CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

7.1 Summary

My leading argument in this thesis is that Christology may pave a way to peace and mutuality in Nigeria. This research began by exploring a two-fold seminal question. In the first instance, I explored the question of the images of Jesus Christ that are dominant in Nigerian Christianity today. The research further probed into some contextual Christological images that can be constructed in Nigeria to promote peace and mutuality. I described the Nigerian situation along religious, economic, and political lines. I also surveyed the development of Nigerian-African Christology, interreligious interactions, and the relationship of Christianity to other Nigerian religions, and how they may likely impact on the Christological paradigms for peace and mutuality. The core of my observation is that all eyes are on Christianity at this point in time for some possible positive inspiration in a search for effective ways to foster mutuality since peace and harmony is a national concern. I am now in a position to report my findings in the course of this research, reflect upon my findings, and indicate aspects that might be taken up as subjects for further research.

My selection of Christology as a point of departure hinges on the centrality of the Christ-event to Christian faith. Christology has become a major focus of Nigerian Christianity. Jesus is central to their liturgy, biblical hermeneutics, and interpretation of daily experiences. Dwelling upon the premise of Christology has given an impetus for church growth by leaps and bounds as the church leaders purposely embark on contextualization of the gospel in ways that bring the heart of the gospel into touch with the needs of their members. That is the situation on the one hand.

However, the nation corporately continues to wallow in perpetual crises, riots, and disruption of social space with various forms of manifestations. This is the problem on the other hand. The well-known solutions which are based on political formulas and the interest of interreligious relations have been suggested over the years. Hence, there is the
presupposition that Christology ought to contribute to the situation in Nigeria when viewed from a holistic standpoint, as it is the core that has rekindled a resurgence in Nigerian Christianity. I have argued throughout this Thesis that Christology can offer some contributions to the many situations in Nigeria while one continues to grapple with the growth of the church vis-à-vis her corresponding social influence and significance.

7.2 First Seminal Question

The first research question, “Who is Jesus Christ in Nigerian Christianity today”? is intended to offer a critical viewpoint on the available resources on Nigerian Christology in the academy and at church levels. The research revealed that there are substantial scholarly materials written by both Nigerians and other African Christian theologians on the subject of Christology. In fact, it is one of the areas that is well developed to date in the highpoint phase of African Christian theology. I highlighted the trajectory of the historical developments of African Christian theology from which Nigerian Christology has firmly taken its own roots. The nature of this Christological formulation is closely weaved into the ebb tide of the social realities in which Nigerians live daily. This includes poor healthcare delivery, pitiable working conditions, inefficient social security, lack of social amenities, the challenge of poor governance, economic inequalities, problems of peace and harmony. All these circumstances require a synthetic articulation of the requisite Christology to assuage the situation. Whilst so much has been written on some of the problems enunciated here, the solution to the challenge of peace and mutuality has not yet been considered from the point of view of Christology.

The research revealed that there has been a changing face in the understanding of who Jesus is among Nigerian Christians. For instance, during the missionary age, Jesus was presented and understood as the Saviour. This image of Jesus emphasised the need for repentance, and conversion. However, the manner in which Christology was enunciated and appropriated resulted in a cultural dislocation of the gospel.

The late twentieth century witnessed the zenith of Christological discourses like culture-oriented Christology, feminist Christology, and liberation Christology. There are variables as well as a strong connection between these aspects of Christology. The dominant Christology in Nigerian Christianity is solution-oriented Christology. Nigerian Christianity arrived at this, probably unconsciously, in a move to contextualize the message of the gospel and bridge the gap that existed in the missionary era. A further reason that may be given is
that there was the desire to interpret Jesus in the light of the existential struggles of Nigerians. This has really worked.

My critique of solution-oriented Christology is that it is individualistic in direction. Its application by the Nigerian church leaves out the nation’s face. This is far from the universal motif of God contained in both the Old and New Testaments. God is the God of all nations; He has interest in individual and national concerns. The community of believers have corporate responsibility to one another and to the nation where God has placed them. The solution-oriented Christology has neglected this perspective. As a result, it falls largely below the standards of what ought to be the ideal dominant Christology in present day Nigerian Christianity. Furthermore, I found it inadequate to build any plausible Christological bases upon it in view of the national challenge of peace and mutuality. The real identity of a Christian, in practice, may go beyond what is professed to what the person does with that profession of faith. It is the divine intention for the Christian community to get involved practically in some non-partisan ways in whatever is happening in the community and the nation where they live. This offers them an avenue to shine the light of Jesus Christ around them. The current situation as revealed through this research is contrary to this. This provides me an avenue to explore the second seminal question in this research.

