

RELIGIOUS CHALLENGES OF NIGERIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

As we follow the steps of Christianity through Africa and other continents, we dare to consider the challenges which faced and are still facing the Church and her mission in order to see a better result in the evangelical field. The examination of these challenges is not from the intention to discourage the missionaries who work in Nigeria neither the converts of Christianity who promote the good works of these Christ's evangelists, but to acknowledge what Jesus the Institutor of the mission said about being ready to fight the obstacles on the way to mission. To tackle these challenges is nothing but the acceptance of the Master *Jesus Christ* in the 21st century – to make use of those techniques and potentials necessary for evangelisation in the present century; to apply the essential skills and methods that are useful for a better result in the missionary work. We may not guarantee the easy execution of this intention, of course, the road to heaven has never been without ups and downs. These tasks could be viewed from any angle of human life but I would like to consider its religious phase in this article

From the very beginning of the Church, it has been a well-known point that the challenges facing the Church will never subside until the end of the World. The sending of the Apostles by Christ and His assurance to them to accompany them to the end of the World have to go with the caution given to them, that he is sending as sheep among wolfs (Mt 28:20). They were also some eye witnesses when Jesus was faced with series of challenges from the Pharisees, the Scribes the Sadducees and so on (Matt 16:1-2; 16:6; 22:15-31). They knew it was not easy for their master, let alone the servant, hence disciple is not superior to teacher; but fully trained servant will be like teacher (Lk 6:40). This may also be the reason why Jesus taught them for almost three years, to strengthen them enough in faith and experience Mt 10:16). If it would have been in the present Hungarian education system in theological campuses, they would have gotten diploma from their Master to be catechists and religious knowledge teachers. Jesus' teachings to them were not only public but also in private, when he was alone with them. He did so to enrich them and improve their knowledge about the outside world and to deepen

their minds into His Messianic mysteries.¹ The Church therefore cannot do without improving her understandings and knowledge from time to time about the world in which she serves. All the apostles and disciples faced challenges to win the fight, to run the good race and to keep the good faith, and this was what earned them crown of glory which God, the Good Judge would give them on that day of judgment (see. 2Tim 4: 7-8). Jesus the Master also made sure that he taught the disciples how to meet to the spiritual needs of the converts. This manifested on his miraculous word at the witness of the apostles, especially when he told them that this could be achieved by fasting and praying (Mt 7:21; Mk 9:29). The Church of today must as well work very hard to keep the same faith which the predecessors kept.

1. PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

The Muslims always find it a bit difficult to look at Christians with friendly eyes, even though tremendous moves have been made to fundamentally resolve this issue on the tables of dialogue. This manner is not new; Mohamed did the same thing with the Jews in Mecca. He saw those Jews and probably Christians as traitors who in Mecca (his home-land) did not accept his so called Allah's message. As Maróth said, the Muslims always predict their betterment as the chosen people of Allah against people from other religion. They presume their schools, Universities and other institutions to be better than Christian owned ones. In many countries the reverse is always the case, consequently they always look for such random opportunities to destroy these Christian owned forums and if possible to persecute them.² In the International Religious Freedom Report, the American Foreign Affairs reports that Arab League and Iran primarily speak about the freedom and right of worship for Christians and from time to time provide the legal potentials necessary to enhance Christian freedom and security.³

Nigeria happens to be one of the West African countries with a considerable number of Muslims as citizens. Geographically, the country may be said to be territorially divided, having Hausas,⁴ Yorubas and Igbos (as the three main ethnic groups) settle at the northern, southern and eastern regions respectively across the country. The Hausa tribe

1 The Church always upholds her opinion that one should be trained enough in order to assume the function of preaching the Word of God. The right of reading the Bible is assured of every faithful by the Church, who reserves that of teaching of catechism and preaching of Word of God to be conferred by the local ordinary. In actual sense, the Church maintains that preaching the Word of God should solely be the priestly function of the local ordinary (cf. CD 11) in which the co-workers, the presbyters share, whether in form of catechism or homily, though extends its participation to the faithful as well, especially in cases of necessity, but with restriction and conditions to be promulgated by the diocesan bishop.

