

NKUZI NK'OKWUKWE: REIMAGINING FAITH EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS¹

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Abstract

This paper argues that a proper understanding of 'education about faith' in Nigeria (and of course elsewhere) must comprise the ecumenical and inter-faith components in order to be truly representative of the concept of faith. The concept of *Nkuzi nk'okwukwe* (lit. "education about faith") presents thus a hermeneutical key to broaden the reception of ecumenical and interreligious theological formation in *Christian Theological Institutions* (CTIs) in Nigeria. On the basis of this claim, my task in this paper is to set an agenda for such an education. In doing this, I shall present two broad ideas interspersed with some random thoughts. These shall include, a) some fundamental discourses that are required for such an education, and b) the practical modes such an education should take within the pedagogical scheme of the CTIs. Yet, in order to situate the argument within a broader universal context, I shall offer brief thoughts on the task of *education for peace* that is required of CTIs all over the world.

Introduction: Education beyond Catechesis

Nkuzi nk'okwukwe is an Igbo phrase that generally refers to catechetical teaching. But when broken down into its component parts, we are faced with multiple layers of meaning in the expression. *Nkuzi* itself is the word for teaching or educating with the literal meaning of "beating something into proper shape" just as the panel-beater does. It is a recognition that education deals with the proper and right formation of the human person, which cannot be left in the hands of just anyone except the expert: '*Onye nkuzi*'. The other component '*okwukwe*' refers to 'faith' as the object of education (*nkuzi*). Since theology as the study of God is grounded on faith in that God, theological education, insofar as it includes both the reflection and teaching aspects, invariably refers to

¹ This article is an expanded version of a paper presented on 16 August 2023 at the *Parliament of World Religions Conference* Chicago (14-18 August 2023) under the panel: "Pluralist and Interreligious Dialogue Focused Religious Education as Asset for Defending Freedom and Human Rights in Nigeria". The article is dedicated to the memory of the Duquesne professor of theology, Dr. Marinus Chijioke Iwuchukwu (1963-2023), who was a champion of interreligious dialogue, and a strong proponent of inclusive religious pluralism.

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‘education about faith’, thus expanding the original understanding of ‘*nkuzi nk’okwukwe*’ as referring only to catechesis.

But then, which faith? Standing alone the concept, faith, is neutral to any religious or denominational affiliation. The association with the Christian (specifically Catholic) catechism was only but a psychological function that emerged given that only the Catholic Church in Igboland used the concept for the basic catechetical text. In other words, the meaning of the concept is quite elastic and could function in the manner that I intend to use it in this presentation, namely as referring to faith education. My argument is that a proper understanding of education about faith in Nigeria (and of course elsewhere) must comprise the ecumenical and inter-faith components to be truly representative of the concept of faith. The concept of *Nkuzi nk’okwukwe* presents thus a hermeneutical key to promoting ecumenical and interreligious theological formation, and to broaden its reception thereof, across various Christian theological institutions (CTIs) in Nigeria. And to appropriate this expanded understanding to serve the intended purpose, it is important to set an agenda for such an education. This project would involve outlining some fundamental discourses that are required for such an education and delineating its practical modes within the CTIs educational framework. Put within a broader universal context, it is important to also offer some ideas on the task of education for peace that is required of CTIs all over the world.

Rethinking the Schemas for Christian Faith Education

Mutual acknowledgment, friendship and participation in the life of one another, across denominational (ecumenical) and religious (interreligious) boundaries, require constant dialogical engagement. Yet the disposition to dialogue, the ability to dialogue and the framework of dialogue must emerge from a certain form of education that seeks the particular goals of dialogue in the two instances. Within the Christian community, such a framework of education is broadly captured in two documents (amongst others): a) the 2020 Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti – On Fraternity and Social Friendship*.³ and b) the 2019 document, *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World: A Christian Perspective* by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).⁴ I

³ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html (accessed 14 August 2023).

