



Philip Esler's Concept of the Communion of Saints and its Significance for Christian Unity in Nigeria

OLATUNDUN A. ODERINDE, VICTOR B. AKERELE, KEHINDE E. OBASOLA
Olabisi Onabanjo Univeristy, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria

Abstract. The concept of “Communion of Saints” as propounded by Philip Esler, emphasises that all Christians are one regardless of their denominations. The concept teaches that the living Christians on earth are saints in the biblical sense of the term and all those who die in Christ are saints in heaven. Hence, there is a sense of oneness among all true Christians whether living or dead. Esler considers this concept as an important tool for fostering unity among Christians. However, one of the challenges facing Christianity today is that of disunity among Christians and churches across the world. In Nigeria, Christians are divided as a result of differences in doctrine, liturgy, administrative policy and other traditions that distinguish one denomination from the other. Some Christians express the view that they are superior to the others due to the denomination they belong or through the doctrine(s) they practice. This however, is hindering the effectiveness of the gospel message as well as the roles of Christians as salt and light in the society. This negates the kind of Christianity or Church that Jesus desired when He prayed “that all may be one” (John 17:21). It is on this perspective that this paper examines the concept within the framework of the relationship among Christians in Nigeria. This paper employs hermeneutical approach in examining the concept and posits that unity is essential if Christianity is to make the desired impact in the society. This paper concludes that adequate understanding of Esler's concept of the

“Communion of Saints” will help in promoting unity among Christians and recommends that Church leaders should teach the concept to their members.

Keywords: Philip Esler, Communion of Saints, Christian Unity

1. Introduction

One of the prayers of Jesus is that His followers would remain united (John 17:20-23). Love plays a major role in uniting Christians together. Jesus and His Father are bound closely in a reciprocal relationship of love which is to emulated by Christians (Davids, 2014). It is however, sad to note that Christians today have been divided by liturgical, denominational traditions and doctrinal differences. Bonhoeffer (2015), when explaining the disunity that exists in the Church says that the culture of the world today is “selfie,” and this has crept into the Church. According to him there is the self-centredness syndrome in the Church. Thus, the Church is no longer bonded as a community of faith.

Apostle Paul teaches that the Church is one body of Christ and encourages the Church to be one. He did this by using the human body as a metaphor in describing the interconnectivity that should exist in the Church. He explains that just as the human body has many parts, so also is the Church. The Church has many different parts

with many different gifts while still existing as one body (1 Cor. 12:12). Apostle Paul further teaches that regardless of their origins and denominations, all Christians “are baptised (regenerated) by one Spirit into one body” and are “given the one Spirit to drink,” that is, are filled with the same one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). In other words, all Christians are part of the body of Christ regardless of their denominations. The different parts of the body are not divided; they do not envy each other. The same should apply to Christians (1 Cor. 12:14-20). Similarly, just as one part of the body does not claim superiority over the other, a Christian or denomination should not feel superior to the other. Fiddes, Haymes and Kidd (2014) assert that such disposition causes disunity among Christians.

It is on the basis of the teaching of Apostle Paul on unity of the Church in 1 Corinthians 12 that Philip Esler, a leading figure in the social-scientific interpretation of biblical texts digs into a not-well-pronounced doctrine called the “Communion of Saints” in the Apostles’ Creed. The last paragraph of the Apostles’ Creed says, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting” (Miller, 2017:8).

It is in the light of the third in the string of these six creedal statement, “the communion of saints,” that Esler examined the relationship of Christians as a communion and community. Esler (2005) opines that the doctrine of the “Communion of Saints” emphasizes that Christians are connected irrespective of their origin or denominations. He unequivocally states that a proper understanding of the concept will promote unity among Christians. It is in the light of this that this study examines the significance of the concept of the “Communion of Saints” to unity among Christians in Nigeria. Attempt will also be made to provide recommendations that will enhance unity among Christians in Nigeria.

