunion between Ajayi Crowther and his mother when Ajayi came to Abeokuta as a missionary from Sierra Leone. J.F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Mission in Nigeria 1841–1891*, Bristol: Western Printing Services (1965), 39. See also M. Oduyoye, *The Planting of Christianity in Yorubaland, 1842–1888*, Ibadan: Abiodun Printing Works (1969), 30. See also CMS ca/031, Samuel Ajayi Crowther to Chapman (5 January, 1856).

Western part of Yorubaland and in the town of Abeokuta, about one 160 kilometres inland, where refugees from local warfare had already built themselves a settlement.<sup>2</sup> They were joined by other returning ex-slaves from countries from Brazil to Cuba. As they formed congregations they soon, however, appealed to missionaries whom they knew in Sierra Leone.<sup>3</sup> The first to arrive was the Methodist, Thomas Birch Freeman, who had already visited Kumasi, Gold Coast, in 1839.<sup>4</sup> In 1842 he established a mission at Badagry and went to Abeokuta at the end of the year. A few weeks later, came Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), who had a cordial meeting with Freeman at Badagry.<sup>5</sup> In 1843, Henry Townsend was ordained into the priesthood and was sent to Abeokuta, where he was joined in 1845 by a party which included Samuel Ajayi Crowther.<sup>6</sup>

Though Badagry was the first mission base, it ceased to be used as a port after the capture of Lagos by the British in 1851, and the Sierra Leonean immigrants moved to the new and more promising centre of trade at Lagos.<sup>7</sup>

After Lagos had superseded Badagry as a port of entry, both Methodists and Anglicans had their headquarters in Yorubaland. All of this happened before the notion had arisen of defining spheres of evangelistic effort, and although there was cordiality in the early years, competition became evident as the churches expanded in close proximity to one another. There was the need for cooperation and unity. This was the primary reason for the movement towards unity beginning in the established churches in the then western and eastern sectors of Nigeria.<sup>8</sup> The leadership of the churches, both African and western missionary, while displaying interest

2 Oduyoye, *The Planting of Christianity in Yorubaland*, 42. See also Crowther's letters, including one when he describes finding his mother, in the CMS archives, University of Birmingham.

3 This fact establishes an African initiative for the beginning of the Nigerian Church.

4 J. Ferguson, *Some Nigerian Church Fathers*, Ibadan: Daystar Press (1969), 30.

5 F.D. Walker, *The Romance of the Black River: The Story of the CMS Nigerian Mission*, London: Macmillan (1950), 52.

6 J. Ferguson, *Some Nigerian Church Fathers*, 56.

7 Ajayi, *Christian Mission in Nigeria, 1841–1891: The Making of a New Elite*, London: Longman (1965), 201–202.

8 Hereafter cited as West and East respectively.

in co-operation and unity, did not seem to have been active in implementing it. Although at the suggestion of Bishop Tugwell during the first decade of the twentieth century,<sup>9</sup> the leaders of the Protestant churches had met and adopted the principle of “unity in essentials, liberality in non-essentials and charity in all things”,<sup>10</sup> nothing very concrete had come out of this, though some improvement in inter-church relations arose in the east from the outset. Because of the difficulties of travel, Anglicans and Presbyterians seldom met. When the Primitive Methodists came in at the end of the nineteenth century to fill the gap in the areas not occupied by either Anglicans or Presbyterians, travel was becoming easier and the need for comity was beginning to be acknowledged. The new mission was concerned from the start not to trespass on territory already occupied by others, and its establishment was effected with the ready consent and assistance of the Presbyterians.