2 Maróth 2017, 28.

3 Horváth-Sántha – Speidl – Abdessamad 2017, 35.

4 The Housas form the Afrcan's biggest African ethnic group who, though spread throughout many towns and villages in several African countries, but densely populate southern Niger and Northern Nigeria as well. In these areas the Housas mostly engage in growing of crops and rearing of animals and most of them practice Islam as religion.

who are the largest in number are predominantly Muslims in religion. With this, it is easy to guess the kind of socio-religious relationship reigning between the Muslims and those Christians who live among them. There are always problems, disputes, disagreements, disunities and controversies among people with these two religions, especially in those countries like Nigeria where the government makes no significant efforts to harmonise the socio-cultural and religious differences among them.

Since 2002, Boko Haram⁵ has been the most dangerous and terrorizing Islamic sect in Nigeria, which in the recent times, have had Christian persecution as one of its targets especially in the northern parts of Nigeria. The members of this terrorist group maintained, in the last couple of years, to kill Christian in Churches during the Sundays and weekdays services, persecute and massacre Christian quarters and villages in the far-north regions of the country, destroy many churches and parishes, organise suicide bombings on roads and gathering places. The local bishops and the country's Catholic Bishop's Conference (CBCN) together with Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in general have tried in every possible way to call the attention of the government to this overwhelming situation and seek for help for their flocks but with lesser or no results. In some areas of those far northern provinces of Nigeria, to be a Christian has become a big task and a challenge. The same thing happens in those countries where a considerable number of Muslims are living, like Syria, Iraq, Iran, etc.⁶

As a matter of fact, Christian persecution is becoming a day-by-day phenomenon in the societies' life in Nigeria, which demands the consent and interest of global societies and countries. Some countries like Hungary and United States of America have made tremendous efforts to help Nigeria and those affected countries in the Middle East to rebuild their destroyed parishes and churches, schools, hospitals and important social institutions which were devastated by the Islam terrorist sects. But much is still expected of many other giant countries who are supposed to be part of the inter-religious and other aspects of dialogues to strive to quench the eruption of these Islamic sects in order to give required protections to Christian and to enhance a required freedom of worship across the globe.

2. IMPROVEMENT OF THE STANDARD OF CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS

The institution of Christ, the Church grew from generation of generation till she gets to her present standard in our time. Even from the first century, precisely at the time of the early Christians the Church has been an institution. This means that she adopted

⁵ Just like Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Boko Haram which originated from Nigeria in 2002 has claimed to be one of the most devastating Islamic sect and movement, causing religious havocs across the country. Boko Haram originally has fight against corruption and adoption of Islamic Sharia law as its goal of existence but busted out of revenge for killing their founder, Mohammed Jusuf, by the security agents of the nation; its members turned and vowed to terrorize the whole country and also Christian religion therein.

⁶ See, Gregorius III 2017.

those methods which made use of the scientific principles for solving problems.⁷ As we know, the catechumenal institution of the first Christians had three stages:

- the training for several years.
- the direct training and teachings during the Lenten season of the last year of education,
- the receiving of the Sacrament on the Easter Vigil.⁸

Meanwhile the Church had seen the importance of supplying the converts with the required facts of *Credo* for stability in faith. The Fathers of the Church kept the standard and also improved it from time to time.⁹ The writings of SS. Gregory the Great, Ambrose, Irene, Tertullian, Augustine and many others testify to this point. St. Thomas of Aquinas and the Scholastic institutions also brought the Church to a very high level of mental development and to a wider range of understanding for the entire world. The theology of Nigeria and of course Africa at large still has a long way to go to uphold the faith of the daily increasing number of converts. The nature of the flowering Nigerian theology and the religious crises that arise sometimes do not give a standard ratio. Again the acculturation, or more precisely, the steps and acts of some Catholic priests and pastors of the other protestant denominations draw an eye-look into the theological systems of these institutions. For example, it is always disappointing and embarrassing when Christian Religious personnel is gotten participating in dirty businesses like trade manufacturing of items that has no connection with the apostolates entrusted to them. There is evidence that our preachers of the Word of God most often engage into cheating of people, living hypocrisy lives, the service of wealth and money and other kinds of worldly lives. These condemn the image of the Church and the Bible among men. The embarrassment of the faithful is totally condemned by Jesus Christ. The root of these atrocities should be traced from the domains of our protestant fellow pastors.