2. The Concept of Communion of Saints

The “Communion of Saints” is a concept in Christian theology that is not well pronounced in

the Church with the exception of the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Communion and Methodist Church. Johnson (1998) expresses this view by saying that the concept is a long neglected element of the Christian creed. Esler (2005:192-193) agrees with the view of Johnson when he states that “Communion of Saints” “was not the subject of any systematic treatises in the early centuries, nor in the medieval period, and there have been few attempts to explicate the idea in Protestant, Orthodox or Catholic theology.” He further explains that lack of emphasis on the “Communion of Saints” is not a recent thing because when it was discussed by the Council of Trent, it was not given a serious consideration. The Council only deliberated on the concept for two days out of its eighteen years of deliberations. The brevity of the discussion on the concept was an indication that it was not taken as a serious theological issue to be considered for thorough discussion. Kelly (1972), Esler (2005) and Bonhoeffer (2015) agree that the concept originated from the East (Greece) to the West (Rome) in the early Church. According to Kelly (1972), the “Communion of Saints” which is a translation of the Latin word *Sanctorum Communio* is an expression of the Greek *koinonia ton hagion* which has its root in the East. It expresses the idea of “participation in the blessings (or good things) of salvation,” as it is experienced in the Eucharist (Kelly, 1972:391). He unequivocally states that the word *Sanctorum Communio* moved from the East to the West to be known as *Communio Sanctorum* signifying the communion of saintly persons.

Esler (2005:193), explains that the communion of saintly persons as expressed in the West means, “a spiritual interchange between Christians living and dead, as seen first in Nicetas of Remesiana's fifth century commentary on the Apostles' Creeds.” He further explains that the concept of the “Communion of Saints” made its earliest appearance in the minutes of regional Council which was held at Nimes, Gaul, in 394 CE. It found its way into the Apostles’ Creed around the same period. A section of the Apostles’ Creed which contained the phrase “Communion of Saints states that “I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints [*sanctorum communionem*], the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, and life everlasting. Amen" (Esler, 2005:193).

It was succinctly stated in the Nicetas of Remesiana that the "Communion of Saints" means having fellowship or communion with the saints (Fiddes, Hyaymes and Kidd, 2014). The saints include the patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs and deceased Christians who were and are and will be, together with the angels (Wilken, 2002 & Esler, 2005). Wilken (2002:161) notes that "the 'communion of saints' designated the close bond that exists between the church of the present and those who have gone before." The belief in communion between living and dead Christians, is only possible with a conviction that those saints who died are in some meaningful sense still alive.

Kirsch (2017:1) explains "Communion of Saints" to be "the supernatural spiritual union which includes members of "the Kingdom of God," whether still alive on earth or already departed hence for that other state in which the souls of departed members of that kingdom continue their existence after death." By this explanation, the concept of the "Communion of Saints" is seen as a connection between the Christians that are still alive on earth and those that have departed into heaven. The link shows that there is life after death. Those who lived in obedience to Christ when they were on earth continue to live in a better place away from earth, while those who did evil when living on earth ends up in a place of pain and suffering. Bauckham (1998:81-82) posits that, in the postbiblical period, belief in life after death "came to be the general belief of Judaism." Apart from the Sadducees, most Judeans believe in a desirable immortality for the righteous and punishment for the wicked. These Judeans had a purely spiritual vision of human existence with the body crumbling to dust while the soul receives eternal life or ascends to God with the bones remaining in the earth (Bauckham, 1998). Thus, the argument that there is a connection between the living saints and those who have gone to heaven.

Esler (2005:196) points out that, the New Testament does not contain an explicit and fully elaborated theology of communion between Christ's followers that are living and dead as developed in later centuries, but "possesses much material in some of its twenty-seven writings that make such ideas seem a rather natural development." Esler (2005) further emphasises that, when one reads in between the lines of the twenty-seven writings of the New Testament, most especially the epistles of Apostle Paul, it will be observed that, the "Communion of Saints" teaches that, Christ's followers should love one another, remember one another and think about one another constantly. The concept also teaches Christ's followers to hope for a solution to problems of one another, to thank God for one another and pray to God to bless every follower of Christ. The concept equally helps believers to ask other believers to pray to God on one's behalf (1 Thess. 5:25).

