

Ecclesial Response to the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon: A Path to Restoring Peaceful Coexistence among Citizens

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ABSTRACT: The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, which began in 2016, has greatly affected unity and peaceful coexistence among citizens. This crisis can be traced back to colonial rule and the unification of both Francophones and Anglophones in 1961, which has led to protests, strikes, school closures in some parts of the Anglophone region, deaths, and property destruction, among others. The failure to address the Anglophone Crisis threatens the federation with separation between the Anglophones (English speakers) and the Francophones (French speakers) in Cameroon. An attempt to render the regions uncontrollable by the government has created an environment that has prevented citizens from peaceful coexistence. The absence of Peaceful coexistence continues to be a significant challenge for Cameroonian society today.

Peaceful coexistence is essential in Cameroon: it builds healthy relationships, fosters a sense of togetherness, enhances individual growth, and strengthens society. However, peaceful coexistence can be restored in Cameroon so that the citizens can coexist harmoniously. It can be achieved when the ecclesial (Church) responds to the Anglophone Crisis.

The absence of peaceful coexistence is evident in the tensions between the Cameroon military forces and the Ambazonia

defense forces. Also, some people cannot freely move along certain routes in the country, and government workers cannot travel spontaneously across the Anglophone region (Roberts, 2022). Therefore, this paper examines the ecclesia's response to the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, aiming to restore peaceful coexistence among citizens.

Keywords: *Peaceful coexistence, Cameroon, Church, crisis, restoration*

Introduction

The Anglophone Crisis has been a significant challenge for Cameroon, resulting in numerous setbacks for its citizens. The Anglophone Crisis is increasingly dominating the socio-political development of Cameroon, which has led to protests, strikes, no school in some parts of the Anglophone region, death, and destruction of property, among others. The failure to address the Anglophone Crisis threatens the federation with separation between the Anglophones (English speakers) and the Francophones (French speakers) in Cameroon (Konings, 1990, p. 30). An attempt to render the regions uncontrollable by the government has created an environment that has prevented citizens from peaceful coexistence.

The absence of Peaceful coexistence continues to be a significant challenge for Cameroonian society today. According to Roy (2024), the nonexistence of peace among citizens in Cameroon is apparent in the exclusive nature of governance, ethnic and regional divisions, school closures and violence, corruption, and insecurity, not leaving out the tension between the Anglophones and Francophone regions, which has led to conflicts, hence, a call for secession among others. Peaceful coexistence is essential in Cameroon: it builds healthy relationships, fosters a sense of togetherness, enhances individual growth, and strengthens society. However, peaceful coexistence can be restored in Cameroon so that the citizens can coexist harmoniously. It can be achieved when the ecclesial (Church) responds to the Anglophone Crisis.

The researcher observes that since 2016, when the Anglophone crisis began, there has been no peaceful coexistence among Cameroonians. It is evident in the tensions between the Cameroon military forces and the Ambazonia defense forces. Also, some people cannot freely move along certain routes in the country, and government

workers cannot travel spontaneously across the Anglophone region (Roberts, 2022). Therefore, this paper examines the ecclesia's response to the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, aiming to restore peaceful coexistence among citizens. This paper will use 'ecclesial' simultaneously with 'Church'.

The Concept of Peace

Peace is an elusive concept that can be seen from different dimensions. It has a broader application, which includes every level and sphere of human and social existence. Throughout human history, the concept of peace has evolved as people and groups seek a harmonious environment. Pandey (2004:4) avers that peace is the absence of war or conflict; a society without structural violence, injustice, or exploitation of any kind; national/international cooperation and understanding; environmental balance and sustainable development; and an inner peace and a peaceful mind. Peace is described as the absence of violence and a calm environment between people, groups, and the state (Mustafa, Jamshed U, Nawas, Arslan, & Ahmad, 2023:854). Mustafa et al. further expatiate on an international context; peace is defined as the absence of war. Peace is more concerned with nations' capabilities to settle disagreements and conflicts without resorting to war (Pandey, K. 2016:4). In this context, it suggests that governments of various countries are expected to use other means to resolve differences rather than resort to force that could lead to war. By this, Africa should be a global community where mutual relationships exist, with citizens required to take an interest in people's challenges. Dijkema, C., & d'Herens, S. (2007) postulate two types of peace: positive and negative. According to them, positive peace is when individuals have peace of mind, while negative peace is the absence of war, violence, and so on.