7.3 Second Seminal Question

Regarding the second research question: “What contextual Christological notions or images can be developed in Nigeria to foster peace and mutuality?”, my concept of ‘contextual imagery’ is that which is relevant to the Nigerian situation and not too far from the biblical concept rather than from a Nigerian-African cultural category. I developed two Christological paradigms that I believe would be helpful to handle the challenge of peace and mutuality in Nigeria. The challenge of the peaceful living and mutuality today can be interpreted differently. The challenge of broken peace in our world may be seen as a product of the fallen human nature which no one can change by any means. This bears reflections on the man-made, catastrophic treatment since almost about the period of World War I. Those who have power and authority have exerted it upon others not only by suppressing their humanity but also subjecting them to varying degrees of degrading situations. The episodes of violence in the northern part of Nigeria vividly indicate this. It is possible to attach the ‘threatened peace’ in Nigeria and around the world to the eschatological events already foretold in the scriptures.
In this way some have associated the political violence around the world today to the biblical apocalyptic predictions.\textsuperscript{1} Whichever interpretation is given to the problem of peace and mutuality there are fundamental questions that are attached to it. The questions that confront these thoughts are: does the Church have any mission in view of these situations? If any, what would that mission look like? And what would form the framework for that mission?

The Christian message is essentially one of hope. This hope banks itself on God’s supreme power to oversee the affairs of His people in spite of the prevalence of evil and its manifold challenges. Additionally, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the message of peace that God wishes to install through the sending of Jesus Christ. It is on this premise that I developed two Christological paradigms upon which peace and mutuality can be built. The first paradigm depicts Jesus as the bearer of the reign of God, manifested to create a new humanity. God freely and unconditionally identified with humanity in Jesus Christ. Jesus reintroduced God to humankind and brought back the image and glory lost in the first Adam. The goal of the first paradigm is fulfilled in the second. Jesus paid the maximum price for the reconciliation of humanity back to God. The paschal mystery brought liberation from the shackles of sin and terminated the age-long enmity between God and humanity. Hence, I argued that Jesus Christ can be portrayed as an exemplar of reconciliation for the Nigerian nation in the second Christological paradigm. The theological significance of reconciliation offered by Jesus Christ needs to have an impact on the Nigerian Christians as they enter into God’s ministry of reconciliation in the modern day Nigeria.

To be effective in fostering peace and mutuality I argued that the church in Nigeria has to conceive reconciliation as a pattern for doing mission in modern times that requires an urgent attention. I argued further that this modern transforming mission should be understood as a tripartite mission in which God’s Spirit, His church and others are involved in the world. God’s activities in the world began with reconciling men and women to Himself. In this mission, God can do it without a human’s involvement but He has chosen not to get involved without His church since the church remains His visible representative on earth today.

It has been identified by different Nigerian authors, and fairly so, that the missionary nature of Christianity and Islam is crucial amongst the factors impeding peace from the inception of the interreligious interaction in Nigeria. The internal struggles began in the dogged quest for conversion. It is apparent that these religions cannot stop promoting their

\textsuperscript{1} See for example, James F. Rinehart, \textit{Apocalyptic Faith and Political Violence: Prophets of Terror} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
missionary agenda. But the commitment of the Christian community through ecclesiastical and ecumenical avenues evident in the massive publicity on their activities is a hopeful prospective to lessen the tension. I have contended in this research that Christian mission is potentially powerful to serve the goal of conversion, peace, and reconciliation. If the church becomes more committed to the motif of God’s reconciliation and peace in the nation, the church will be resolute to support the nation in overcoming the problems affecting the corporate existence of the nation.

If there is any area in which Christianity’s influence needs to be felt in Africa today, it is in the public arena. The various writers on African Christianity present the reality of the state of the church and the social lapses. For instance, Paul Gifford, describes the growth of Christianity in Kenya, and observes that it has succeeded less so in its impact on the corporate national interests. Corruption and clientelism have threatened the nation to a point of fragility. Gifford avers that “Christianity has played different roles in Kenya’s public life. These roles can be as diverse as service provider, cultural anchor, business school, motivator, entertainment, scientific explanation. The one public role it does not conspicuously play is to provide a serious challenge to the dysfunctional political structure.”

The will to maintain a prophetic stand against the national ills of such magnitude is not so evident at the moment. Gifford’s study on four other African nations, Cameroon, Zambia, Uganda, and Ghana, reveals similar conclusions. All these countries have a Christian influence from their colonial days through Protestant or Catholic missions. In later years the advent of Pentecostal church groups also gave rise to monumental development. Gifford’s conclusion was that the church in these places, and perhaps other Christian African nations too, have developed through inculturation, Africanisation or indigenisation, external links through which they act as an agency within their territories and beyond in issues related to money, employment, propagation, ideas, and social service. It is good to imagine how much has changed since Gifford’s works.