Ryken (2001) and Bonhoeffer (2009) view the "Communion of Saints" as love relationship among followers of Christ all over the world irrespective of the denominations they belong. It is a relationship that helps followers of Christ to build Christian community. Ryken (2001) while explaining what Communion of Saints is, calls the attention of his readers to the content of the speech of John Winthrop (1588-1649), the devout Puritan governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company to illustrate the kind of relationship that should exist among Christians. The speech states that Christians: *must be knit together in this world as one man, we must entertain each other in brotherly affection We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality, we must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body, so shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us* (Ryken, 2001:1-2).

The speech gives a graphical explanation of what the relationship of Christians should be within the purview of the concept of the “Communion of Saints.” It should be a living fellowship of love centred in Jesus Christ where Christians who have experienced the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, live to share a common life of unity, charity, and generosity. This agrees with the prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17:21-22. Jesus prayed that all His followers will be knitted together as one. It also confirms the desire of Apostle Paul for the Christian community as expressed in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. Putnam (2000) stresses that, contrary to the prayer of Jesus Christ and the desire of Apostle Paul, Christians are divided due to several reasons which include, the claim of better liturgical order, sound doctrinal position and better Church polity. There is a breakdown of the doctrine of “Communion of Saints” among Christians (Putnam, 2000).

Recent studies on major themes in biblical scholarship reveals that “Communion of Saints” is a theological concept that should be studied with a view to unravelling its significance to Christian unity. The concept of the “Communion of Saints” teaches that all Christians are interconnected to form a unit called the body of Christ. Individual Christian should identify themselves with other Christians regardless of their denominations because they are members of a single body of Christ. Esler (2005), uses the Social Identity Theory as a spring-board to affirm Christian identity in the body of Christ. He states that all Christians are saints according to the teaching of the New Testament.

The word “saint” is prominent in the New Testament. It is almost always used in the plural, just as it is used in Acts 9:13, which says “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem” ([Acts 9:13](#)). There is only one instance of the use of its singular form and 67 occurrences of its use as a plural form. Even in that one instance, the plurality of saints is in view: “...every saint...” ([Philippians 4:21](#)) (Ferguson and Wright 1998). The word “saint” comes from the Greek word *hagios*, which means “consecrated to God, holy, sacred, pious (Vine, 1996). In the

New Testament, all Christians were regarded as “saints” “not because of their moral achievements, or even martyrdom, but because they were in Christ” (Fiddes, Haymes and Kidd, 2014:8). In other words, all Christians are “saints” and are, at the same time, called to be saints. This is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 1:2, “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy...”.

Esler (2005) opines that living saints have always considered that those of their number who died in Christ were in some sense still present. According to him, this sense of the presence of the dead has taken many forms, among others, from the general idea that the dead are living on in the memory of their survivors to the notion that they “slept” in Christ until they were resurrected on the last day, to the idea that their souls survived death in heaven (or some lesser state) and would be reunited with their bodies at the resurrection at the *parousia*. *Parousia* is a transliteration of Greek word which means “presence” or “coming.” In New Testament theology it encompasses the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus Christ (Butler, 2003).

Generally, it is agreed that the “Communion of Saints” points to an ongoing connection between the living Christians and Christians who have died. All Christians on earth are saints in the biblical sense of the term and all those who die in Christ are saints in heaven. Both groups are linked by their communion with the living God who pervades and transcends the boundaries of time itself (Tavard, 1992 and Esler, 2005). Saints on earth have access to the company of saints in heaven through memory and hope. Memory is meant here in the sense of anamnesis, an effective remembering that makes something genuinely past to be present and active in the community today (Esler, 2005). In other words, a remembered event becomes a living force in history when it is recalled and narrated; in the very retelling, power comes forth to change the horizon of the people who are living and offer new possibilities of existence. Retelling the stories of heroes and heroines of faith brings the subversive,

encouraging, and liberating power of their love and witness into the present generation. Communion of Saints also suggests a bond of companionship among living persons themselves who, though widely separated geographically, form one Church community (Johnson, 2011).