From the above entitlements, the researcher views peace, as this paper argues, as a state in which people have learned to control their emotions, express love to one another, and exercise freedom as they move and relate in society.

Theoretical View of Church

The word 'Church,' per scripture, is ecclesia, and the Greek word ek-kaleo conveys the idea of 'to call out.' An ecclesia, then, is a called-out body. It asserts that the

Church comprises individuals who have been called out among others for a purpose. Further, it is a body of people set aside (Miller, 2005, p. 55). Cross quotes Rev. Francis: the Church as those God has called and adopted as his sons and heirs of eternal life. It indicates that the Church comprises people whom God has called either through individuals believing in Christ Jesus, through adoption, or through redemption. It is meant for born-again individuals who have confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior from sin. Cross (2005:348) concurs with the above assertion that the Church is seen as the people of God. It implies that the Church consists only of those God identifies as his—those who have been set free from sin and are regenerated through the blood of the Lamb. The Church is a body of people called out (Cogdill, 2003, p. 2). Cogdill further states it refers to the universal body of believers called into God's service (Matt. 15:18 & Eph. 5:23-25). This view is related to the above views in that the Church comprises called-out ones. From the above claims, the researcher avers that the Church comprises God's called-out people. People who have been regenerated and serve Jesus as Lord and Savior, hence living out the expected Christian life. Children of God who are divinely called into fellowship and the Peace of Christ (I Cor. 1:9).

Historical View of the Birth of the Disruption of Peace

The disruption of Peace in Cameroon is the crux of Cameroonians' problems. Several factors prompted the disruption of Peace in Cameroon, among them the Anglophone Crisis. The Anglophone crisis refers to a socio-political issue rooted in Cameroon's colonial legacies from the British, Germans, and French (Tembom, 2018, p. 3). The Anglophones are citizens in the North and Southwest regions of Cameroon. Tembom further notes that the birth of the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon can be traced to the Fouban Conference of 1961, which united the two territories (French- and English-speaking) with different colonial heritages into one state.

The birth of the Anglophone crisis can be seen from the First World War, when Cameroon was known as German Kamerun (Brockway, 1979, p. 187). Brockway advanced that the Germans first colonized Cameroon in 1845, when Alfred Saker established a mission station there. Hence, during the First World War in 1916, France and Britain joined their military forces to attack and seize German

Kamerun from the Germans (Para, 2018). Koning and Nyamnjoh (1997: 207) state that three-quarters of the territory was given to the French and one-quarter to Southern Cameroon (English-speaking regions). Thus, colonizers later influenced the colonies with their European languages and cultures. Consequently, they were rendered as Anglophones and Francophones. The significant difference in the awarded territory has resulted in Cameroon having a majority of the Francophone population and a small minority of Anglophones (Kouseau, 2018, p. 8).

Pera (2018) opines that after the Second World War, the United Nations mandated that Britain and France withdraw from their territories and support their independence. Konnings (2016:4) affirms that British Southern Cameroon was given three political options: becoming independent by joining French Cameroon, or by joining Nigeria to become self-independent. Lastly, the most preferred alternative was for the least populous to amalgamate with French Cameroon. Thus, they merged with La République du Cameroun because the Southern Cameroons could not sustain themselves as an independent nation. After all, it was not economically viable (Tembom, 2018, p. 4).

Nonetheless, during the British Plebiscite (referendum) of 1961, the United Nations documents defined the foundation of integration as: "Integration with an independent State should be based on complete equality between both territories" (Hazlewood, 1967). It implies that both territories have equal rights to citizenship and status at all levels of government, whether in the executive, legislative, or judicial branches. On this basis, the British Southern Cameroons voted to join La République du Cameroun in February 1961 (Johnson, 1970, p. 57).