With regard to these, majority complain that considerable percentage of the roaring problem is from negligent of the ecclesiastical competent authorities and *formators* in amending the system of formation in the religious and theological institutions. They say that most of these institutions have no good *formators*, therefore their work with the local ordinaries has no harmony and strength to pursue the diocesan problems.

3. OVERZEALOUSNESS OF THE CLERGY AND AGENTS OF EVANGELISATION

The clergy of the present Church and mission of Nigeria must be very careful to maintain the optimal and desired nature of the Church. It may be surprising and interesting to say that overzealousness reigns in the midst of the clergy of Nigeria. Under normal circumstances, a clergy or a religious is supposed to be pious and zealous in

7 Scherer – Stephen 1999, 19-21.

8 Várnagy 1999, 89.

9 Martin 1986, 3.

order to carry out his daily spiritual and pastoral activities.¹⁰ It then needs to be limited when they work and go beyond the boundaries of the teachings of the Mother Church.¹¹ Presently, many clergy have engaged in opening healing ministries in their parishes and homes without the consent of their Bishops. Some of them disobey their Bishops when they are told to stop it until the right procedures for examination of such adoration centres are made. Well, there is no doubt about the blessings and charisma which the Holy Spirit gives, especially to his anointed ones. But only God knows the ones he gave the power of healing among the clergies. That is why most of the Bishops fall into problems of decision when their priests approach them with the request of opening healing ministries. Witnesses also say that the attitudes of the competing with protestant pastors is one of the most outstanding reasons which makes many clergies to go beyond expectation. When these pastors draw and win some of the Catholic faithful, the tendency is for the clergies to do like them to maintain and uphold theirs as the anointed people of God.¹² This is also from the people's misunderstanding of the expression *anointing of God*. Meanwhile the anointing of ordination is not the same as the healing charisma of the Holy Spirit. From the real essence of it, a priest can heal with prayers, holy water and even sacramental, but healing power of the Holy Spirit and the charisma remains a special gift given only to those he chose for that. To clear this point, St Paul says: "*Now Christ's body is yourself, each of you with a part to play in the whole. And those whom God has appointed in the Church are, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, after them miraculous powers, then gift of healing, helpful acts, guidance, various kinds of tongues (1Cor 12:27-28).*" Everyone cannot be with the same kind of gift.

Again, many clergies tend to accommodate enculturation beyond the lines order and the impetus given by the directories of the Church. An example of this could be seen at the timing or dating of the traditional weddings and the Church weddings. It has almost been a culture to do the two weddings the same day. Some even do the Church weddings before the traditional ones and the parish priests allow and organise these for them. In the western and American countries, this practice does not bring forth any problem, but in a country like Nigeria where, in the past, Church's weddings were organised several months after traditional weddings, to enable the wedding couples think well and accept each other in the sacrament of matrimony, it contributes to the problems of the present day union of man and woman in the aforementioned sacrament. In

10 See Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 21; AAS 57 (1965), 24.

11 See Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life, no. 7; AAS 58 (1966), 1001.

12 Howe 1967, 29.; This challenge has been great these days, when different worshipping communities are springing up from every corner. Again the laities are making effort to read the Bible and preach to one another. The tendency is for the priests to make use of such words and expressions that are high and meaningless to the hearing of the faithful, only to see that they say something different. Howe said that when preachers use these words or concepts without explaining them, the words and concepts cease to be effective symbols of communication. He also said that without such explanation laymen have no choice but to interpret the symbols or myth literally, and of course, it then seems senseless to them in the context of contemporary life.

the former era, there was no traces of divorce among wedded couples. Now, it is really a problem. All these show the priest's over readiness to dance to the tones of the parishioners. It is therefore a profound duty if the agents of evangelisation, the clergy to uniformly draw the lines of demarcation and boundaries of impetus to avoid such invents leading to atrocities and heresy.