Jesus Christ is the fulcrum of Christianity. Every believer irrespective of their denominations should see Christ as the connecting factor of Christians all over the world. This view is emphasized in the concept of the Communion of Saints. Colson and Vaughn (1992) opine that, Church leaders should regularly emphasise the doctrine of the “Communion of Saints” in order to strengthen unity among Christians irrespective of their denominational bias. Ryken (2001) corroborates the fact that the essence of the concept of the “Communion of Saint” is to strengthen the bond of unity in the body Christ and that living in unity should be seen as an act of grace. He supports his view by citing what Bonhoeffer wrote on Christian unity as an act of grace of God, “Let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God’s grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren” (Ryken, 2001:ix).

The Church is a family in which believers in Christ are connected and have concern for one another. The concern is such that, “If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honoured, all rejoice together” (1 Corinthians 12:26). Wilhelm (2005), points out that, what Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:26 is the ideal but not the real considering the sharp division among Christians today. He submits that, an emphasis on “Communion of Saint” will reduce the division and strengthen the bond of unity. The concept of the “Communion of Saints” shows that mutual interchange of love is the hallmark of the community of Christians.

3. Christian Unity in Nigeria

The current population of Nigeria is estimated to be 195,109,684 as at Thursday, May 10, 2018, based on the latest United Nations estimates

(<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/nigeria-population>, 2018). Out of this estimated population of Nigerians, 85 million persons belong to various Christian denominations (<http://www.canng.org/>, 2018). Akano (2018), after conducting a research on the roles of Christians in nation building, unequivocally states that it seems the rate of disunity among Christians in Nigeria is proportional to the rate of increase of churches. He asserts that this disunity is basically caused by differences in doctrinal beliefs of various denominations, power tussle among Church leaders and the thought of superiority of a denomination above others. The causes of disunity highlighted by Akano corroborated those stated by Oderinde (2010) that the major causes of disunity in the body of Christ are centred on a desire for recognition, honour, power, pleasure, money and superiority. The problem of disunity among Christians is not limited to Nigerian Christians, according to Fuchs (2008), it cuts across the length and breadth of the world where Christians are.

Ayegboyin (2000) opines that disunity is not a phenomenon that is common to only contemporary Christians. It existed among Christians during the time of the Apostles and early Church fathers. There was some measure of unity in the Church at the beginning, but after the upper room experience there was disunity. A Church that was less than two hundred worshipers grew in a single day after the sermon of Peter with an addition of three thousand believers (Acts 2:41). God continued to add to their numbers as they gathered as community of believers sharing things in common and meeting the needs of those in need (Acts 2:42-47). The Church was significantly strong numerically and believers were united in heart and soul to the point that when the apostles were warned by the Sanhedrin not to witness about Jesus, they were not deterred (Acts 4:1-21). Upon the release and return of the Apostles to their fellow believers, they reported their experience with the Sanhedrin. Instead of the believers to panic, they unitedly raised their voices to God, requesting for power and passion to continue to speak more about Jesus Christ (Acts 4:23-31). This underscores the kind of unity that was in the

Church. The Church experienced a common bond of fellowship. Constable (2007:79) describes the unity of the Church being led by apostles as:

The unity of the believers extended beyond spiritual matters to physical, material matters (cf. Mt 22:37-39). They owned personal possessions but they did not consider them private possessions. Rather they viewed their belongings as common (Gr. Koina, cf. koinonia –“fellowship”) property.