The United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs (2018) declares that the Fouban Conference (July 17–21, 1961) was purposely constructed to construct a constitution for the innovative Federal government of British Southern Cameroon and La République du Cameroun. It was reported that representatives from La République du Cameroun, including Amadou Ahidjo, the then President, were brought to the Conference, along with some Southern Cameroon representatives, such as John Ngu Foncha. Konnings (2018:12) asserts that, before the Fouban Conference, there was the Bamenda Conference, at which all parties in

Southern Cameroons (the Native Councils Authority and the traditional leaders) met to decide that a joint proposal should be presented when negotiating with La République du Cameroun. Among others, Okereke (2018:13) opines that at the Conference, a non-centralized federation was approved to safeguard a discrepancy between the states' and the federation's powers. Most of these proposals from the Bamenda Conference were ignored by Ahidjo (Taku, 1996, p. 13). Some of these suggestions included a bicameral legislature and decentralization of power. However, a unicameral system was established with a centralized system of control (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 1997, p. 216).

Nevertheless, Johnson (1970:45) states that on October 1, 1961, the Southern Cameroon and the Republic du Cameroun became one. Then, on May 6, 1972, Ahidjo broadcast his resolution to convert the Federal Republic into a unitary state, stating that the idea would be put to a referendum (Ebune, 1916). This suggestion disrupted the articles in the Fouban document, which states that "any offer for the revision of the existing constitution, which prejudices the unity and integrity of the Federation will be inadmissible." Suggestions for revising by the Federal Assembly members of a majority vote from the representatives of each of the Federated States and not through a referendum (Tembom, 2018, p. 11). Okereke (2018:8) stresses that the violations paved the way for the change of the Federal Republic into the United Republic of Cameroon. In 1984, Paul Biya, Ahidjo's successor, replaced the name "United Republic of Cameroon" with "La République du Cameroun," the same name the francophone Cameroon had before federation.

Causes of the Disruption of Peace

The intensification of the many difficulties faced in Cameroon is mainly a result of leadership challenges (Agwanda B., Nyadera I., & Asal U., 2020:1). Socioeconomic and political factors contribute to the growth of the country's numerous Peace disruptions. Possible factors influencing Cameroon society in the face of the interruption of peace include growing threats from insurgency and terrorism, poor governance, activism aggravated by the effects of climate change and environmental deprivation, corruption, insecurity, marginalization, tribalism, poverty, inadequate medical care, and the Anglophone Crisis, among others.

The Anglophone Crisis: A significant challenge in Cameroon, it has brought many setbacks for citizens and the nation. The Anglophones are citizens in the North and Southwest (NWSW) regions of Cameroon. The Anglophones perceive themselves as being marginalized by the Francophone government from the time Cameroon gained independence to the present (Lunn & Holland, 2018). The Paul Biya war is what many in Cameroon's Anglophone regions have termed the Anglophone Crisis. President Paul Biya declared this in November 2017 during his swearing-in as President of Cameroon Tembom (2018:5). However, before this date, the Anglophone Crisis began in 2016 with the following causes.

Firstly, the Lawyers' Protest began as a movement initiated by lawyers in the Anglophone regions. Fatunde (www.universityworldness.com) declared that due to the dissolution of the federal system of government (Southern Cameroon), there had been dysfunction in the legal system in Cameroon since common law was practiced in West Cameroon (southern Cameroon after independence) and civil law in East Cameroon (Tembom, 2018, p. 9). The Anglophones had grievances that judges were trained in the civil law system and sent to work in the Anglophone regions that practiced common law. It led the Anglophones to request a return to the two-state federation as the bedrock to ensure the existence of both legal systems and cultures, and to protect the people's interests (Pera, 2018). The government acted deaf to this request. At this, the lawyers displayed a peaceful protest walk but were beaten by the government security forces instead, and their professional attire was confiscated.