⁴ PCID and WCC, *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World: A Christian Perspective* (Geneva: WCC, 2019). The idea of ‘education for peace’ was already muted in WCC’s, *An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace* (Geneva: WCC, 2011), 10 §28.

shall briefly comment on key ideas in these two documents, which are important for our discourse, before sharing random thoughts (theological and practical) on the realization of '*Nkuzi nk'owukwe*' within Nigerian CTIs.

a) Education for Fraternity and Social Friendship

The first document, *Fratelli Tutti* inspires education for fraternity and social friendship that bear the undertone of ecumenical and interreligious dispositions. The encyclical recognizes the values of fraternity and solidarity as products of culture, hence of education. With this background, Pope Francis interrogates: "What happens when fraternity is not consciously cultivated, when there is a lack of political will to promote it through education in fraternity, through dialogue and through the recognition of the values of reciprocity and mutual enrichment?" (FT §103) Fraternity is learned so also division and conflict, from families and other social spaces including religious educational institutions. The same could be said of solidarity, which in many ways is synonymous with fraternity. In reference to part of his 2016 Message for the World Day of Peace (8 December 2015), Pope Francis reminds us that, "The values of freedom, mutual respect and solidarity can be handed on from a tender age..." and as such "communicators also have a responsibility for education and formation, especially nowadays, when the means of information and communication are so widespread" (FT §114).

Faith education that promotes "cultural, economic and political integration" of different peoples must involve "a process of education that promotes the value of love for one's neighbour, the first indispensable step towards attaining a healthy universal integration" which invariably begins from one's own region (FT §151). The re-tooling of faith education (*Nkuzi nk'owukwe*) that champions the goals of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Nigeria must begin from the citadels of faith formation of the churches. The church ought to set an example through its educational programmes which constitute part of her mission in the world, and also reflective of her identity as "a home with open doors" and "a mother" (FT §276). This has implications not only on what the church is called *to be* and *to teach* but also the kind of education that she ought to promote regarding faith.

Drawing from his encounter with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyed, Pope Francis offers an example of such an integrative education that is aimed at dialogue and peaceful co-existence, when he recalls the resolution that "religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood." All these tragedies are "the consequences of a deviation from religious teachings," and they reflect manipulations of political and religious types (FT §285). He emphasizes a strong ecumenical dimension of the task ahead by offering 'An Ecumenical Christian

Prayer’ at the end of the article, where he prayed that “we Christians may live the Gospel, discovering Christ in each human being...” and implored the Holy Spirit to help us “discover anew that all are important and all are necessary, different faces of the one humanity that God so loves.”

b) Education for Peace

The second document, *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World*, articulates the theological motivation as well as the practical recommendations for an ‘education for peace’ in today’s multicultural world. Nigeria represents such multiculturalism, given the plurality of religions as well as the overwhelming number of Christian denominations. Theologically, the call for such an education is Christological⁵: Christ *is* and *gives* peace! (cf. Luke 2:14; 24:36, John 14:27; 20:21; Eph. 2:14). In fact, the disciples of Christ were the first beneficiaries of this ‘education for peace’ (cf. Luke 10:5; 9:54-55; Matt. 26:52).

Amongst other recommendations, *Education for Peace* tasks ‘Christian educational institutions’ (CEI)⁶ to “develop educational resources that focus not only on the promotion of knowledge, attitudes, and values essential for peacemaking but also on developing skills along with good will to translate them into concrete action and behavioural practice.”⁷ The test ground for such ‘concrete action and behavioural practice’ remains the CEIs at various levels. If tolerance, openness and peaceful co-existence with the other, which allow the ‘other’ to be, is lacking in the institutions, then there is need for grave concern. Furthermore, the CEIs are admonished to “identify potential partners with whom creative, interactive, learner-centered educational tools can be developed for various levels.”⁸ What this means is that the School of Humanities in tertiary CEIs ought to take up this ecumenical task from multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. Outcomes of such studies are to be applied not only in the tertiary CEIs but also at the other levels, primary, secondary, churches and even families. The effects on the larger society would in due time manifest even in the social and political life of the people.⁹

⁵ PCID and WCC, *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World*, 1-2.

⁶ PCID and WCC, *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World*, 11.

⁷ PCID and WCC, *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World*, 12.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ The document, *Education for Peace* also recommends that beyond the responsibilities of the churches, the government must equally be charged to “shape education in ways that promote and prioritize peace as a means towards strengthening fundamental human rights and safeguarding the dignity of all, dispelling injustice and discrimination, respecting legitimate differences, and enabling greater openness to the other.” PCID and WCC, *Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World*, 13. In that way, the prophetic function of the Christian churches

Narrowed down to the Christian theological institutions (mainly the seminaries and theological colleges of various Christian churches) in Nigeria, which belong to the CEIs – with the faculties of theology and philosophy – and has the special status of being the formation ground for future leaders of the church, *education for dialogue* becomes critically important. At the present, the Seminary syllabus has not taken such an education very seriously. For most part, what we have are only introductory courses on both ecumenism and Islamic Studies that rehearse, rather casually, the historical and elemental contents of both fields of study. In both cases, there is little or no attempt to contextualize and to guide the students on some of the dialogical praxes that are necessary for dialogue.