I must not forget the competitions among the agents of evangelisation in building some big Churches, chapels, stations of the cross as well as some renovations that costs fabulous amounts or money just because their fellow priest did the same. Of course, some towns and villages are rich while others are poor. These are mostly encouraged when the parishioners are financially capable to at least, finish the stered church building after a period of time, but should not be loaded to them as a heap of agenda. Most of these priest who have started the building and construction works in churches cannot finish them. As a result, they conduct "*second collections*," that is, several other collections every Sunday, thereby making the Church and practice of faith inconvenient for the poor faithful. If these issues are not corrected, they would rather scare away the parishioners than bringing them back to God.

4. OVERZEALOUSNESS OF THE LAITY

It has been experienced, times without number, that the faithful are tempted to engage and participate in some areas which are meant for only the clergy. The hunger to do what one is not allowed to do. Some ordinary members of our Church lay hands to each other while praying, especially during their visitations to the sick. Some claim to have healing charisma, some bless holy water in the houses, majority open and spread their hands when the Eucharistic prayers are said on the Holy Masses, some claim to be speaking in tongues and to mention a few. These characters are mostly seen among the members of the pious groups in the Church like the Charismatic Renewal group, the Bible Society group and so on. It is also interesting that some of these men and women claim to have more important work and part to play in the lives of the members of their societies. Some have their meetings or gathering while some others pray in the same Church at the same time when ceremonies like Holy Masses and Benedictions are going on. Some of them do not take their children to the hospital even they are seriously sick because for them it is enough to pray and lay hands on the children. Many of them observe the third commandment and other holy days of obligations to the extent that they negate corporal works of mercy towards one another.

One may be surprise that most of these our overzealous members feel greatly offended when they are called to order by the clergy or competent authority. In any case it continues to remain the duty of the clergy to explain and warn them to know the implications of what they do.

5. PARTICIPATION OF THE AGENTS OF EVANGELIZATION (THE PRIESTS) IN POLITICS

The Church of the 21st century seems to desperately be in need of money. This is dangerous in the House of God. We seem to have passed the era when faith has only, but only love as a complement. Our Church today appears to be like during the time of Hosea in the Old Testament, when man was not regarded in the society unless he plays sycophancy.¹³ The politics of the Church is now determined by the politics of the government in so many countries. Then what is our present stand and where are we going? We are still under such situations like when most of Eastern Europe countries were under the communist system: “when Churches of these countries were not independent; when their Churches had to dance to the tone of their governments; when their governments determined and gave them limits of interpreting the Gospel so as not to offend them; the topics of the Sunday’s homilies of some clergies were chosen and determined by the local governments; when there was no difference between the laws and leaders of the two; when some of the agents of evangelisation were also agents of the government.” For me, financial enslavement is like Egyptian enslavement, one needs to liberate from it to be free. I therefore repeat, we should know where we stand.

From the time of the institution of the Churches as independent Churches lead by the local compatriots, the Church has been enjoying that independency from both the government and the politicians.¹⁴ It is true that this independency does not earn the Church much financial or material support from the government till today, unless some government personnel made individual donations to the Church. Then it has been the function of the parishioners and the faithful to keep and uphold their parishes and stations from every angle, which they happily and willingly do from generation to generation. Then the big tasks of building and constructing big and expensive churches in which most of the priests engage make them to become hunters of the big money, thereby subjecting themselves to external authorities, like the authorities of world politics. In return, those politicians always use their tenure to help in the development of those parishes and areas that supported them and looked for them at the time of election while other areas remain undeveloped.¹⁵ It always causes discouragements and of course havocs in the minds of the faithful when these behaviours are transparent. The party leaders tend to develop only the areas that voted for them during the election. This attracts the interests of the agents of evangelisation who would expect them to work more in those areas. Consequently, the pulpit can be given to a politician to make some donations at the end of the Holy Mass, especially when election approaches. We know that God loves a cheerful giver, but these reciprocated donations of the politicians make

13 Kii 1989, 25-39, 11.

14 Ibid. 43.

15 Ibid. 56.

the name of the Holy Church sound *worldly*.¹⁶ The Church of Nigeria should give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's.