After some times, there were dissensions among Christ-followers. Apostle Paul mentioned a case of division over leaders among the Corinthian Christians. Some Church members were becoming more sentimentally attached to certain ministers of the gospel than to the gospel itself. Paul condemned this attitude when he said:

I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each one of you says, I belong to Paul, or I belong to Apollos, or I belong to Cephas, or I belong to Christ. Is Christ divided? (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

Apostle Paul states that the failure of the Christians at Corinth to present a united front was unhealthy. Further disunity was caused when some Christians felt their gifts were superior to that of others. In 1 Corinthians 12: 12, 23, he pointed out that though there are diversity of gifts in the Church given to believers, it does not infer division or superiority of certain gifts above others. He stresses that the different gifts are meant to enhance unity in the body of Christ. Apostle Paul used the analogy of the human body which has many parts to illustrate that the body of Christ has different parts but it is still one body.

Division among Christians did not stop at the time of the apostles. It was seen to have existed among Christians in the early Church. Those things that caused the division include disagreement on what should be creed,

interpretation of Bible and Church politics (Ayegboyin, 2000). These resulted in the starting of other Churches, like Eastern Orthodox from Roman Catholic. Later, there was reformation in some parts of the Western Churches which brought about the Protestant movement. Fiddes, Haymes and Kidd (2014:5), in their explanation of the division that erupted in the early days of Christian era, state that:

Christians were persecuting Christians. Arguments about the true Church, its governance, and its membership meant that whosoever had the power to do so brought death with them-the destroying of heretics or the affirmation of martyrs according to the prevailing theological point of view. Christians were both the prosecutors and the persecuted. Catholics killed Protestants, Protestants killed Catholics, and both, when in political power, killed Dissenters such as Anabaptists. The power of the state allied to religious convictions is always a serious, potentially fearsome matter.

The division in the Church also gave birth to the Pentecostal movement. Missionary Churches in Africa were not exempted from the crises of disunity and this led to emergence of African Indigenous Churches/Africa Independent Churches (AIC) (Olowola, 1998 and Ayegboyin, 2000). Today, there are different denominations in Nigeria like in several parts of the world and the Church in Nigeria is not in any way immune from the challenge of disunity as a result of many factors which include claim of denominational superiority, doctrinal differences, administrative polity and Church politics.

Obijole (2012) asserts that regardless of the diverse denominations in Nigeria and those things that make them different from one another, all Christians are regenerated by one Spirit who is the Holy Spirit and filled by same Spirit. No individual Christian or denomination should feel superior than others and no Christian should isolate himself from other Christians based on doctrinal differences. Instead of emphasising what make Christians of a denomination different from those of other denominations, emphasis should be on love, which is supreme and the most excellent way (1

Cor. 13). Esler (2005) points out that, the concept of the “Communion of Saints” hangs on love of Christ which connects Christians together. He believes that placing emphasis on this concept will foster love among Christians regardless of their denominational differences and this will in turn strengthen the cord of unity among them. This position agrees with the view of Muthengi (1998) who says, all Christians irrespective of their denominations form one spiritual family with Christ as the head of the family and the object of worship. In Nigeria, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is expected to promote Christian unity in Nigeria. It has not done much in this area but have been successful in being a voice for Christians in the area of politics.

When Christians are united, they become a single force to change things in the society. This is because there is strength in unity. This is in agreement with the African world view. Ngewa (2006:1431) opines that, “in the African world view, unity is strength.” Africans believe, the higher the number, the better and the powerful. Also, in Africa, each group traces its origin to a hero and is united around certain beliefs and practices. The same should be true of the Church. Christians in the South-West of Nigeria should take advantage of their increase in numbers and be united in their purpose to spread the gospel and move the country forward. They should also be united as they trace their origin from Jesus Christ who is their hero. They should also be united around biblical beliefs and practices that are common to them and not allow the ones that are particular to each denomination to divide them. Since everything rises and falls on leadership, the onus is on them to pursue what promotes unity in the body of Christ (Akerele, 2016).