The Benin Republic theologian, Ká Mana’s recent publication equally reflects upon some of the useful contributions of churches in African nations to their nation in the process of social reconstruction, drawing insight especially from the area of soteriology. The awareness on how Christians in African nations should arise to their God-given duties, to be

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creative in modern ways of doing mission in their nations; this is increasing. In this vein a study like this can serve as a beacon of light on how greatly the Christological paradigms can be useful for the church in the public space. This research ultimately points to two main ideas as far as the Nigerian situation is concerned.

7.3.1 Peace is a Product of Justice

The commonality between the Reign of God and reconciliation as Christological paradigms is the prominence they give to the justice of God. The God who revealed Himself to the world in Jesus Christ has justice as the central theme of His activities. In the Reign of God, the call to the believer is to embrace the totality of joy, peace, and justice that become evident as its practical manifestation. The concept of justice is an ideal beyond human exertion. It is a divine attribute that is revealed ultimately to produce peace in human relationships. Jesus instituted the standard of God’s justice and became the justice of God through His life by reconciling humanity back to God and establishing the Reign of God.

The phenomenon of justice as a revealed vision of God demands human fidelity to God, to one another as fellow humans, and to the entire creation. Justice depicts a right relationship with one another that encapsulates fairness and equity in totality. This right relationship is meant to be reflected in the interpersonal relationships within the society. In this regard, I argued that an ideal peaceful human society can be built upon human commitment to God’s demand of justice. It is the human fidelity to God's demand of justice that creates an atmosphere of peace and mutuality.

Beneath the many challenges of peace and mutuality in every human society are the structures of injustice in the political, social, and economic terrain. An accumulation of various manifestations of inequalities will always result in violence and civil disturbance.

The justice as enunciated in the Reign of God and reconciliation can disassemble the imbalances created through injustice. This is what Mark Shaw means when he states that “justice is served by a kingdom consciousness” and moves on to attest that “every expression of Christianity in Africa has a place in the witness to the kingdom.” When the church

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rediscover the vision of the Reign of God as a divine intervention in human affairs afresh, it becomes easy to witness to it through her numerous ministries. The church can do this by speaking truth to power through prophetic dialogue and prophetic Christology. The church needs to emphasise these dimensions of modern Christian mission expression and practice as the needed paradigms today in Nigeria. The major difficulty lies in how to keep a balance between the threefold nature of the Kingdom: as the Sovereign rule of God, as the redemptive reign of Christ, and as the coming Kingdom of peace and justice. This is an on-going concern that the church will continue to wrestle with in every age.

The church, however, has had trouble keeping the threefold nature of the kingdom in full view. Balance has been a problem. This lack of balanced witness to the fullness of the kingdom has produced tensions and even rival factions in the church. Sad as these divisions may be they can be seen as part of God’s providential rule keeping each of the three emphases of the kingdom alive.

The challenge that is identifiable is: how will the church emphasise one aspect above the other without dislocating the effects of the Kingdom on social space? In spite of the difficulty of aligning the threefold nature of the Kingdom theme, it becomes imperative that the church must bring the notion of justice to the fore.

The type of justice that is embedded in the Reign of God cum reconciliation is a restorative justice. This justice focuses on building community and human relationships. Restorative justice de-emphasises legal demands for retribution on the offenders. “Restorative justice processes see the community, the offender, and the victim as connected participants in the outcome of the justice process.” The value of restorative justice can be seen in the healing and restoration of dignity to the victim. This process arbitrates between the victim, the human community, and the perpetrator. By so doing restorative justice promotes truth-telling and deters a future occurrence. This is particularly instructive in the case of Nigeria because of its close reflection on the biblical notion of the reign of God cum reconciliation and the African system of conflict settlement that is community and relationship oriented. The second big idea that this research points to is that peace is attainable through personal and corporate responsibility.