Secondly, the Teachers' Protest: Tembom (2018:10) reports that three of the Anglophone teachers' trade unions, due to their grievances, appealed to the government for a return to the federal system of government as a basis for resolving their grievances. During their protests, they were treated like lawyers. The teachers then proposed school boycotts, believing this would pressure the government to resolve the problem peacefully. Sadly, the school boycotts proved remarkably ineffective. However, Fatunde (www.universityworldness.com) postulates that the teacher trade union complained of the following points, among others.

1. More opportunities are given to Francophone students than to Anglophones in tertiary/ professional schools, even with qualified grades. Thus, they

outnumbered the Anglophones at Anglophone universities such as Buea and Bamenda, as well as at Higher Technical Teachers' Training Colleges in Kumba and Bamenda.

2. Anglophone students who applied to Francophone universities to study medicine faced language challenges, leading to their dropping out.
3. Anglophones are compelled to write entrance examinations for technical and professional colleges in French, resulting in mass failure among Anglophone candidates.

Thirdly, the University of Buea Students Protest: Students of the University of Buea protested because the University was militarized and lecturers were absent, calling on the government to intervene. The government sent security forces that shattered students like snakes, girls were raped, and some students were made to keep their faces and mouths in the mud. Students' rooms were vandalized and sprayed with water, and their money was forcefully collected. Many students were wounded and traumatized as a result of this violence (US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2018).

Fourthly, the Coffin Revolt: On November 21, 2016, Mancho Bibixy, a journalist with a local radio station, stood in a coffin before a large crowd in Bamenda, asking the "Bamenda people" questions concerning the poor road conditions, the filthiness of the city with heaps of garbage, and government corruption. After his interview, Mancho asserted that this dysfunction and long-lasting corruption must be stopped (Tembom, 2018, p. 14). However, the security forces used brutality on the crowd, which led to violence. Several protesters were killed, while some were injured, and many were arrested and jailed. The Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) concurs with Tembom's claims that some young men were shot on their feet in their homes. However, this record argues that the government's violation of universal human rights and freedoms prompted the 2017 call to arms in the Anglophone regions as a means of self-defense, which has now escalated into something else.

Lastly, the Provocation of the Government: At the core of these tensions, some Anglophone leaders in the Biya regime sought to reassure President Biya that, even amid these tensions, they still supported him. Hence, they hired people from the neighboring regions into the Anglophone areas to organize a march, singing in support of Paul Biya's leadership. The population saw this as a provocation, which led to clashes between the security forces and the population. It resulted in the vandalization of properties, more deaths, injuries, and many arrests. On January 12, 2018, there was a bang in the arrest and detention of some ten leaders of the independence movement of the Anglophone regions in Nigeria. Some of them are still in detention to date (Amnesty International, 2017).

Due to the above, the Anglophone community decided to witness an effective 'ghost town' (coffins), and school boycotts adopted by the Teacher Union continued (Lunn & Holland, 2018). In their confusion, the government decided to use money and other incentives to see that schools were restored and to break the push of the ghost towns, but all to no avail. Pera (2018) opines that the government became frustrated and embarked on an internet blackout in the Anglophone regions from January to April 2017, affecting many internet-based businesses. As if this were not enough, in October 2017, social media was shut down for 150 days (3 months).

As the crisis progressed, the opposition movement formed various groups; some were founded in the 90s, while others were established in the 2000s. Some of these groups are the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC) led by Cho Ayaba, the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL) led by Akwanga Ebenezer, and the Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF), which they all served together, fighting for Southern Cameroon independence. Consequently, these groups transformed into an Interim Government of Ambazonia under the acting leadership of President Ayuk Tabi. On October 1, 2018, Ayuk Tabi declared the restoration of Ambazonia's independence (Pera, 2018).

