
DIMENSIONS IN INTER-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is a major issue in any given human society and often it is inevitable but violence is avoidable. Research indicates that conflict is an on-going process in human relations and interaction and may occur within and among individuals, groups, communities and nations at any time. In the case of Nigeria, the frequency of inter-religious conflicts in the country from 1980 till date has left adverse effects on the Church and the wellbeing of the citizens. The paper therefore examines that in the course of these conflicts, Christians have at certain times, taken up weapons to counter the attacks from Muslims, claiming to do so in self-defense and Muslims have also done the same claiming to be in defense of Allah or his servant Mohammed (SAW). The researcher adopted observational and qualitative methods with the use of theories such as relational theory and greed and grievances conflict theories as methods in eliciting relevant data required to do justice to this research. The paper therefore, presents an overview of the general concept, causes of religious conflicts in Nigeria and the role of the Church. This paper shows that the Church and her leaders have the potential to manage and resolve conflicts in Nigeria through their religious resources or values and frameworks involving love, forgiveness, contentment, justice, peace, respect and tolerance rather than sustained hostility and suspicion in Christian-Muslim relation. The paper concluded with a fervent plea for the revival of our distorted values and some possible avenues of achieving this which is through dialogue, interfaith dialogue, religious peace-building, seminars and workshops, as media of evangelizing and restoring hope in the country with their gospel of peace.

Key words: *Inter-religious, Conflict, Nigeria, Role of the Church*

INTRODUCTION

Federal state all over the world vary in many ways, such as; in the nature, character and significance of the underlying political, economic, cultural and social diversities. Indeed, conflict has received various definitions and interpretations, to the researcher it simply means, 'a friction arising from the desire that I want something and you also want the same, but we both cannot have it all'. According to Lamle, (2015: 3) conflict is "Opposition among social entities directed against one another". The term "conflict" is derives from the Latin *confligere*, which denotes "to strike together" (3). Fernandez in Ekpenyong (2011) views conflict as difference in perspectives: what one sees, thinks, feels, and believes may be different from

what another sees, thinks, feels and believes (118). This means that conflict is part of all human interactions, and it can have positive influence and sometimes negative influence depending on how the parties in conflict want it to be. Again, DFID report of 1997 as quoted by Bassey (2007) has noted that: Violent conflict generates social, political division, reserves economic progress, impedes sustainable development and frequently results in human rights violations. Large population movement triggered conflicts threaten the security and livelihood of whole region (xvi). Best (2011) said conflict originated from the Latin word *confligere*, meaning 'to clash or engage in a fight'. It connotes a confrontation between one or more parties aspiring towards incompatible or competitive means or ends (23).

The Nigerian example of federalism like other developing African countries are confronted with a lot of complex challenges which on many occasions have shook the Nation to its foundation. Some of these challenges are the issues of politics, economic and social instability frequently stemming from bad governance, dictatorial governance, failed economic policies, fundamental human rights abuses and inappropriate development programs stemming also from exacerbated ethnic and religious differences in society. These problems have posed a lot of difficulty in the continent and government at all levels seems to be helpless and hopeless in the resolution of crisis and conflict arising from them. Most Nigerians who had lived peacefully together for years now suddenly take arms against themselves on issues bothering politics. Several communities that were previously living peacefully suddenly took arms against one another as a result of claim of ownership of the land and politics. The paper therefore examines the importance of land ownership in a multi-ethnic and pluralistic society like Africa and the importance attached to the socio-political status of citizens in the continent. The paper concludes that for Africa and the Church to make progress and to be a developed continent, it must find a way of tackling the problems associated with socio-political conflicts. It also explained the root causes of conflicts, examined the ideological platforms and the role of socio-political conflicts by giving historical evolution of ethnic, social, economic, politics and identities in Africa and to understand the African positions of the different constitutions on land and other root causes of conflict and relationship between claims to land, ethnic ideology, social and politics and how they either cause or escalate conflicts. The paper indeed shows that the Church and her leaders have the potential to manage and resolve conflicts in Africa through their religious resources or values and frameworks involving love, forgiveness, contentment, justice, peace, respect and tolerance (Dajwan 2021: 1-3).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Here the researcher asks whether religion, social and politics are roots causes of conflicts and what role the Church can play in the management of conflicts in Africa. The seven broad categories have been singled out to guide our understanding and how religious identity is engaged in challenging governance; these are; relational theory and grievance and grievances conflict theories.

Relational Theory

Relational theories attempt to provide explanations for violent conflicts between groups by exploring sociological, political, economic, and historical relationships that has existed between groups. Culture, values and interests all have a way of influencing the relationships

between migrant's – settlers- indigenes more especially at the sociological level where differences between cultural value is a challenge for groups identity formation processes which in turn, creates the tendency to view others as intruders who should be prevented from encroaching upon established cultural boundaries (Best 35-37).

Greed and Grievances- Collier and Hoeffler

Greed versus Grievance is an argument that seeks to understand the motivations of combatants in civil warfare. Greed model- that combatants perform a cost benefit analysis and take up arms when fighting will better their situations- that the grievance-based explanations of civil war are wrong, and that combatants in civil wars fight for economic benefits such as loot: that economic agendas appear to be central to understanding why civil wars get going. Conflicts are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance model- that combatants are motivated by religious, ethnic, identity, and social class grievances: ethnic or religious hatred, political repression, political exclusion, economic inequality and social discrimination (Dinshak 2018:15).