4. The Significance of the Communion of Saints to Christian Unity in Nigeria

The inclusion of the “Communion of Saints” in the Apostle Creed is an indication that it is meant to enhance Christian faith and promote unity (Esler, 2005). The concept teaches that Christians are one regardless of their denominations. These Christians are regarded as “saints” because they have accepted Jesus Christ

as Lord and Saviour and are following His footsteps for their daily living. The gospel emphasises that the road to joining communion of saints is the way of Jesus the Christ, crucified and risen, and requires being poor in spirit, merciful, pure of heart, peacemaking, and hungry and thirsty for righteousness (Johnson, 2011). This shows that Christ is at the centre of the concept of the “Communion of Saint.” He is the unifying factor. Christians in Nigeria should be united on the ground that they were regenerated by one Spirit and are filled by same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

The concept of the “Communion of Saints” shows that Christianity is not an individualistic religion, rather it is a religion of communal living where Christians show concern for one another. “If one member suffers, all suffer together; If one member is honoured, all rejoice together” (1 Cor. 12:26, RSV). All Christians regardless the denomination, tribe or ethnic group they belong to, are expected to show concern for one another. The Communion of Saints” emphasises unity in diversity. It shows that, although Christians are many but they all join together to form one body. Just as the human body has many parts and each part depends on one another, also, the relationship among Christians should be symbiotic not parasitic. Nigerian Christians should always bear in mind that, regardless of their denominations, all Christians are regenerated by one Spirit and are filled by the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

5. Conclusion

All Christians, wherever and whenever they live, who have faith in Jesus Christ and in His work can be called “saints” not by virtue of what they did but by what God has done for them in Christ. It indicated that they have been set apart for God and for His service. This applies to believers of all ages. Being a saint demands obedience, maintaining a good relationship with God and fellow saints. Christians have the obligation of keeping the bond of unity of the “saints” irrespective of the variant factor of doctrine, administrative polity, liturgy and other traditions. The concept of the “Communion of Saints emphasises that Christ who is the unifying factor is not divided, so, “saints” must

not be divided. They must recognise the uniqueness of each denomination, play down on what makes a denomination different from others and promote love. Denominationalism should not corrode the unity of the Church rather, it should unite it because Africans believe in “the more, the merrier.” When All Christians understand the concept of the “Communion of Saints,” they will no longer live as isolated individuals or feel that their denomination is superior to others. All Christians belong to one family of God and it is the will of God for them to grow stronger together, rather than Christian individualism. In Christ there is no East or West, no South or North, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole world.

6. Recommendations

This study shows that Church members, pastors, ecumenical leaders and Christian religious lecturers have roles to play in fostering Christian unity. It therefore recommends that pastors, ecumenical leaders and Christian religious lecturers should teach the doctrine of the “Communion of Saints” emphasising the unity among Christians as a result of Christ who is the unifying factor. Pastors also have the responsibility of teaching their members that all Christians are the same regardless the denominations they belong. They should place more emphasis on things that are common to all Christians of different denominations in order to promote unity. Ecumenical leaders should passionately seek for the unity of Christians by being truthful in their dealings and not self-seeking. When apex Christian leaders maintain integrity, their followers are more likely to follow their examples. They should look for ways to unite the leaders of Christian denominations in Nigeria through regular meetings done with open heart. Church leaders and Christian religious lecturers should create a forum where gown and town meets to promote the concept of the “Communion of Saints” in order to foster unity among Christians.

References

Akano, O. (2018). *Building A Great Nation: Moving the Nation Forward Through*

Effective Christian Participation. Osogbo: Solyday.

Akerele, V. (2016). “The Christian Apologists in the Early Church: Role Models for Church Leaders Today.” In D. Asaju, C. Oshun & D. Adegbite (eds.), *Christianity and Persecution in the Contemporary World*. Abeokuta: Crowther Theological Publisher. pp. 395-420.

