



Towards Ecumenical Dialogue between African Pentecostalism and Roman Catholic

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Abstract

There are undoubtedly differences between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism such as doctrinal issues and salvific conceptualisations. Besides non-Catholics, specifically Pentecostal churches have always been perceived as non-churches and lacking the real salvation by Roman Catholics. Thus, Roman Catholics have looked at Pentecostals with the eye of suspicion regardless of ecumenical efforts made to bring the two together. Similarly, Pentecostals have perceived Catholics as carrying a non-transformative doctrine, lacking the Spirit, and leaning towards political institutions and systems. Hence, the relationship between these two movements has been perceived as irreconcilable and incompatible with some leaders giving up on ecumenical engagements. However, a literature review on the relationship between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism reveals some similarities between the two movements through the ecumenical dialogue model. In other words, as much as the two movements do not see eye to eye, they have commonalities such as the use of sacramentals, common foundational beliefs, and salvation through Jesus. These similarities can be used as a starting point toward ecumenism and helping the two movements to move towards unity.

Keywords: African Pentecostalism; Roman Catholic; ecumenism; theology; ecumenical dialogue

Introduction

The tension that exists between Pentecostalism and Roman Catholic has received the attention of many scholars in the past years (Butticci, 2016; Hollenweger, 1996; Murphy, 2018; Odeyemi, 2019; Rausch, 2010, 2021). Lindhardt (2016:97) points out that it is not only the tension between Roman Catholics and Pentecostals alone but also the tension between Roman Catholics and Protestant tradition. The tensions according to Rausch (2021:82) are not new as they date back to the sixteenth century, exacerbated by the collection of myths demonizing Roman Catholic. But the tensions are also exacerbated by claims of Pentecostals being persecuted by the Roman Catholics due to the attraction of some Roman Catholics to Pentecostalism. This tension continues regardless of attempts at both ends to try and bring unity between the movements. Some of these differences have been made public. Butticci (2016:19), quotes Pope John Paul 11 who publicly defined Pentecostalism and its multiple



expressions as ‘sects that act like rapacious wolves, causing division and discord in catholic communities’. Equally, Pope Benedict XVI regards non-Roman Catholics as para churches that do not have a proper doctrinal foundation (see Butticci, 2016). Similarly, Pentecostals have criticised Roman Catholics for their doctrinal and devotional practices lacking the power and move of the Holy Spirit (Butticci, 2016). The greater criticism coming from Pentecostals to Roman Catholics is the alignment of Roman Catholic with the politics or political powers of the day (Butticci, 2016).

However, despite these tensions, this article argues that there are commonalities between Roman Catholic and Pentecostalism specifically in an African context. This will be demonstrated by first looking at the tension that exists between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism. The article will also look at the rationale behind the failed ecumenical engagements between Roman Catholic and Pentecostalism. The Greek word “ecumenical”, means ‘embracing the entire world’ and was first used at the Stockholm Conference of 1925 when Orthodox and Protestants began a dialogue and this continues to date. External conditions and technicalities have forced denominations to stay separated from each other (Alivasatos, 1954).

Why is it that the various movements are irreconcilable and incompatible and battle to work together for Christian unity, especially Roman Catholics and Pentecostals? The article defines ecumenical dialogue as the common ground for the unity or common understanding between Roman Catholic and Pentecostalism. The article will discuss in length the discourses on the aspects that can be used to move Catholicism and Pentecostalism towards unity in an African context. This union is proposed here as the source for the two movements to move towards ecumenism regardless of their differences for Christian unity. Data in this article was collected by studying extant literature that addresses the relationship as well as the tension that exists between Roman Catholic and Pentecostalism. The article is thus a literature review on the subject and works within the theoretical framework of an ecumenical dialogue that can hopefully be established between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism per se.

Ecumenical dialogue

According to Chitando and Biri (2016:74) “...ecumenism is a theological concept that seeks to encourage communion and interaction amongst different Christian denominations and promote Christian unity”. In ecumenism, Rausch (2010:994) mentions that “The goal of the dialogue is not structural unity, but rather to develop a climate of mutual respect and understanding in matters of faith and practice, to find points of genuine agreement as well as indicate areas in which further dialogue is required.”