Fundamental Theological Discourses on Dialogue in Nigeria

I have chosen to highlight three questions of interest as a way of generating further debate and discussion on Christian dialogue, whether of ecumenical or interreligious nature, and these should ground the reconceptualization of *education about faith* (*Nkuzi nk'okwukwe*) in Nigerian Christian theological institutions. These include: a) the primacy of 'openness' in dialogue in Nigeria; b) the authenticity of Nigerian Christian identity; and c) the ecumenical conversion of church leadership in Nigeria.

a) The Primacy of Openness in Dialogue in Nigeria

In setting the stage for any form of dialogical encounter, openness emerges as the entry point as well as the *spirituality* of dialogue.¹⁰ By spirituality I mean a fundamental element that must be present at any point in time; it represents the sustaining impetus of every dialogical encounter or engagement with both the self and the other. And as long as this openness is focused on the specific objective of a given dialogue, transformation is invariably initiated. It is clear that the failure of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Nigeria is premised on the lack of the requisite openness that presupposes any genuine conversation. Elochukwu Uzukwu's *A Listening Church* is one of the foremost attempts at compelling the church in Africa (Nigeria) to realize that its nature and mission implies that it should neither insulate nor isolate itself from the

would not be limited to a critical self-reform but also in demanding the transformation of the society by demanding accountability from civil leadership. The effect is that the churches would begin to 'live what they preach' and also ensure that the privilege of an 'education for peace' is extended to people outside the CEIs.

¹⁰ Elsewhere, I have argued this out in relation to ecumenical reception. Cf. Ikenna Paschal Okpaleke, "On the Borderline between Consensus and Reception: The Spirituality of Openness as a Necessary Criterion for Ecumenical Reception," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 53, no.3 (2018): 348-370.

other.¹¹ In ‘listening’ to the Word of God, to the Holy Spirit and to the experiences of the community, the church cannot afford to shut itself out from the ecumenical and religious others. Thus, the current state of ecumenical dialogue in Nigeria stands in contradiction to what the church is called to be. Not only is Christian division a scandal (Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* §1), but the inability of Christians to dialogue among themselves is a much greater scandal. This explains why the Christian relationship with the Muslims in Nigeria is predominantly defined by intolerance and political contestation.

b) Questioning the Authenticity of Nigerian (African) Christian Identity

If *education about faith* in Nigerian Christian theological institutions (CTI) is to be contextualized, then the discourse on Nigerian Christian identity requires further investigation. But is there any such thing as a Nigerian Christian identity? In the scholarly works of Elochukwu Uzukwu, Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, and Victor Ezigbo, an identity that is reconcilable with African interrelatedness is found in authentic African traditional spirituality.¹² Central to this argument is the attempt to shift from a ‘missional’ to a ‘naturalized’ Christian identity in religious discourse in Nigeria. As indicated by the influential African theologian, Laurenti Magesa, such discourse in sub-Saharan Africa has over time been bedeviled by “the malaise of the dichotomy between Africanness and Christianity.”¹³ This is not a place to begin a fresh debate on this subject matter, but I maintain that the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Nigeria cannot be framed in a way that is “unrelated to [the] African experiential story.”¹⁴

Indeed, one is always confronted by the question of the meaning and implication of African Christianity to dialogue. It poses the question to some of the answers already provided: Is a proper understanding of ‘Africanness’ in African Christianity capable of offering valuable resources for the praxis of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Nigeria and elsewhere? This is the challenge of examining that which is often ignored when the peculiarity of contexts is investigated. Questions concerning a people’s common history, culture, and daily experiences serve as spaces where the people encounter God

¹¹ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 8.

¹² Cf. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008); *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018).

¹³ Laurenti Magesa, “Truly African, Fully Christian? In Search of a New African Spirituality,” 79-92 in Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed., *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016), 87.