The more precise definition of spheres of work in the interest of brotherliness came at a conference held at Calabar in 1905, followed by two at two-year intervals. At the last of these, the question arose of the transfer of membership when a Christian moved from one area to another. This was the period immediately before the great Edinburgh conference of 1910.<sup>11</sup>

The meeting at Edinburgh was a landmark in the history of the missions, both in the scale of divergent church traditions represented and its achievements. It was dominated by a new spirit of cooperation in missions with other labourers in the vineyard. Werner Ustorf has commented on the irony of the fact that: “Mission has taken on an importance in business, commerce, and academic life, just at the time when the Christian churches seemed in danger of dropping it from their vocabulary as an outmoded concept of colonial age. But far from being irredeemably imperialist, he argued further that ‘mission’ is essential to the self-understanding and

9 C.P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, vol. iv, London: Lutterworth Press (1955), 25.

10 T.S. Garrett and R.M.C. Jeffery, *Unity in Nigeria*, London: Edinburgh House Press (1965), 25.

11 Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, 288.

self-critique of religion in its willingness to engage with others, to witness, to be vulnerable".<sup>12</sup>

This argument is very much relevant to the events and effects of the Edinburgh conference. At this conference, many intractable problems were discussed and resolved, for instance, the problems of carrying the gospel to all the non-Christian world; the church in the mission field; education in relation to the Christianisation of national life; the missionary message in relation to non-Christian religions; the preparation of missionaries, missions and governments; the base of mission; and finally cooperation and promotion of unity.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the Edinburgh Conference initiated ecumenical consultations in the West on the themes of Faith and Order, which later led to the founding of the World Christian Council, a significant event in the history of the church union movement in Nigeria.<sup>14</sup> One Mr Arthur W. Wilkie of Calabar, at a meeting in 1911 raising a discussion on the message of Edinburgh of which he and his fellow Presbyterians were host, said:

We are not here primarily to establish an African Presbyterianism or Methodism or any ...ism, but to preach Christ and to take a lowly place, under the guidance of the spirit of God, in laying the foundations of a church which shall not be foreign to the Africans.<sup>15</sup>

There was one complication in the observance of brotherliness. The Niger Delta Pastorate (NDP), which had been accorded a measure of independence within the Anglican Communion, was not a signatory to the

12 W. Ustorff, "Mission to Mission" – *Rethinking the Agenda Birmingham: Selly Oak Colleges Occasional Paper, no. 9* (1991). Cf. K. Ward and B. Stanley (eds), *The World Mission Society and World Christianity, 1799–1999*, Cambridge: Erdmann's Publishing Co. (2000), 3.

13 Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, 292.

14 See O. Kalu, *Divided People of God; Church Union Movement in Nigeria 1867–1966*, New York: NOK Publishers (1978), 4.

15 Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, 292.

agreement made between the missions,<sup>16</sup> although it had been represented at the conferences, and in a few places which the Church Missionary Society (CMS) had agreed should belong to the Methodist sphere of work, the pastorate had ventured to form congregations. But this was not allowed to be an obstacle to progress in fellowship. An evangelical union to meet annually was formed in 1923 and discussed union among other subjects. Seven years later, this became the Eastern Regional Committee of the Christian Council.

The meeting hitherto mentioned was attended by missionaries: Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians were present. The Voice of Africa was first heard at a conference arranged at Awka for “Senior African Agents” in 1928. It was a series of resolutions passed at their third meeting in 1931 which may be regarded as being the beginning of active steps towards church union in Nigeria. They suggested more prayer for unity and instruction about it, an agreed statement on doctrine, a central church in each town, a common form of worship, a common name and catechism, inter-church visitations and exchange of pulpits.<sup>17</sup> The summary is as follows:

In view of the great commission we have received from our Lord, of his express desire that his people should be one, and of the desirability of presenting a united front to the world in the evangelization of our people, we the African delegates representing the churches of the Eastern Regional Committee of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) deprecate the existence of divisions among us as a source of weakness and strongly urge that steps be taken to the consolidation of union among churches.<sup>18</sup>

16 G.O.M. Tasié, *Christianity Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta*, Belgium: E.J. Brill (1978), 202–234.