Eregare, Ekpendu, and Adesina (2017) define ecumenism as a paramount trend in the contemporary church due to the geometrical level of division in Christendom which is contrary to Christ’s plan for the church. According to Achunike (1995:84) “ecumenism is both a movement and an attitude of openness toward Christians of different traditions to learn from their various experiences and deepen one’s commitment to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Kaigama (2006) posits the concept from a narrower and more common-sense perspective. For him, ecumenism refers to the movement toward cooperation among Christians (Kaigama, 2006) – simply put, ecumenism refers to Christians of different Christian denominations working together to achieve a common goal. Furthermore, Kaigama (2006) confirms that ecumenism wants to start a movement toward cooperation among Christians by creating an avenue through which Christians of different Christian denominations can work together. In addition, Kaigama (2006) states that as a Christian phenomenon, ecumenism seeks to promote cooperation and better understanding between religious groups or denominations. Thus, according to Eregare (2013:207), “the ecumenical initiative is to aim at truth, justice, and unity of the body of Christ or Christian churches or denominations”.



Working from an ecumenical paradigm, Koffeman (2009:13) offers a perspective on the ecumenical marks of the church as follows: "...unity, holiness, catholicity, and authenticity postulate the respective quality markers of conciliarity, integrity, inclusivity, and authenticity." In *Ut Unum Sint* (that they may be one), promulgated in 1995, the late Blessed Pope John Paul II reiterates a theme from the Decree on Ecumenism. He draws attention to the fact that although doctrinal dialogues are of high importance, dialogue engages the whole person and the whole Christian witness (Gros, McManus & Riggs, 1998:214). The goal of the dialogue, Rausch (2010:944) states, is not structural unity, but rather "to develop a climate of mutual respect and understanding in matters of faith and practice, to find points of genuine agreement as well as indicate areas in which further dialogue is required". Blessed Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint* :47) writes: "That it is right and salutary to recognise the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in His works and worthy of admiration."

The tension between African Pentecostalism and Roman Catholic

African Pentecostalism is a movement that is part of the protestant tradition but different from other traditions because of its emphasis on the direct relationship with God through the work of the Holy Spirit. In addition, African Pentecostalism is considerably different from Catholicism in Africa in many aspects such as political affiliations, continuity with African traditional beliefs such as ancestral worship and rituals, and liturgy and worship. Catholic churches in Africa have a relationship with the governments of the day to a greater extent than African Pentecostals. Maxwell (2000:272) cites an example of how the Roman Catholic church had political associations with the ZANU PF during Robert Mugabe's regime, even blessing Mugabe's marriage. The other places where Roman Catholic churches have exerted political power include Ghana, Zambia, Nigeria, and Uganda, among other nations. Maxwell explains that this is informed by the massive infrastructure and resources that the Roman Catholic church has in African countries as compared to African Pentecostal churches. The Roman Catholic church also has a presence in the political arena through its membership that occupies strategic positions in government. Although African Pentecostal churches like Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) of Ezekiel Guti have some presence in the political arena, it is the Roman Catholic church that has greater numbers (see Maxwell, 2000). Another example comes from Mozambique where Catholics were accused of having relationships with colonial powers such as Portugal, that suppressed Pentecostals and looked at them with suspicion (Pfeiffer et al, 2007:690). The same can be said in South Africa when comparing African Pentecostal churches with the Roman Catholic church – the Catholics have more presence in politics (Butticci, 2016). Some Pentecostals interpret this kind of political affiliation or relationship as the reason why churches do not confront the political powers of the day.