¹⁴ Magesa, “Truly African, Fully Christian?” 87.

and one another. These are spaces where communal identities are shaped and reshaped in ways that are unique and often non-repeatable. Experiences of 'Nigerianness' cannot be displaced or substituted by any other particular communal identity, even when considered universalized, be it Roman Catholic or Pentecostal, Christian or Muslim. The 1967-1970 Civil (Biafran) War, for instance, ignited an incredible ecumenical collaboration that was never deepened in the post-war era. The same could be said of the ecumenical and interreligious engagements during the Military regime that lasted till 1999. Similar arguments apply to the contemporary challenges of culture, ethnicity, politics, economy and religion in Nigeria. These complex issues are important in the discourse on Nigerian Christian identity.

c) Ecumenical Conversion for the Church Leadership in Nigeria

The ecumenical conversion of the church leadership in Nigeria is very pivotal for dialogue since church leaders constitute the 'instruments of unity', to appropriate the Anglican concept.¹⁵ As the institutional representation of ecclesial community, church leadership plays a critical role in promoting unity *ad intra* and *ad extra*. The church leadership across ecclesial communities, particularly within the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria, should not understand their ecclesial institutional character as a rigid or static status, but as a ministry that, to a great extent, mobilizes the church towards salvation in Christ. And this involves "performance, praxis, testimony, witnessing, martyrdom, and sacramentalizing what we profess."¹⁶ The problem of leadership does not exist only within each ecclesial tradition but is also manifest in the inter-ecclesial context.¹⁷ In fact, the exterior aspect of the role of church leadership extends beyond religious issues to really impact on the society (EG §245).

The ecumenical conversion of the church leadership in Nigeria therefore requires 'a spirituality of action' that moves away from the glorification of inter-ecclesial competition over territoriality and institutional stability to a

¹⁵ The general instruction on the role of bishops in promoting ecumenism is found in: Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), *The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vademecum* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020).

¹⁶ Stan Chu Ilo, "The Church of Pope Francis: An Ecclesiology of Accountability, Accompaniment, and Action," 11-30 in Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed., *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016), 29.

¹⁷ ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way*, §75. Generally, ARCIC III considers the problem of the two ecclesial communities as a matter of the right balance between centralization and the local. While the Anglican Communion needs to move toward a more coherent unity, Catholics are to open up more to collegiality. And in that way, both ecclesial communities ought to 'learn' from each other.

manifestation of Christian identity “through authentic and credible being and deeds.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, church leadership, acting ecumenically, is largely absent in advancing the transformation of Nigeria. The leadership of churches in Nigeria, must recognize that there is the problem of disconnected conversation and ineffectual communication regarding the reception of dialogue results. This, of course, cannot bring the needed change in the disposition and approach to dialogue by ecclesial communities in Nigeria. The situation is even made worse by how church leaders often perceive theologians who are committed to dialogue. They are often accused of lacking deep experience of pastoral life of the church and only intellectually inclined; they may even be suspected of syncretism and experimentalism. They are labelled as liberals and unorthodox in a polarized dualistic categorization in which the political binaries of conservative *versus* liberal, orthodox *versus* unorthodox are deployed with little or no deep theological foundation and justification. As such, the entire mission of dialogue is reduced, as Lamin Sanneh would put it, to “the fringe activity of a small minority that is itself on the fringes of its own religious tradition.”¹⁹

The poor disposition of church leadership and the uncertainty faced by theological experts is accompanied by the non-participatory position of most persons in the community. This implies that dialogue results are largely considered strange or threatening by a large section of the ecclesial community, and so, only good to be rejected. Ecumenical conversion of church leadership in Nigeria requires that church leaders should become vanguards of unity. This is very important if we are to change the *status quo* with regard to *education about faith* in Nigerian CTIs.

Transforming Praxes in Ecumenical and Interreligious Identities in Nigerian CTIs

Ecumenical and interreligious engagements have always come up with very interesting recommendations on the practical things that need to be done in favor of dialogue.²⁰ Setting an agenda for an *education about faith* (Nkuzi

¹⁸ Ilo, “The Church of Pope Francis,” 29.

¹⁹ Lamin Sanneh, *Piety and Power: Muslims and Christians in West Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 6.