Impacts of the Anglophone Crisis

The Anglophone crisis has had significant impacts on Cameroon's inhabitants. These impacts have disrupted the Peace of Cameroonians, specifically those in the North

West (NW) and South West (SW) regions. There are several impacts as a result of the conflicts, but some will be seen below;

1. According to IPSS (2020), the NWSW regions are significant contributors to Cameroon's economy, whereby, from 2017, the country registered a drop of more than 30% in industrial service performances, a decrease in exports of 5.3%, 34% in consumption, and 10.2% in investment compared to the pre-crisis period.
2. The IPSS further records over US\$6 million of infrastructure damage.
3. And about US\$ 35 million of destruction in the agricultural business sector and 27 million in the energy sector.
4. Over two million inhabitants lost their lives as a result of the crisis.
5. Substantial adverse effect on the education sector

Education is central to the development of any country, but by the end of 2023, the crisis had led to the closure of over 3,000 of 6,515 schools in both NWSW regions. It has deprived over six hundred thousand schoolchildren of regular classes, hence an increase in child molestation, crime waves, riots, and teen pregnancy/motherhood. As a result, several of these children have left their parents to attend school in other regions. Only 23% of primary and secondary schools are functional in the NWSW regions. Several schools in major towns, especially key educational hubs like Buea and Bamenda in the NWSW, do not attend school on Mondays due to "ghost towns" (Nwenfor, 2024). 6. It has affected businesses. Some private and public enterprises, such as PAMOL and the Cameroon Development Cooperation (CDC), with about ten thousand employees, have temporarily shut down. It led to a high increase in refugees in the country, whereby many left their war zones to find refuge in other places, which led to the separation of parents and their children. The large displacement has caused overcrowding in cities like Yaoundé, Douala, and Bafoussam, such that some cannot afford the high cost of living in these cities; consequently, there has been an increase in crime rate, prostitution, and abortion. 7. It drastically increased hunger due to food scarcity, as farmers, fearing for their lives, would not go to their farms to harvest or cultivate food. 8. It has led to an increase in insecurity. The conflict has promoted massive insecurity, whereby individuals are abducted for huge ransoms, undergo unexpected sieges, and suffer massive deaths. 9.

It has led to the demolition of several infrastructures, such as health facilities, schools, and church buildings. 10. It has brought frustration and psychological trauma to children in these regions who secretly attend schools. It hinders them from concentrating for fear of being abducted or killed. Several teachers and pupils/students cannot complete the required school hours due to attacks, which force them to flee for refuge elsewhere (Yenika, 2024). 11. Regarding the health sector, only about thirty-eight health facilities operate in the said regions. 12. It has led to the vulnerability of some children. Some of these children, in the course of running, were taken away by others for trafficking. Innocent children were forced into prostitution, drug trafficking, or even begging. Some of these Students were taken away by false promises and ended up trafficked. 13. Young boys and girls of about eleven and above are influenced negatively by friends into the consumption of hard drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, tramadol, and cigarettes, among others. It harmed their social, psychological, and physical health, as well as their morale.

The above impacts have disrupted the peace of the citizens, leaving many in a state of great fear and panic. There is little or no freedom of speech. People are restricted in their movements and cannot visit some places carelessly due to the fear of abduction or death. Government workers cannot get to the NWSW regions at will. Many traumas have dramatically affected the peace of the people in the country. The government of Cameroon has not been proficient in taking appropriate measures to terminate this crisis to date. Thus, the Church's role in resolving this outstanding conflict is essential if peace is to be salvaged in Cameroon.

Ecclesia's Response to the Anglophone Crisis

The Response of the Church in Cameroon, particularly during the Anglophone Crisis, is a subject and question that some believe the Church has played its role effectively. In contrast, some believe the Church has not acted enough, while others think the Church is silent. To be able to understand what the Church in Cameroon has done, is doing, and hopefully will do, there is a need to have an inside-house understanding of the Response of the Church to the lack of Peace in Cameroon and the expectations

of the Church by the state, by the community, and by the non-state armed groups. Before diving into the Response of the Church to the Anglophone Crisis as an attempt to restore Peaceful coexistence among citizens in Cameroon, it will be necessary to comprehend what the Church has recorded before.