Therefore, the tension between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism is informed by the attitude that both have about the relationship between politics and religion (Mayrargue, 2008:12). Adeboye (2004:144) adds that the tension increases as "Pentecostals seek an active political role and opportunities to ensconce themselves in leadership positions, to break the Catholic hegemony and put an end to the discrimination they are suffering in the hands of Catholics". However, unlike Catholics, Pentecostals do not seek political solutions to socio-economic and socio-political challenges but perceive them as demons that need to be dealt with through the power of the Holy Spirit (Adeboye, 2004:149). This might as well be the very reason why African Pentecostals are not connected to the politics of the day the same way Catholics are. In addition, it is also a reason why in South Africa, for example, so many Pentecostal churches were silent on the issue of racial segregation which was driven by a political front. While other church traditions were very active in either supporting the system or fighting against it, Pentecostals adopted a very conservative approach. This kind of approach is not helpful, hence a need for active participation in societal issues by Pentecostals in Africa.



The second aspect of this tension is that Pentecostals, unlike Catholics, do not mix their Christian beliefs with traditional spiritual beliefs and practices in Africa (Pfeiffer et al, 2007:688). Most Pentecostals in Africa believe that the Holy Spirit can solve their challenges including sickness, poverty, and other forms of suffering (see Anderson, 1991; cf Anderson, & Otwang 1993). Hence Pentecostals emphasise the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues which differs from Roman Catholic baptism (Rausch, 2010). Therefore, they do not see a need to follow the traditional spiritual practices to access health, wealth, and prosperity but they only believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. However, they stand in agreement with these practices in terms of linking human sufferings to the spirit world such as demonic and evil forces. Therefore, Pentecostalism unlike Roman Catholic can be viewed in terms of discontinuity with traditional spiritual practices (see Anderson, 2018). This discontinuity is important for Pentecostals as it is the essence of their faith as their emphasis is on the direct relationship with God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The third aspect is the experiential liturgy and worship among Pentecostals which does not only differentiate them from Roman Catholics but also other protestant churches (see Saayman, 1993:49). In Catholicism, liturgy and worship are led by the priest on the altar and among many protestant churches, it is about the pulpit that is administered by the minister, reverend, and so forth, whereas in Pentecostalism, worship and liturgy are more pews oriented with believers taking part in singing, the clapping of hands and other worship activities (Saayman, 1993). This kind of approach is more appealing to African people who want to express themselves in religious practices; hence, Pentecostalism has found resonance among Africans. Therefore, we see a movement of some Roman Catholics and other protestant church members joining Pentecostal churches in Africa (see Rausch, 2010:933). In recent years, Pentecostals have the propensity of fishing in the pond of Roman Catholic, specifically those who are considered “nominal Christians” or who have not yet received the Holy Spirit (Rausch, 2010:935). In addition, it is the aspect of lively worship and a relationship with the Holy Spirit that has given birth to the charismatic renewals in Africa that exist within Catholicism (Enegho, 2020:2). These are Catholics that did not leave their denomination but wanted to stoke the Pentecostal fire within the ranks of Catholicism.

The failed ecumenical engagements: Irreconcilable and incompatible movements

In a quest to promote Christian unity for the sake of the corporate body of Christ and the kingdom of God, some church leaders from both denominations have been pushing talks toward unity (Vondey 2010). Thus, to achieve ecumenism, Pentecostal and Catholic leaders have tried to come together. However, these unity talks have not yielded fruit in the different African contexts. In Nigeria, for example, Adeboye (2006:152) cites promises made by the ‘Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) [but] have not been able to impose overall unity on the different groups’. On the contrary, the many different groups and associations among, for example, Pentecostals have been confronted with different challenges of fighting for positions and power. These alone are impediments to achieving unity between Catholics and Pentecostals. Therefore, the unity of Pentecostals among different sub-traditions is pivotal in achieving unity with other different denominations or Christian church traditions as are the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic attempts to reconcile