17 J.P. Harwood in *Church Union News*, no. 3 (1963), 5.

18 Garrett and Jeffery, *Unity in Nigeria*, 25.

## Ecumenical Ventures

On the initiative of the CCN, various ecumenical projects were undertaken which in one way or another brought the churches together. The first of these was in the field of education, in which a need for a common policy in the vast educational commitments of the churches had been the immediate inspiration for the founding of the Christian Council itself. The West led the way when the United Missionary College (UMC) for the training of women teachers was established in Ibadan in 1928 by the joint efforts of Anglicans and Methodists. In the Lagos area, there followed the establishment of the Protestant Teacher Training College for men at Yaba and a secondary commercial school at Apapa, in both of which Baptists also participated. At Yaba, Anglicans and Methodists cooperated to establish Igbobi College. The East had the women's training college at Umuahia, which all three uniting churches supported,<sup>19</sup> and a union secondary school for girls. Other cooperative efforts included the trade schools at Abeokuta and Aba. All these enterprises were established where congregations of the uniting churches and others had been close neighbours.

Although all of the larger churches had their hospitals and small medical units, including some quite outstanding leprosy work, medical work had not been quite as extensive a Christian enterprise in Nigeria as that of education. The one major united enterprise in this area was the Queen Elizabeth Hospital at Umuahia, established by the Anglican and Methodist churches in 1952.

Another obvious field for concerted effort and action was the production of literature. The Secretary of the then CCN Literature, Canon A.J. Stephens, was noted for his invaluable service to the Nigerian church union committee and its standing committee as its editor, and the Daystar Press of the CCN, founded in 1960, undertook all of its work of publication. Other cooperative activities can be seen from the staff of the CCN, which included a Social Action Secretary and a Visual Aids Secretary. The

19 That is, the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

study centre at Ibadan, where members of many churches in many walks of life could come together to confer on common problems, was another joint venture.

The most important development of all is that of United Ministerial Training. For instance, a centre was started at Awka in 1948 for Methodists, Presbyterians and Anglicans of the eastern sector of Nigeria and moved to the present site at Trinity College Umuahia, in 1950.<sup>20</sup> In the West, previous Anglican and Methodist institutions combined in 1958 to form Immanuel College of Theology which, after occupying temporary quarters at Kudeti Ibadan, they moved to the present site next door to the University of Ibadan.<sup>21</sup> For the united church it was of great importance that the younger generation of its ministers be trained together. The joint theological colleges could be fertile ground for ecumenical training, practice and the sharing of resources.

There is a record here of an impressive achievement in work of both an institutional and administrative character. However, progress in fellowship and united action at the congregational level was equally impressive. The hard fact was that at the local church level, the importance of cultural pattern in the discussion of church unity was never discussed. During the formative years of church unity, some questions were raised which were recorded by Kalu.<sup>22</sup> Some of the church leaders who had a clear vision of the end product asked: was the union an indigenous church or an amalgamation of denominational patches? Would the product be a living church, speaking to Nigerian people in their own situation, or would it merely be a church imprisoned within a foreign structure? Other questions raised were; how could denominations dominated by missionaries yield to radical restructuring? What was the role of these missionaries in the church union movement? Kalu argued that the failure of the negotiations to accentuate

20 Minutes of the 19th Annual Conference of the Methodist Church Nigeria.

21 S.S. Solanke, *Christian Interaction*; A paper delivered at Immanuel college of Theology, Ibadan, 5 June (1988), 5.

22 Kalu, *Divided People of God*, 74.

this perspective was due to over-emphasis on organisational issues instead of on mission and worship with regards to Nigerian culture.<sup>23</sup>

The impact of the ecumenical activities of early missionaries and the inherited approaches of subsequent Christian denominations to the people's socio-cultural traditions has long been an issue of debate among scholars of various disciplines. Looking back to the period of the twentieth century, the impact of this reform, in my view, appears to be twofold. It was both liberating and at the same time limiting: liberating because, it was the agency which campaigned against the slave trade and to a great extent brought the Yoruba out into the wider world, thus laying the foundation for a new Yoruba identity.<sup>24</sup> The joint colleges, joint hospitals and joint theological institutions established by the missionaries did not only play a vital role in the manpower development of the people, but also laid the foundation for future ecumenical collaboration. On the other hand, its intrusion into the socio-cultural way of life of the Yorubas brought with it some western categories which resulted in the suppression of some aspects of Yoruba "socio-cultural expressions".<sup>25</sup>