Armstrong, D. (2012). *Biblical Evidence for the Communion of Saints*. Edinburgh: Sands.

Ayegboyin, D. (2000). “Unity in the Body of Christ: The Nigerian Experience.” In A. Ishola & D. Ayegboyin (eds.), *Rediscovering and Fostering Unity in the Body of Christ: The Nigeria Experience*. Yaba: Wellspring. pp. 17-36.

Bauckham, R. (1998). “Life, Death, and the Afterlife in Second Temple Judaism.” In *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament*, Richard N. Longenecker (ed), 80–95. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Bonhoeffer, D. (2009). *Sanctorum Communio*. Mineapolis: Fortress.

Bonhoeffer, D. (2015). *The Communion of Saints: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church*. London: FB &c.

Butler, T (ed). (2003). “Parousia” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible.

Christian Association of Nigeria. “History of Christian Association of Nigeria.” <http://www.canng.org>. Accessed on 10th May, 2018

Colson, C. and Vaughn, E. (1996). *The Body*. Dallas: Word Publishing.

Constable, T. (2007). *Notes on Acts*. <http://www.soniclight.com>. Accessed on 08/05/18

Dauids, P. (2014). *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

Esler, P. (2005). *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

- Ferguson, S. and Wright, D. (1998). "Saint." In *New Dictionary of Theology*. England: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Fiddes, P., Haymes, B. and Kidd, R. (2014). *Baptists and the Communion of Saints*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press.
- Fuchs, L. (2008). *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Johnson, E. (1998). *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*. London: SCM.
- Johnson, E. (2011). "Circle of friends: A closer look at the communion of saints." In *U.S. Catholic: Faith in Real Life*. <http://www.uscatholic.org/2011/01/circle-friends-closer-look-communion-saints>. Accessed on 07/04/18.
- Kelly, J. (1972). *Early Christian Creeds*. London: Longman.
- Kirsch, J. (2017). *The Doctrine of the Communion of Saints in the Ancient Church*. Edinburgh: Sands.
- Miller, J. (2017). *The Communion of Saints*. Meadville: Christian Faith Publishing.
- Muthengi, J. (1998). "The Work and Worship of the Christian Church." In S. Ngewa, M. Shaw & T. Tienou. (eds.), *Issues in African Christian Theology*. Nairobi: East African Educational. pp. 245-264.
- Ngewa, S. (2006). "What is the Church?" In Tokunboh Adeyemo (ed.), *African Bible Commentary*. Nairobi: WordAlive. p. 1431.
- Nigeria Population (2018). <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/nigeria-population>. Accessed on May 10, 2018.
- Nordling, L. (2005). "Philip Esler: Think Big." In *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/>. Accessed May 21, 2018
- Obijole, O. (2012). "The Church and the Gospel Message in the African Cultural Context." In *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*. XVII(1). pp. 99-116.
- Oderinde, O. (2010). "John the Baptist's Message of Repentance and the Rebranding Nigeria Project: A Re-Reading of Luke 3:7-14." *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. XXVIII(1).
- Olowola, C. (1998). "An Introduction to African Independent Churches." In S. Ngewa, M. Shaw, & Tienou, T. (eds.), *Issues in African Christian Theology*. Nairobi: East African Educational. pp. 286-305.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Ryken, P (ed). (2001). *The Communion of Saints: Living in Fellowship with the People of God*. New Jersey: P & R Publishing.
- Tavard, G. (1992). *The Church, Community of Salvation: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press.
- Vine, W. (1996). "Saint(s)." In *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Dallas: Thomas Nelson.
- Walford, S. (2015). *Communion of Saints: The Unity of Divine Love in the Mystical Body of Christ*. Kettering: Angelico Press.
- Wilhelm, A. (2005). *Christ Among Us: A Modern Presentation of the Catholic Faith*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Wilken, R. (2002). "Sanctorum Communio: For Evangelicals and Catholics Together." In *Pro Ecclesia* 11.