Another reason for failed ecumenical engagements is that most Pentecostals are either not interested in ecumenism or they do not have personal ecumenical experiences (Rausch, 2010:943). This is the case even in an African context, where many neo-Pentecostals do not have a solid theological background, especially regarding church history and talks around church unity. Therefore, when challenges of disunity cause tensions between Catholics and Pentecostals, some do not know how to approach the matter. In addition, Pentecostals are inward-looking and very congregationalist on matters of ecclesiology – it is not easy for them to open up to other ecclesial organisational structures (Rausch, 2010:943). Although some



classical Pentecostals in Africa are members of organisations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), it is not easy for neo-Pentecostals in Africa to join movements like these. It is even difficult for African-neo-Pentecostals to join national bodies such as the South African Council of Churches. Some of them feel inferior and intimidated by these large church organisations that could assist in ecumenical engagements. Sometimes, this intimidation is caused by the negative treatment of Pentecostals by not only Catholics but also other protestant denominations, which causes Pentecostals to withdraw from ecumenical engagements for fear of these persecutions repeating themselves (Rausch, 2010:944). In South Africa, for example, African neo-Pentecostals have been treated with suspicion and some of them are not regarded as proper churches by the Catholics and other denominations. This kind of treatment is driving Pentecostals away from unity talks.

Establishing ecumenical grounds between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism

Foundational beliefs

Roman Catholic and Pentecostalism, along with Orthodoxy (Nicolaidis, 2020, 2021) share the belief in the mystery of a triune God. The Trinity is the term to signify the central doctrine of the Christian religion, which seeks to clarify the truth that in the unity of the Godhead there are Three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three Persons are distinct from one another. Historically, the doctrine of the Trinity is understood more in the New Testament. The New Testament explains that the Father is God (Philippians 1: 2); Jesus is God (John 1: 1, 14) and it says the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5: 3-4). Hence, there can be no doubt that the New Testament proclaims there is only One God and He exists in three distinct persons. Taking account of different interpretations of the concept of 'Triune God', we can agree that Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism can also assert that these foundational beliefs can be a vehicle to transform the lives of believers, empowering them to spread God's hope and love throughout the world.

Salvation through Jesus

The historical Jesus met and touched people. For example, in the Gospel according to John (9:37), we encounter a story of a blind man, a beggar. Jesus makes a mud-pack, and He applies it to the wretched man's eyes. Afterward, Jesus instructs him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man does as Jesus instructed him and for the first time in his life he can see. However, the Pharisees are enraged because Jesus cured the man on the Sabbath. They then asked, is he or is he not God's man? But the beggar knows and proclaims: "Lord, I believe" (John 9:37). In a sense, the above story illustrates that the historical Jesus's touch always demands a response (Pennock, 1998). Although we are talking about the historical Jesus, He still touches us today through His church, in the Gospel, in the sacraments, and as Duncan (2010:1) puts it, "as they are securely founded on and expressive of the word of God and sacramentals, and through our priests or pastors of our different denominations."

Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism preach salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The two movements agree that the purpose of a Christian's life is glorifying God and sharing his love with others. We would also like to argue that both movements believe that faith alone is not enough; thus, it must be accompanied by good works. Further, the relationship/union between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism will be according to Duncan (2010:3). "a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled and it is expressed in a common mission witnessing to all people to the gospel of God's grace and serves the whole of creation". This could be testified through ecumenical dialogue by both denominations.



Objectification of religion

The objectification of religion refers to reducing the religious faith to the use of objects to access healing, deliverance, and so forth. In other words, when religion is objectified, that which has been defined as spiritual and abstract is reduced to the material, the concrete, and the tangible. Thus, instead of relying on God, the religious practitioners use various objects that they perceive to be carrying the anointing to heal and deliver people. Consequently, the consumers and followers of these religious leaders end up placing a demand on these faith products instead of exercising their faith in God. Banda (2020:2) explains, "...anointed objects function as instruments for mediating God's active presence in the believers' lives. A primary role played by the anointed objects is bringing the powerful presence of God to the believer, therefore connecting the believer with God". Hence, the danger of using objects in religion is not in the objects themselves but in the reliance on these objects as mediating God's power and presence. In addition, religious practitioners tend to commercialise religion because the demand for these objects such as anointing oil and anointing water ends up causing them to sell them at unregulated and exorbitant prices at the expense of consumers.