Right from its inception, the transmission of western culture through Christianity, as particularly demonstrated by the returned educated Saro Christians and European missionaries, was a recognised process much admired by the indigenous population. In his account of the consequence of the rise of the prestige of missionary education and progress in Yorubaland during the latter stages of the nineteenth century, Ayandele aptly illustrates this:

The rapid economic development, the establishment of "Native" courts and councils, post and Telegraphs, the introduction of bicycles and commercial lorries, construction of motor roads and the "iron horse" – all these introduced a new wealth,

23 Kalu, *Divided People of God*, 72.

24 See the address of Prince Albert on 1 June 1840 at the Exeter Hall, London and the subsequent resolution of Thomas Buxton. See also Walker, *The Romance of the Black River*, 14ff.

25 F.M. Jones, "The Growth of the Church in the Mission Field: The Work of the Church Missionary Society in West Africa" in *International Review of Missions*, vol. 5, London: Oxford University Press (1916), 241.

opened up countless opportunities, excited immeasurable hopes and created fresh values. To the masses, education was the only key that could unlock the mysteries and the prosperity of the new world being created. So high did the prestige of learning become that, as it was recorded, it was *infra dig* for a man who knew how to write or read to carry any load of any kind, including Bibles and hymn books which had to be carried for the Christians.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of the fact that such prestige could sometimes be overstated, depending on one's line of argument, one would agree with Peel that the unique role of the missions in bringing 'enlightenment' and 'progress' were "values which, while particularly linked with Christianity, have gone beyond it to become public values which all Yoruba recognize".<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, despite its numerous advantages, western ecumenical theology with its own values, ideology and worldview, also brought some dislocation and created a new Christian elite, some of whom were very race conscious while others were highly discontented from their 'Yorubanness'. This no doubt became disruptive to the old community ties, morality and tolerant nature of Yoruba socio-cultural traditions. While one might agree that social upheaval and internecine warfare seem to have weakened any theory of Yoruba unity before the mid-nineteenth century, this however, does not, in my view, rule out the fact that there were still some strong links and affinities which enable us to treat the Yoruba speaking sub-groups as parts of a single entity during this period. Common tribal origins and unified linguistic and social identity, values and religious worldviews no doubt seemed to have occupied a significant part of the region's socio-cultural and religious life, providing for the spiritual, social and even physical welfare of the various sub-groups.

The concept of kingship, naming ceremonies, family structures, festivals, age groups, tribal marks and chieftaincy titles and indigenous names, which represented the core values of Yoruba socio-cultural pride, were no doubt different avenues which were used to pursue similar goals. However,

26 E.A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis*, London: Longman (1966), 289.

27 J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yorubas*, Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press (2000), 45.

the advent of Christianity seems to have swept away a significant part of the traditional socio-cultural vitality of the people; so much so that, to a large extent, many Christian converts had to change their perspectives.<sup>28</sup>

My argument is that traditional theology, which dominated the colonial period and the period immediately after independence, is not adequate to address the various social, religious, economic, political and cultural problems and challenges prevalent in the African continent, particularly in the Yoruba speaking region of Nigeria. New theologies need to be developed which are relevant to the African reality on the ground. Church unity can only flourish positively if the necessary tools that take into account the culture of the Africans are put in place. I will highlight two different statements on the realities of African Christianity which underline the enormous relevance of the need to making things work with regards to the socio-cultural values of African continent.

John Pobee seems to underline this when he says, "Because Christianity is growing faster in Africa than in any other continents, the future of world Christianity may well depend on how African Christianity develops".<sup>29</sup> Similarly, John Baur also rightly notes that, "The picture of the church in Africa after thirty years of ecumenical history is disappointing. What has been achieved is a general peaceful co-existence but little cooperation and much less congruence. Almost nobody feels the urgency to go further, and it would be difficult to distribute the blame for this lethargy".<sup>30</sup> The two different remarks on the state of African Christianity seem to accentuate the relevance of the indigenous and socio-cultural values of the African peoples in the development of modern concepts and theology. That is to say, because the future development of the Christian faith in Africa is vital for the state of the faith in the world, it is essential that anything that would enhance it is encouraged. Although the actual state of African Christianity

28 J.K. Oluponna, "Major Issues in the Study of African Traditional Religion" in J.K. Oluponna (ed.), *African Religions in Contemporary Society*, New York: Paragon House (1991), 26.