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8 Shaw, The Kingdom of God in Africa, 296.
7.3.2 The Horizontal Quest for Peace: Peace is Relational and ‘Achievable through Human Responsibility’

The notion of peace is also common to both the Reign of God and reconciliation as Christological paradigms. The perception of peace and mutuality that is emphasised in this study is that of a right human relationship rooted in a proper God-human connection. This harmony is a necessary condition for any development in the personal, political, economic and religious life of a nation. Although, peace is a free gift divinely bestowed upon humanity, its practical manifestation in social space depends on attitude, actions, and dispositions of other fellow humans. This is the one responsibility that should be given a renewed emphasis in Nigerian Christianity regarding peace in the nation. This re-emphasis can be done through building relationships with other key stakeholders to promote the Christological paradigms proposed in this study. The notion of the Reign of God as an irruption in human society can stimulate the church to shift her attention from individual problems to corporate needs and get involved more in the affairs of the nation.

The paradigm of reconciliation can influence the Christian attitude by redefining the church’s social and national involvement. The goal of the nation’s reconciliation can be conceived as a vision by the church leadership. Then, it requires considerable education and reorientation on what the role of the church should be to foster harmony. The important gatherings such as denominational assemblies and ecumenical fellowships can serve as channels for this reorientation. The pulpit ministry, electronic and print media can be obtained to disseminate the message of the church to the grassroots, to government and its agencies, to the entire Christian community and other Nigerian religions. This has a great potential to bring positive results, since, as I have pointed out, the church as the victim is calling on itself and others to reconsider the need to live together peacefully. It will take time to rebuild trust, assurance and confidence across various levels. This is because peacebuilding is a process that needs care and gentleness.

There are different areas in which the human effort or collaboration can aid the release of God’s gift of peace. The human engagement with one another over the issues underlining the occurrences of violence and disruption of peace and mutuality can usher in a peaceful atmosphere. This collaboration can be seen through interreligious association or dialogue. By this I mean that the Christological paradigms can guard a Christian ethic for engaging in interreligious relations or dialogue. One of the current realities with regard to
theological reflection is that dialogue with other religions, worldviews, and ideologies is indispensable. The religious worldviews, social theory, and political ideologies present both an opportunity and a challenge for the church’s missionary agenda and they invite the Christians to a cautious way of doing theology.\textsuperscript{10} However, all these challenges invite the theologians to connect those diversities to who Jesus is through an attitude of dialogue. Various forms of dialogue such as dialogue of life, dialogue of inquiry, dialogue of action or deed, dialogue of theological exchange will be strengthened as the proposed Christological paradigms are presented inclusively in the form of prophetic dialogue. The peculiarity of the existing interreligious dialogue that resides in the circles of the experts in the field of religion and theology can be removed following the emphasis on the church’s engagement with different stakeholders in the nation’s affairs.\textsuperscript{11} Improvement that Christological paradigms will bring is that the experts in theology and religious studies will no longer occupy the overriding positions to the extent that the church-state and the interreligious engagements will deprive the Christians at the grassroots to participate adequately. Rather the Christological paradigms for peace and mutuality will enable Christians at the grassroots to be involved in the peace-talk or peacebuilding process as those who are directly affected by the surge of violence.

Having emphasised the necessity for the churches’ engagement with the nation, it must be noted that the Christians cannot build a multi-religious and a multi-ethnic nation alone. There is still need for a meaningful collaboration with others who may not even think like the church. This may impact on Christians’ contributions to Nigerian Interreligious Council (NIREC) and other relevant interfaith engagements in Nigeria. It implies that the paradigms developed in this study can serve as the bases for participation in the moves for national harmony. The perspective I have proposed on ‘gentle mission’ may prove very helpful in the long run. It is in such a partnership that the collective goal of a prosperous and progressive Nigeria can be realised.

\textsuperscript{10} Paul Louis Metzger, \textit{Connecting Christ: How to Discuss Jesus in a World of Diverse Paths} (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2012). Argues that there are different ways of discussing Jesus which are evident in the New Testament writers’ presentations from different lenses. In the modern times this leads to dialogue of Christians over themes and ideas with other people and religions within the society.

\textsuperscript{11} Thaddeus Byimui Umaru, \textit{Christian-Muslim Dialogue In Northern Nigeria: A Socio-Political and Theological Consideration} (Bloomington IN: Xlibris, 2013), 172-174. Umaru argues that one of the major reasons that has rendered interreligious dialogue ineffective in Nigeria is that most of the efforts in the space of dialogue always concentrate on the thoughts of the experts with an utter neglect of the ordinary religious practitioners who are directly involved in starting a violence.
7.4 Projecting into the Future

The matter of the church’s involvement in the nation on the platform of Christological presuppositions that has been dealt with in this work needs to be considered via the urgency of the desire for the transformation of African societies. The question that readily comes to mind now is, in view of all that has been said here what if the church fails in the role I have elicited as rightly belonging to her in the Nigerian society? This question cannot be waived since it is in the human nature to project into the future. It is likely that it will enter a critical phase characterised by fake piety and loss of relevance. Christianity had always attended to the needs within its context from its inception.\(^{12}\)