²⁰ On the one hand, ecumenical documents such as Vatican II’s *Unitatis Redintegratio*, IARCCUM’s *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* (2007), JWG’s *Ninth Report 2007-2012* (2013), the ARCIC and ARC documents (including the *Covenants*) are filled with lots of practical things that need to be done. On the other hand, texts on interreligious engagement – *Nostra aetate* of Vatican II, PCID’s *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims* (1981/1990), *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), *Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World* (2011), *Dialogue in Truth and Charity* (2014), and *Celebrating Mercy with Believers of Other*

nk'okwukwe) in Nigerian CTIs requires an understanding of the praxis of dialogical engagement in which the institutional and the personal, the theological and the praxis are held together in a tensed relationship. The intention here is not to dictate the content of the curriculum but to suggest some general and focused practices that can help the agenda of an inclusive faith education in Nigerian CTIs. It considers the realities within and outside these institutions as they relate to the formation process, within the three levels of ecclesial structure: national, diocesan and parish.

a) The Interplay of Identity and Difference in the Structure of Theological Formation

In response to the commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to ecumenical dialogue at the universal level, the Nigerian Church has managed to introduce the study of ecumenism in the seminaries. However, as aforementioned, the course is more or less an introduction to the concept and history of ecumenism that leaves out many important aspects of ecumenism, particularly the local context. As such, dialogue initiatives such as *Nigeria Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission* (NARCC) is hardly mentioned in most CTIs. There is therefore the need to re-design the curriculum on ecumenism in the seminaries in order to promote real, honest and open engagement in the local context. The curriculum should focus on a 'cooperative learning' style rather than a 'competitive learning' method that invariably promotes either a 'fortress identity' or contrast identity construction.²¹ This would imply occasionally inviting non-Catholic theologians and seminarians (Anglicans/ Pentecostals/ Protestants) to participate in conversations. Perhaps, there should also be the initiative to create inter-faculty exchange programs across denominational seminaries and formation houses, and to equally set up 'mock dialogue

Religions (2016), WCC's *Christians Meeting Muslims* (1977) and *Meeting in Faith* (1989), Lambeth Conferences, and so on – equally make recommendations for the engagement with the Muslim other. Unfortunately, some of these recommendations are grossly missing in NARCC documents.

²¹ Simon Oxley, *Creative Ecumenical Education: Learning from One Another* (Geneva: WCC, 2002), 97. In the above, *fortress identity construction* refers to some sort of 'ecumenism of profile', through which ecclesial boundaries are fortified under the pretense of ecumenical engagement. The curriculum on ecumenism in the seminaries becomes disingenuous if it does not involve the ecumenical other in the discourse concerning dialogue. In fact, to put it more simply, one cannot learn about dialogue with another Christian community in an environment that does not create the opportunity for that other community to be encountered itself and to offer its experiences as materials for learning, and vice versa. In cooperative or 'community-based learning' the other is never an outsider, but is made a critical stakeholder in the learning process.

commissions' among theology students to be moderated by the theological experts.

As regards the engagement with Muslims, it is not enough to have a course on Islam in the CTIs, which is basically similar to what is contained in the secondary school curriculum across Nigeria. The religious study of Islam should be complemented with an introduction into the theology of interreligious dialogue. In other words, it is no longer enough to ask scholars with the requisite knowledge on Islam to take up the course, rather such experts must also be specialized and actively engaged in dialogue with the religious other. There is the advantage that comes from involving a participant in dialogue. Besides, ecclesial communities can leverage on the services of such experts to promote openness and tolerance right from the formation stage. In that way, some common projects could be designed between the students and the Muslim communities within the locality, and Muslim scholars could also be invited to conferences or seminars for cordial exchange of ideas and mutual learning from one another.

b) Mutual Learning and Mutual Accountability

Mutual learning and mutual accountability ought to go together if dialogue is to elicit serious commitment from dialogue partners. In ecumenical education in Nigerian CTIs, there is need for ecclesial communities to develop mechanisms for critical feedback from one other. Feedback implies that one is somehow involved in the life of the other. It indicates a recognition and acceptance of one's entangled identity. Popular practices or recommendations such as inviting Christian leaders of other ecclesial communities to diocesan Synods and pastoral council meetings, or even to give public lectures in CTIs is important within this context. Invitees should be allowed to freely make contributions, even critical of host's identity. In this way, communities will *learn* from each other while ensuring mutual accountability. Another way of doing this is to commit to praying for, and with, one another. Christians in most local contexts in Nigeria undergo similar experiences and so their prayer contents do not differ much. Eucharistic gatherings may serve this purpose, but it should not be limited to such contexts, since the absence of intercommunion could sometimes be embarrassing. One might ask: Is there any problem with the seminary serving as a platform for organizing such events? A special *Office of the Hours* could be jointly prepared by different churches for such common prayers. Interestingly, the ability to pray together with each other not only brings the communities closer but also disposes them to engage in spiritual actions with the Muslim other. Finally, mutual learning and accountability offer the churches another way of witnessing to the Nigerian society in a very radical way. *Education about faith* within CTIs is one of the ways of doing this because it

prepares the future leaders of the church to move away from the ethnic parochialism and religious bigotry that has crippled relationships across the pluralistic landscape of Nigeria.