29 J. Pobee, Art. on "Africa" in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 7.

30 J. Baur in M. Oduyoye (ed.), *History of the Ecumenical Movement*, vol. 3, 1968–2000, Geneva: WCC (2004), 478.

and church unity in Africa still requires a great deal of improvement, Pobee and Baur's remarks could be regarded as pointing to the importance of theological education.

It has been argued that theological training for church ministry in Africa was patterned along traditional lines during pre-independence and immediately afterwards.<sup>31</sup> The curriculum was argued to be dominated by Biblical studies, with emphasis on the literature of the Old and New Testament, Biblical theology and Biblical interpretation. Apart from Biblical studies, a great deal of emphasis was placed on church doctrines covering much of the patristic period, scholastic theology, theology of the Reformation, history of Christian mission, sacramental theology, the planting of the churches in Africa, homiletics, Christian ethics, pastoral studies, the liturgy, and in some instances other world religions such as Islam. Little attention, if any, was paid to cultural studies, and most importantly ecumenical theology, in a contextual understanding of Nigerian society. The church ministers produced at this period were a carbon copy of the priests from the mother churches from top to bottom. Essentially, theological education was an exact replica of the curriculum which was dominant in the mother churches overseas. The result was that much of the theology produced at this period was divorced from the aspirations and realities of African life: although some aspects of it may be useful, a number of these theologies have no reflection of the culture which they serve. Vidler drew a very interesting caricature of the church ministers that emerged out of the colonial period. He argued:

The missionaries had no doubt about the complete superiority of their own culture, and therefore, their method was to transplant all they could of Christianity in its western forms. Hence churches and chapels were built in Africa ... in the neo-Gothic architectural styles that were then fashionable in Europe. Native priests were dressed up like European clergymen, and even native bishops, when there came to be such, adorned themselves in the riding attire of eighteenth century prelates which has sometimes been mistaken for that of a highlander going to funeral! European music, art, and ways of living were blindly exported.<sup>32</sup>

31 A. Vidler, *Church in an Age of Revolution*, London: Penguin Books (1961), 242.

32 Vidler, *Church in an Age of Revolution*, 252.

Because of the missionaries' emphasis on European and American orientated theology, theological institutions during and after the colonial period ended up producing Eurocentric theology which was out of touch with the African reality and, therefore, often irrelevant to the nascent Christian Church in Africa.

There are some challenges to ecumenism within the African context. One of the missiological challenges is the recovery of African identity, values and morals. Andrew Walls, commenting on the literature of African theology, stated:

No question is more clamant than the African Christian identity crises. It is not simply an intellectual quest. The massive shift in the centre of gravity of the Christian world which has taken place cannot be separated from the cultural impact of the West in imperial days. Now the empires are dead and the Western value-setting of the Christian faith largely rejected. Where does this leave the African Christian? Who is he? What is his past? A past is vital for all of us – without it like the amnesiac man; we cannot know who we are. The prime African theological quest at present is this: what is the past of the African Christian? What is the relationship between Africa's old religions and her new one?<sup>33</sup>

The divisive attitudes of competing churches are a scandal and do not speak well of the love that Christianity sets out to preach. Traditional Nigerian societies have family and communities as priorities, so a united front presented by the churches would be more appealing and would identify well with the indigenisation process of the Christian faith.

The churches need to continue to put into practice the emphasis laid on evangelism, changing some of the patterns and attitudes of a superiority complex on the part of the Church. Rather than scramble to take over the places and positions of foreign missionaries, the Nigerian churches, Anglican and the Methodist in particular, have the task of going out to continue witnessing in some other practical ways, bearing in mind their socio-cultural affinity. It is said that the two greatest things we can give our children are roots and wings. While the Nigerian churches are pressing

33 A. Walls, "Africa and Christian Identity", *Mission Focus*, vol. 6 no. 7, November (1978), 12.