However, the use of objects in religion is not something new but has been practiced in ancient times. Banda (2018:58) says, "The use of holy objects for healing and blessing people has a long history that stretches from the Old Testament, the early church, and various epochs of church history". The most common use of the holy object in the Old Testament is the ark of the covenant that was used to connect the people of Israel with their God (see Heskin, 1996:20). In the early church in the New Testament, various objects were used by Jesus and later by his disciples in healing and delivering people. In this article, the discussion is not on whether the use of objects is right or wrong, but rather to illustrate that its usage in Roman Catholic and the African neo-Pentecostalism can be a source of driving unity.

For a better understanding of this aspect under discussion, it is important to grasp the meanings of the objects or sacramentals in the Roman Catholic tradition and the Pentecostal tradition – specifically African neo-Pentecostals. Very significantly, the term *sacrament* in Roman Catholic is used to designate verbal formulas such as blessings or objects like holy water or medals to which a religious significance has been attached. Similarly, neo-Pentecostals use objects such as holy water and anointed oil to bring healing and deliverance to their followers (see Banda, 2020). The relevant structure of the Catholic tradition is that these objects are symbols of personal prayer and dedication, and their efficaciousness is measured by the practical dispositions of the person who uses them. Some neo-Pentecostals in Africa use various objects in their devotions.

The Catholic understanding of sacramentals is closely linked to the understanding of sacraments. The outstanding teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Catholic Church, 2011:668) is that:

Sacramentals are instituted for the sanctification of certain ministries of the Church, certain states of life, a great variety of circumstances in Christian life, and the use of many things helpful to humanity. They always include a prayer, often accompanied by a specific sign, such as the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, or the sprinkling of holy water (which recalls Baptism), and the use of holy oil.

Amongst many neo-Pentecostals in Africa, various objects are used to help those in need, not necessarily for prayer, and they replace the conventional way of provoking healing such as the laying of hands. Nonetheless, in both traditions, the use of objects depends on a specific context and the problem that is addressed at that time (Nkadimeng, 2018).



In the Roman Catholic tradition, according to the Catholic Church (2011:1667) sacramentals are “sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments ...” but are not sacraments in the strict sense for two reasons. First, they were not instituted by Christ but by the Church as the Catholic Church (2011:1667) further states that the “Holy Mother Church has ... instituted sacramentals”. Second, they do not work *ex opere operato* which means according to Catholic Church (2011:1667) that “from the performance of the act itself, rather than from the individual human soul, the feelings or experiences or spiritual energies of the person receiving the sacrament, or from the person administering it to produce the effects they signify, but only ‘signify effects ... which are obtained through the intercession of the Church ...”. Similarly, in African neo-Pentecostalism, the use of healing and deliverance products were not commanded by Christ but are used to aid the faith of individuals looking for help (see Kgatle, 2017, cf Gyadu, 2005). In the Catholic tradition, according to Catholic Church (2011:1670) “sacramentals do not confer the grace of the Holy Spirit in the way that the sacraments do, but by the Church’s prayer, they prepare us to receive grace and dispose us to cooperate with it”. In addition, sacramentals vary much more with time and place than sacraments do. They, according to Catholic Church (2011:1670) “respond to the needs, culture, and special history of the Christian people of a particular region or time”. Neo-Pentecostals in Africa believe in healing products – specifically the anointing oil – representing the anointing of the Holy Spirit (see Benyah, 2020) but do not replace it, which is like Catholicism. In the Catholic tradition, ordinary things in life become saturated and consecrated through the sacramentals (Catholic Church, 2011:1667). The Catholic Church (2011:1670) explains: “For well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the ... Death and Resurrection of Christ. From this source, all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power.”

This explains why the church leaders call the name of Jesus Christ when using the sign of the cross (Catholic Church, 2011:1671). Therefore, every use of sacrament is done to sanctify human beings and bring glory to God (Catholic Church, 2011:1670). This is not just a matter of interior or spiritual intentions; the spiritual power of the Church’s prayer flows into material things like waves onto a beach. In the Roman Catholic tradition, and also in Eastern Orthodoxy, much more than in other denominations or Christian movements, there is a sacramental sense which unites, rather than divides, matter, and spirit, secular and sacred. Thus, sacramentals sanctify or make holy material things, times, and places, such as relics, holy days, church buildings, altars, statues, holy water, rosaries, medals, processions, and religious dances, and pilgrimages. African neo-Pentecostals use anointing oil, holy water, and other products to remove evil powers that have been planted by evil forces in the spiritual realm.