If the Nigerian Christians restrain from these national needs, that will eventually make the church lose her prophetic voice and social relevance. Those who have been injured and battered by the current state of constantly threatened peace in the nation may not find an appropriate ministry of healing and reconciliation within the church as has been proposed in this thesis. The inability of the church to minister to her members will hinder any ministry to the Nigerian nation. With or without the church’s involvement the nation will surely proceed on the journey of realising the goal of building the nation of her dream, an environment where the economic condition is buoyant and increasing, where the political arena is not beclouded by corrupt practices, where education and healthcare delivery is properly invested into for sustainability. Hence, it will become problematic for the church to keep up with the nation later, if the existing gap is not filled presently.

The awareness of the social responsibility of the church in Nigeria and other parts of Africa is gradually on the increase. This may prevent the unforeseen circumstances I have highlighted earlier. The church has a unique advantage in a place like Nigeria because of the people’s religious worldview.

What can be said now is that there should be further research, as situations unfold in the future. Some issues could be stressed in subsequent researches that could corroborate what has been done here. The suggested areas include but are not limited to: ecclesiology and peace-building; the effects of globalization on Nigeria’s quest for peace, coexistence and harmony; Christian revivalism and the pattern of conversion in relation to national rebirth; the impact of Nigerian ecumenism on peace and mutuality; Christian mission and the

\(^{12}\) In Africa, for instance, one of such significant needs that gave Christianity its first social relevance is the abolition of the slave trade.
political liberation in Nigeria among others. It is hoped that these aspects will further buttress what has been done in this work. It will stir up the church leadership and Nigerian Christians at large to the need to embark on massive mobilisation of Christians for social transformation. I expect a time, when the impact of the Christian church on the basis of God’s self-act of becoming human in Jesus Christ will chart the path for the church in Nigeria to witness to God’s gift of abundant peace in the nation.

The one major area this research has left open is the question of the possibility of absolute peace and mutuality. The spiralling violence and insurgencies will make one conclude that there can be no situation of absolute peace in the world again. The absence of total warfare or conflict in the human situation cannot be envisaged again in the present level of human existence. But we must never forget to reiterate, that God places the church for a purpose on earth. This purpose is to shine His glory and to make Him known in the midst of conflicts and wars.

7.5 Conclusion

Christological study is advancing in Nigeria and in other parts of Africa but it is yet to witness the needed engagement that is expected for social transformation. Jesus Christ and His meaning today is relevant for every human situation. More transforming stories will emerge as theologians continue to seek to reinterpret the Christ-event and its social significance.

In conclusion, this research has, in my opinion, contributed both to knowledge in the area of Christology and social transformation in Nigerian Christianity to be specific. My effort has been to take Christology as my point of departure in examining and proposing two useful paradigms which, in my opinion, can lead to a paradigm shift in the peace-talks in Nigeria. The Christological paradigms developed in this study have been my contribution to the ongoing debate and research on the peace-talks or peace-building and mutuality in Nigeria. It also adds to the literature on the role of Christian mission in the public sphere. It is impossible to claim that the effort that is made here can singlehandedly resolve the challenge of mutuality and peace in Nigeria. But what is certain is that it will act as a catalyst for repositioning the church in Nigeria. It is still possible to draw a connection between the solution-oriented Christology in Nigerian Christianity, and the Christological paradigms for
peace and mutuality that I proposed in this study. The bottom line is that they are both reflective of the liberating motive of the ethical principles of the Reign of God on earth.

The result of engaging the national challenges will be obvious in the long run. Christological paradigms will result to the formation of a church that is relevant to the life of the people in her context. This will be a church that is missional and constantly rethinking contextual mission engagement, equipped with Christo-praxis models for transforming the nation in all its facets. The continuous proclamation of the Reign of God and reconciliation which the life of Jesus Christ exemplifies will be the core of the mission and the ministry of this church. It will be a church that is prophetically relevant to the nation and the praxis of social transformation. This is the anticipated description of the Nigerian Christianity.

It has been shown in this study that a Christology is contextual when it seeks to interpret the meaning and significance of Jesus Christ within its context. Such a Christology must establish a correlation between how the interpretation of Jesus Christ is appropriated to fill the gap in the apprehension of a particular Christian community. The time has come for the Nigerian church to examine at a closer range, and passionately, aspects of Christology within its context in the search for the lasting peace and harmony. This may well be a contribution to the transformation of the Nigerian nation in its quest for peace and mutuality, albeit from a Christian perspective.