6. THE PROBLEM OF ARCHAISM

The phenomenon "archaism" still prevails strongly in Nigerian's different religions and in their liturgies.¹⁷ Christianity arrived in Nigeria just few centuries ago. Before then, many tribes of the country, like the Igbos have settled in their areas and lands for millennia. There has been strong and deep culture and custom among these people which may be very difficult to be wiped away from the minds and lives of the people.¹⁸ Moreover many symbols of worship, oracles and articles of faith had been in the content of their religion before the highlights from Christianity. As a result, many cannot feel the difference between the two outstanding religions neither knowing which one to follow actually.¹⁹ As a challenge, the native converts always abide to the Church to provide them with such services that assure them redemption, but they further in providing them such extraordinary services – prophecies about the reincarnation of their children, magic, sorcerer, – which they claimed to be getting from their African or Igbo Traditional Religion.²⁰ They would like God of the Christians to appear physically to them in times of trouble and misunderstanding just as masquerades interceded for them on behalf the gods of their lands in similar occasions.

As a matter of fact, the Church cannot and can never promise them these things, there many of them felt disappointed.²¹ The Gordian Church is a practical example of the matter. It was introduced by K.O.K Onyioha.²² It comprises of those members who, though believe that Christianity is from the Almighty God but have a very great respect to their culture than any other Church. Most of them were disappointed by their wrong way of believing in Christianity. When they left the Church, they went back to cultural ritual practices. They claim to have modified the Cultural Region among the natives and convince people that they have more to give than Christianity.

The areas of conflict are those moments and circumstances in which an Igbo is confronted with the choice: to keep faith with Christian tenets which are often wrapped in unaccustomed mystery as solutions or fall back to traditional solutions which are often practically wrapped in accustomed mystery. With respect to this, John I.O. acclaimed

16 Ibid. 85.

17 Evangelization in Africa in the third Millennium: Challenges and Prospects, 1990, 52.

18 Devisch 2002, 287.

19 Confer the similarities between the two religions on the above topics.

20 See Chidili 1997, 70.

21 Taylor – Olkes 1989, 11.

22 K.O.K Onyioha was a very well known wealthy man of Igbo land who gathered people to himself and started his own Church in line with African Traditional Religion.

Francis Cardinal Arinze's²³ (1990:55) description of many Igbo Christians as serving two masters at the same time. Arinze affirmed:

*When they find themselves in moments of crises
sickness, matrimony, birth of a child, funeral of relatives,
construction of a house, and for students, facing
important and difficult examinations- it is not rare to
find them having recourse to superstitious practices of
the Traditional religion.*²⁴

John affirms that this state of affairs has resulted in various movements in Igbo land in search of security. An Igbo Christian is therefore in trouble. He is faced with tremendous obstacle which inhibits his or her efforts to keep faith with Christianity. Thus these conflicts spiritual generate spiritual tensions. The conflicts and tensions within the individual are caused by conflicts and tensions existing between the traditional religion and the new faith.²⁵ At the center of the problem is the difference in the world-view of the traditional religion and that of Christianity. It must be noted that all the areas of conflict which have been identified are dependent on the world-view. An understanding of the two world-view are therefore necessary.

Every religion takes its bearing from its world-view. The solution to the crises of faith-culture conflict in Africa can be achieved when evangelization achieves the desired harmony between the traditional world-views. With regard to this Justine Upkong (1992,74) said:

*Today the average African Christian is torn apart
between the African and the Christian world-views.
The primary purpose of dialogue here is the integration
of the two world-views so as to give the African
Christian an integrated religious personality.*²⁶

Each religion consists of relationship between man and spiritual beings or supernatural being in his or her own world-view. Christianity must escalate in spirit and truth to bring back her converts from these fields of understanding, because the life of each

23 Cardinal Frnacis Arinze was one cardinal prefect of propoganda for inter-religious dialogue and latter headed the prefecture for liturgy and worship under St. Pope John Paul II.