Charismatic renewals as a point of contact

To establish the common ground between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism, the two movements can use charismatic renewals as a point of contact. Charismatic renewals are renewals which advocate for the gifts of the Holy Spirit within the Catholic tradition. They can be used to initiate ecumenical dialogue because, like Pentecostals, they believe in charismatic worship. Enegho (2020:5) points out that Catholic charismatic renewal movements exist and they not only worship in a charismatic style, but they also “try to initiate change in some areas for the good of the church”. In addition, Catholic charismatic renewal movements like African Pentecostals across the world all believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit exist today, and they can be utilised by Christian believers. In similar ways, healing remains central among charismatic renewals, but the importance of tongues diminishes in comparison to the ministry of deliverance (Van den Toren, 2015). In addition, Van den Toren (2015) asserts that charismatic renewals generally put great emphasis on prosperity and power although the movement itself encompasses a range of positions concerning the role of “health and wealth” in the Christian life. This evidence existed and still exists to build up the body of Christ and glorify God and should not be used for selfish gain. As a result, both movements believe in an



appropriate manifestation of these gifts as part of living in the power of the Holy Spirit (see Bartos, 2011).

Towards ecumenical dialogue regardless of differences

As has been established in the preceding sections, tensions exist between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism. However, the differences between these two movements are not as strong theologically as the aspects that can unite them as highlighted in the preceding section. In other words, it seems that these two movements are divided on matters related to politics and dis/continuities with traditional beliefs. But they have commonalities regarding the basic Christian doctrine which is stronger than their differences. In simple terms, the Christian traditions should differ based on the Christian doctrine that compromises their faith and belief systems but if these basic foundational doctrines are common then other differences can be compromised.

Ecumenical dialogue can help Africans according to Van den Toren (2015:104) to "...develop a Christian position in a secular post-Christendom society". To do so, the two movements must recognise the unity of the body. Duncan (2010:2) maintains that "...oneness is the defining attribute of the body of Christ, and we are united to Christ in baptism and joined to all who are in Christ". In a quest to promote Christian unity for the sake of the corporate body of Christ and the kingdom of God, Duncan (2010:3) continues to maintain that the unity among Christians is "...held by many as evidence of Christ being the savior of the world". In addition to Duncan's argument, Koffeman (2009:6) affirms that, if this is so, it is not very compelling evidence given the disunity of the body; hence, unity is both present and future, indicative and imperative. It is "a gift and calling", a source of hope and therefore a challenge to our faithfulness. Therefore, if Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism serve the world to promote our identity and Christian unity for the sake of the corporate body of Christ and the kingdom of God, then, undoubtedly, the unity between the two movements can be manifested.

The two traditions should also recognise their common goal in the Christian tradition. It is perhaps as well that the beliefs and practices of Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism may seem divided, but the two movements embrace a common goal. Moreover, they share important core beliefs about God's identity, his plan for humankind, and the veracity of the books of the Old and New Testaments. Although the expression of worship differs, they agree on some of the fundamental issues of their Christian faith. As such, if the deeds of both movements and their reflections on those deeds aim to serve one God, then Christianity according to Pennock (1998:125) is "better situated to be a more accurate statement on the current situations of the society and how to best do away with the ills".

Although there are serious differences that still divide Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism, evidence suggests that there can be unity between the Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism which should aim, according to Rausch (2010:945) "...to develop a climate of mutual respect and understanding in matters of faith and practice, to find points of genuine agreement as well as indicate areas in which further dialogue is required. In other words, the Christian community engages in a spiritual journey for perfection to avoid unnecessary conflicts". The field of ecumenical dialogue exploration can be utilised by the Catholic Church and African Pentecostalism because for Gros, McManus, and Riggs (1998:214), "Many forms of witness in interpersonal relationships and community life are ripe for ecumenical engagement and ecumenical learning among each other with which relationships have been difficult".