- a. The Church has been part of national and international mediation talks in which various agendas have been put on the table to restore peace in Cameroon.
- b. Also, when the agenda shifted from a call for reforms to an independence agenda, the Church took a stance that broke the peace with the government and non-state armed groups.

Amid the crisis, the Church has responded through the following;

- a. The health sector. Lots of civilians were shot and treated through funds raised by the Church for the treatment of these victims. It was made possible through the Ministry of Evangelism and Missions Department of the CBC in collaboration with the NNB and the Ministry of Cooperating Missions, for which over 100 million FCFA was raised to treat fatalities (Mukake, personal communication, November 19, 2024).
- b. The Church has called the body of Christ for different seminars: prayer vigils, prayer conferences, and talks on denominational and nondenominational forums.
- c. The Church has responded by studying peacebuilding and conflict transformation using the African Peace Institution as the platform. Several seminars have been held to educate on peacebuilding. Some schools have been encouraged to include peace and conflict management in their curriculum. It is to help inculcate the vision and mission of peace in the children's hearts.
- d. Has organized trauma-healing and conflict-transformation seminars within and beyond the Church to help redirect the community and victims from trauma to healing.
- e. The Church has assisted several IDPs, victims, and children of those who have suffered in the crisis by providing school fees and food and by empowering them through small-scale business assistance, in partnership with the Norwegian Refugee Council and Missions 21, which is still ongoing (Mukake, personal communication, November 19, 2024).

Given the above endeavor by the Church and the current situation on the ground, it seems the Church has not responded sufficiently to the Anglophone Crisis, which could facilitate peaceful coexistence among citizens. That is why the crisis persists, and things seem to be escalating. The Church is the moral conscience of society. Hence, as part of that moral consciousness, God has mandated the Church to uphold truth and peace by preaching and advocating peace across various facets of society. From a random interview conducted with some top Church leaders in Cameroon society, it is deduced that the Church can respond to the Anglophone Crisis as an attempt to restore Peaceful coexistence among citizens in Cameroon via:

- a. Soliciting the government to declare a ceasefire for both parties (government and separatist) and for both parties to come to the table for dialogue, where the source of the cause of the crisis will be addressed and carefully reviewed. Consequently, it facilitates dialogue between conflicting parties and mediates peaceful negotiations.
- b. Organized peace rally symposiums and workshops to educate the citizens on peace building and conflict management, human values and dignity, and the rights of community persons. Hence, seek to see that those values are promoted as expected, for the scriptures say we should live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18) (Julius, personal communication, November 22, 2024).
- c. Promoting Reconciliation: Encourage reconciliation between conflicting groups and support initiatives that foster forgiveness and healing.
- d. Advocate for the vulnerable, underprivileged, and those who are treated unjustly.
- e. Education and Awareness: Educate Church members and the broader community about the crisis, its root causes, the need for a peaceful resolution, and the need for Christians to anticipate entering civil leadership (Samuel, personal communication, November 22, 2024).
- f. To be passionately involved in cognizance of the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, as the incarnate creator of the universe, put his hands in the earth's mud to help humanity bridge the gap between humanity and eternity. The Church plays the role but draws the lost to the hope in Christ Jesus (Mukake, personal communication, November 19, 2024).

- g. Intentional Prayer and Counseling: Organize prayer vigils and conferences for the nation. Prayerfully advocate for a peaceful resolution through diplomatic channels and provide free counseling for society (Comfort, personal communication, November 22, 2024).

Conclusion

Peaceful coexistence is necessary in the community, and the Church is the principal agent for restoring peace. Until the Church understands its role and plays it effectively, several things will continue to go wrong in society, and the Church's stakeholder role in development will be lacking. The Church is the main stakeholder in building peaceful coexistence among citizens. Hence, the Church needs not to play a backbench role but a frontbench role. When the Church implements the above-suggested responses, there will be Peaceful coexistence among citizens in Cameroon.

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