24 As John I. O. referred in his topic titled: *The practice of inculturation as the vehicle to right the wrongs of the colonial evangelization in Iboland*, on the International symposium for the Religion in the world of Change, 2002. The wise men say that it will be very difficult to wipe away totally the cultural religious views of the Igbos due to the immensity and heaviness of their culture. They say that the richness of it is so high that even the Igbos learn to know their culture.

25 Anusionwu 1994, 12.

26 Arinze 1993, 13.

individual is bound together with his or her own world-view. It is the world-view which determines the meaning given to every reality. It also determines the values one gives to existence itself and sense of the universe. Finally, it is the world-view that makes religion a reality. John Obilor (1994:117) describes the traditional world-view as one in which both visible and invisible beings inhabit, a real world where the living and the dead live together to form a symbiotic relation. He identifies three relations which, according to him maintain equilibrium in traditional thought: Cosmic, social and religious relations. According to him, "the three relations are viewed both from the spiritual world and the world of humans." The three relations are the essential elements of the traditional world-view. The Church should see herself participating in the outlined three relations. Firstly, the Church should be cosmic, or more precisely, the Church should exist in the world. This is why Jesus Christ left heaven to institute the Church in the world in order to be incarnate of the thought and plan of the Holy Trinity. Secondly, the Church should be social. The Christian Religion is instituted for man who lives a social life. The Church should go deep to embrace the social lives of her faithful in order to win them wholeheartedly. Thirdly, the Church has to be religious. By this the Church must have in mind what Jesus the Master said when he prayed for her in his last days. He prayed that the world would know that the Church is not of this world as He Himself is not of this world.

Every student of African religion and culture must come to terms with these relations. They are however not opposed to Christianity. If anything, what they need is proper interpretation and redefinition for an equitable *aggiornamento*. If Christianity must do better in Africa it must be ready to adjust itself to the African world-view. Such adjustments must be real and radical. It must be seen to happen. The required proper adjustment can be achieved by inculturation.²⁷ This adjustment should go a long way to clarify the terms like, archaism.

7. THE SO CALLED "BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS" AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The name Born-again had been in use since late 60s by those New Religious movements (the Pentecostals and the Evangelicals) who brought their denominations at the beginning of the flowering time of Christianity in Nigeria.²⁸ They arrived from various

27 Cf. Chidili 1997, 21.

28 This inculturation must carry interculturalisation along the line. Chidli observes the importance of this issue especially in those areas where Catholicism and faith already existed. In this case one only needs to get accustomed to the way and style of worship of a given community and joins them. Meanwhile, this interculturalisation is necessary for the intercultural exchange between sister churches which most often yields practical expression of communion between the churches. In other words, "catholicity" of all the churches. Hence, whereas inculturation pays attention to rooting Christianity in a culture, interculturalisation points to exchange of Christianised cultural values among local churches within the universal context of the Church.

countries of the world ranging from the United States of America, Latin America as well as Asian countries. Their advantage was their knowledge of English language, the formal and official language of the country, therefore adapting to the environmental conditions was easy for them. Their close approach to people and preaching on the roads and streets help them to gather men and women.²⁹ At the beginning, they seem to be totally against the Catholic teachings especially in the dogmatic areas and contents of articles of faith of the Church. In fact, the Church of Nigeria experienced it in the same way the Church experienced the act of Martin Luther and his men during Reformation.³⁰ They convinced the local natives that the Church has been misleading them in so many things, giving them no freedom to worship as they liked, collecting annual dues, keeping them under the strict guideline of the sacramental doctrines and giving them no permission to read the Bible. As a matter of fact, they won people to themselves, but to make themselves different from the already existing protestant churches in the country they called themselves *Born-again Christians*. Some of their followers were from the catholic Church especially the members of the Charismatic Renewal group who have been longing for the opportunity to be liberated from the commandments and regulations of the Mother Church. While others were the people who were in serious problems and sicknesses and have been looking for someone to care for them.³¹ These New Religious Movements flowered from late 80s when economic and social hardship was high in the country. Till today some of them do not use the name protestant, instead they call themselves born-again.