c) Praxis of Friendship and Symbolic Gestures

In Nigeria there are hardly stories of robust friendships between church leaders of different communities. There is rather an ominous atmosphere of competition and rivalry among church leaders, and even within denominations. Church leaders in Nigeria should set the pace in this area by developing friendship with one another, and in that way create a template for education on dialogue in the CTIs. The CTIs are to become spaces for faith education on the practice and value of ecumenical friendship. If we are to take Pope Francis' call for a church that 'goes out' (EG 24,46) in a broader perspective, then the invitation to church leaders to reach out to one another should not be limited to the mission of conversion, but should also be extended to the mission of reconciliation, of renewal and of unity (cf. Ez 34: 11-16, Lk 15:4; EG 31, 49). Church leaders are to undertake symbolic gestures as a way of encouraging the communities to engage with one another and to discover in each other fellow Christian pilgrims. This level of relationship is easily extended to the Muslim other. The different Muslim feasts that are celebrated in Nigeria should be opportunities of displaying the level of solidarity that the different religious communities ought to have in Nigeria. The recent example of ecumenical and interreligious gestures of friendship coming from Nsukka diocese, under bishop Geoffrey Onah, might offer one or two practical lessons. Such praxes of friendship should be integrated into CTI programmes in the form of joint feasts with designated churches, or it can become part of the assessment of annual apostolic work task.

d) Promotion of Ecumenical and Interreligious Literacy

There must always be a synergy between the seminaries and the three levels of the Roman Catholic ecclesial structure in Nigeria: national, diocesan, and parish. The proceedings of dialogical engagements at the national level should be studied in the seminaries. Seminaries should be allowed to host national dialogue meetings, and formators and students should participate in plenary sessions. The theological faculties of our seminaries should be an important part of the process of reception of dialogue results.²² More so, bishops should set up, what I would call, the *Dialogue Literacy Commissions* (DLCs) as part of the diocesan *Department of Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue*. The purpose would be to promote dialogue in the communities, drawing the learning

²² PCPCU, *The Bishop and Christian Unity*, §30.

materials from available church documents such as *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *Nostra Aetate*, *Generous Love*, as well as the various ARCIC and IARCCUM documents. This is a necessary way to begin, because in the Roman Catholic Church for example, most Christians are largely unaware of the basic teachings of the Church concerning ecumenical and interreligious forms of dialogue. Booklets that address dialogue issues written in a simplified Q&A method of the famous *Baltimore Catechism*, should be developed by the theology faculties in collaboration with the national and diocesan commissions, and used in promoting this education. Finally, the media should also be used in a strategic way. Diocesan newspapers should dedicate columns for news and articles on ecumenism, interreligious dialogue; church television and radio stations should also develop programmes that educate the viewers and audience on the same subject matter. These media agencies could also become spaces for internship for seminarians to learn the principles of media communication on dialogue.

Conclusion

So far, I have argued on the necessity of providing faith education focused on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in Nigerian CTIs. The sort of *education about faith* that I have advanced here expands and deepens what is currently obtainable in the CTIs. It is also an effort at suggesting an integral approach to such an education in two ways. First, is the consideration that prior to any discourse on praxis there are fundamental theological issues that need to be sorted out to make such an education feasible. Issues of openness, specific Nigerian Christian identity as well as ecumenical conversion of church leadership, are very important in any argument that seeks to promote a robust faith education within the CTIs. Second, is the understanding that the practical issues surrounding this form of education, whether in terms of the arrangement and improvement of the curriculum, the joint actions through seminars, conferences and friendship programmes, the development of instructional materials for the promotion of dialogue literacy, and the media strategies, must take into consideration the three levels of ecclesial structure of the church. What happens at the national, the various dioceses and parishes must resonate in what happens in CTIs in terms of education and formation in dialogue. Where this is absent, we end up with a disjointed and uncoordinated education process, one that satisfies the *status quo* without addressing the intended goals of Christian unity and peaceful co-existence of ecumenical and interreligious dialogues, respectively. Finally, in the absence of ecumenical and interreligious components, catechetical education or faith formation in ecclesial institutions would remain incomplete as long as it continues to identify as *Nkuzi nk'okwukwe*, “education about faith.”