To move towards unity, there is a need for more meetings between Roman Catholics and Pentecostals like those that were previously initiated by Pope Francis. Pope Francis convened a meeting on 29 September 2018 at the Vatican with members of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Through this action, the Pope and the Council were holding their



annual plenary meeting, which focused on relations between Catholics and Pentecostal and evangelical Christians (Pope Francis 2018). For Pope Francis, confronting unity among all Christians is a profoundly challenging faith issue. Pope Francis does not seem to have reservations concerning previous tensions. He shifts the Church to a view of conviction that God wants Catholics and Pentecostals to learn from each other. His most influential words during this session (2018:1) assert that: “The Church grows in fidelity to the Holy Spirit the more it learns to not try to domesticate it, but to welcome it without fear while exercising discernment to understand whether what is new is what God wants for the Church.”

Speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit among Christians, Pope Francis (2018:1) declares: “The Holy Spirit is always new and we must get used to it. It is a newness that helps us understand things more deeply, with more light, and makes us change our routines, even disciplinary routines”. By affirming Christian unity, Pope Francis (2018:1) strongly urges the Catholics that “Catholics can appreciate the way Pentecostals “live their faith, give praise to God and witness to the Gospel of charity,” although often in ways different than we are used to.

In sharp contrast, Pope Francis (2018:1) speaks more clearly and positively about the necessity for Pentecostals to accept the Church’s Catholicism: “Pentecostals, on the other hand, should be helped to overcome their prejudices about the Catholic Church and recognize that in the invaluable treasure of the tradition received from the apostles and safeguarded throughout history, the Holy Spirit has, in fact, not been extinguished or suffocated, but continues to work effectively.”

Pope Francis (2018:1) further engages Catholics to drive home his message:

Catholics cannot ignore the growth of Pentecostalism and the fact that many Catholics are attracted away from the Catholic Church by what they find in Pentecostal and evangelical communities. Catholics also cannot ignore the sudden appearance of new communities, tied to the personality of some preachers and how that contrasts sharply with the ecclesiological principles and experience of the historic churches.

To evaluate the validity of the church’s Catholicity, Pope Francis (2018:1) conscientised the Catholics by teaching them that:

...the growth of those communities should be, on our part, a motive for personal examination and pastoral renewal, especially in helping Catholics learn to love and pray with the Bible and to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who leads people to love, witness and serve.

We believe that the significance of the Papal address to the Catholic Church is not limited to the subject of the current situation between the Roman Catholic church and Pentecostalism. We see in it an important ecumenical dimension in that it brings the divided Christians before a common task that they must face together. We live at a time when fundamental existential problems overwhelm our traditional divisions and relativise them almost to the point of extinction (O’Boyle, 2019). Similarly, with such divisions, ecumenical unity may not be difficult to establish. Hence, Pope Francis extended his invitation to Pentecostal bodies throughout the world which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

It is therefore important to note that to attain ecumenical unity, Enegho (2020:6) says “The goal of the Roman Catholic Church is not to create a super church within Christianity, but to be co-workers with Christians of other denominations”. Hence, the goal of Christianity is based on the vision for the messianic salvation which is proclaimed through the life, death, and



resurrection of Jesus Christ and which in Biblical terms is described as liberation, righteousness, justice, and peace. As posited by Ndiokwere (1994), there is an urgent need for the ecumenical movement to foster unity among Christians all over the world and on purely religious African grounds.

Conclusion

The tensions between Roman Catholic and African Pentecostalism are real notwithstanding efforts by church leaders to bring the two traditions together. In spite of what appear to be serious doctrinal differences, closer contacts between these denominations is quite possible because a closer look at these movements reveals that the two can work on their commonalities to achieve an ecumenical dialogue. This is possible when the two movements recognise the fundamental beliefs, salvation through Jesus, the objectification of religion, and using charismatic renewals as a starting point. In addition, African Pentecostals have begun to show an interest in ecumenism. If achieved, a Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue will serve as a model for other traditions to achieve Christian unity regardless of their differences. This is important since both movements have a great influence on African Christianity and the broader Christian movement across the world.

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