It is remarkable that their spontaneous *start* and arrival which was like a lightning that descended against the Catholic Church made them lack structural base till today.³² Their services of gathering, as the case maybe, is based on the one person (the pastor), who may as well be the owner of the group. Some of the pastors went on a small training about the knowledge of the Bible and came out with an acclamation that they are pastors. They rented or bought small buildings for their services. Of course people followed them because they pretended to give the best of evangelism and shout more loudly, pray much with loud voices, they tend to be more caring to one another. The society however, know them and group them, therefore we would examine their challenges to the Catholic in line with that of the protestants.

During the first World War, Christians all over the world, both Catholics and Protestants had to arrive again at the shore of truth, that the spiritual fundamentals should be recovered. To promote this, the two sides sent many of their theologians to further schools. The Catholics found it necessary to re-examine their three central sources of nourishment of Christian life, namely the Bible, the liturgy and the teachings of early

29 Wilkins 1968, 67.

30 See *Evangelization in Africa in the third Millennium: Challenges and Prospects*, 1990, 73.

31 Ford 1970, 34.

32 Minus 1976, 98.

Fathers of the Church.³³ The New Religious Movements still suffer the instability of basement, but strive very strongly to challenge the Catholic system in the following ways below:

- They make out more time to look for the poor and the disadvantaged of the society.
- They do everything possible to get the faithful even if it requires so many personal sacrifices.
- They employ their unemployed followers when they have job opportunities. This also serves as a strategy to keep back the faithful and show them close regard and care.
- They provide their followers with loans and other collateral security for solving bigger personal and family problems.
- The New Religious Movements tend and claim to be more active in worship and prayer. Their Sunday and ordinary day services last much more longer than the Catholics’.
- They are more at home with the Bible. Their belief in *Sola Scriptura* makes them to have the Bible as the only instrument for worship and as well have more time to read and explain the Words of the Bible among themselves. The seminarians who spent eight years in the seminaries are behind them in the message of the Bible when they spend only 2-3 years of their New Religious Movements’ educations. They do not care to acknowledge the fact that Catholic institutions and theological schools interpret the Bible with faith and science while the New Religious Movements interpret with only faith. They are more Christocentric.

When the challenge reached to this point, the Catholic Church had to sit up to react to them, otherwise the tendency would be ‘lost of some of her faithful’ whose faith was not strong in Catholicism. The Church then had to introduce some of the development and building organizations that helped in providing the faithful with job opportunities and loans for businesses and other family affairs. The Catholic, being what it is cannot depart from the teachings of Jesus Christ not to pray like the hypocrites who love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. Jesus said that they have had their reward. The Church rather remain in the Lord’s teachings to go to the private room, shutting the door and praying to the Father, for He who sees all that is done in secret to reward them (see Mt 6: 5-6). The Church however called on the Bishops and gave them instructions to allow the Charismatic Renewal group in their Dioceses and parishes to take care of those overzealous faithful who fell unsatisfied with the organized and written prayer system of the Church. Today the Church enjoys victory over this challenge given to her by the rival partner because with this, the Catholics, especially the Charismatic movements and other spiritual movements would not go to Church without the Bible. They read and interpret the Bible for

33 Ibid. 132.

themselves even at home before going to Sunday Masses. In other words, it shows that our people are gradually moving towards the use of the Bible. Other Catholic gatherings and societies then see it as a challenge to wake up in using the Bible for the everyday activities. Even the discursion in the streets and gatherings are influenced by their little knowledge and quotations they have from in the Bible. Their prayer of the faithful over the Holy masses show their dependent in the use of the words of Scripture.

So the situation may be said to have moved from Christendom (from the Church) to Christianity (the emphasis of Jesus Christ). But Christianity welcomes more Ecumenical Christendom which talks about the people of God at large. Meanwhile, it has also moved from Christianity to the emphasis on the Kingdom of God – everyone preaches the Kingdom of God.

Finally, every denomination and group agrees on the fact that Bible should be inculturated more for the native people to understand. Because they are already in line with it, they read it and use it. The Bible should be contextually read and interpreted to maintain and retain its value and meaning for us. The Church is however challenged to keep this pace so as to retain her faithful across the universe.

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