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT NEXUS

According to Jonathan (2000), religious belief systems are essential aspects of the identities of those who follow them. Accordingly any attack, real or perceived, on one's religious framework is not an attack on the religion; it is also an attack on a vital element of one's identity. Given this, it is not surprising that this can cause a defensive reaction that is often violent. Wentz describes this phenomenon metaphorically as defending the 'walls of religion'. Lewis makes this argument with respect to Islam and Christianity noting that these religions' claims to exclusive truths are a major source of conflict (Jonathan, 2000:7-8).

Again, Gurr in Jonathan said one way to understand the ethnic conflict process is described as basic model posits that discrimination or even differences in status between groups, causes deprived minority groups to form grievances. Gurr specifically deals with grievances over social, political, autonomy, and economic issues. These grievances cause the minority to mobilize for conflict. These mobilized groups finally engage in conflict. This is the core of Gurr's model. He also accounts for the influence of the group's cohesion, size, and geographic concentration, regime factors like democracy, democratisation, state power, and economic development, international contagion and diffusion, international support for both the state and the minority group, and repression. Although Gurr does not deal with religion directly, by analogy religious discrimination should lead to religious grievances which, in turn, should lead to mobilisation followed by conflict (Jonathan, 2000:9).

Economic perspective on the causes of civil war and based on empirical patterns globally over the period 1965-98. During this period, the risk of civil war has been systematically related to a few economic conditions, such as dependence upon primary commodity exports and low national income. Conversely, and astonishingly, objective measures of social grievance, such as inequality, a lack of democracy as in political, and ethnic and religious divisions, have had little systematic effect on risk (Collier, 2006:1). Identities have historically been significant in the African political process (Nigerian in focus), under colonial rule as well as in the post-colonial dispensation. Under colonialism, administrative exigencies warranted "the invention of traditions", and the nurturing and exacerbation of an "us" versus "them" syndrome: Muslim versus Christian; Northerner versus Southerner; Hausa-Fulani versus Yoruba versus Igbo, and

so on. Religious, regional and ethnic differences were given prominence in conceiving and implementing social, educational and economic development policies and projects under the indirect system of colonial administration favoured by the British. Thus, the differential impact of colonialism set the context of the regional educational, economic and political imbalances which later became significant in the mobilization or manipulation of identity consciousness in order to effectively divide and rule, as well as in the politics of decolonisation and in the arena of competitive politics in the post-colonial era (Jega, 2000:15-16).

THE ORIGIN OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA

According to Dajwan et al (2018) affirmed that, historically, it was the contacts with the Western and Arabic Worlds that birth to Islam and Christianity in Nigeria. although Christianity was said to have come to Africa as early as the first century AD, and had great worship centers in ancient places like Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Lybya, Tunisia and Algeria (109); Nigeria had a taste of Christianity during the Portuguese Missionary enterprise in the sixteenth Century Olayiwola as in (Dajwan et al 2018:109). This was strengthened during the nineteenth century missionary enterprise of the Evangelical Societies from Europe and America Beathan (Dajwan et al 2018). On the other hand, Islam came to Nigeria in the eleventh century and was firmly established in the Kanem-Brono Empire (Fola&Adediran, 1983).

Despite its late introduction into Nigeria, Christianity has significantly recorded a great and high rate of massive conversion, development, increase and expansion over the years than Islam because of its connection with western civilization. Indeed, this development, there is a stronger presence of Islam especially in the Northern part of the Country while there is a stronger and huge presence of Christianity in the South Western and South Eastern which include the present South-South States of the Country. In the North Central States, the population of adherents of the two (2) religions is almost equal (Dajwan et al 2018:109).

SOCIO-POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

In religious conflicts, it is clear which aims are achieved. Gopin (1997) however regards political, ethnic and economic aims as primary. In his view, religious conflicts form a specific form of conflict between groups which differ ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for socio-political relevance. In a seminar vein, Takaya in (Dajwan et al 2018:109) and Batson, Schoenrade and Pych (1985) emphasize the behavioral and political character of religion. To them, “religions are parochial and emotional socializers. They specialize in building one-faith exclusive brotherhood communities. Religion, at some point, is politics and is the most potent and long lasting political association. Moreover, religious creeds excite and extract the deepest possible sociopolitical and psycho-emotional and physical loyalties from their adherents when in political competition with people of other faiths” Richardson as in (Dajwan, et al 2018:109).

One significant element driving conflicts of this type is the attitude of superiority that religious persuasions often adopt in their dealings or assessment of others that is mainly related to the sense of stenotype, prejudice and discrimination shared by members towards people from other faiths (Allport, 1954; Franzoi, 2000). This attitude tends to exclude others, seeing them as out-groups and classifies them as ignorant and doomed which invariably, creates an

atmosphere of conflict and hostility. This atmosphere of hostility tends to intensify where opposing religious and political persuasions see their numerical strengths as social and political advantage. In such a situation, the leaders think that new socio-political and religious perspectives as threats to the hegemonies enjoyed (Brown, 1985; Richardson, 1985). Furthermore, where the social, political, religious or economic factors are unfavorable, messianic rhetoric can exacerbate the tensions by way of playing on the psyche and mind-set of adherents.

Nwaomah as observed by Dajwan et al (2018) that conversation campaigns, as in Nigeria, “by opposing religions(s) and fanaticism arising from indoctrination of the adherents, mostly due to parochial education, which can also reinforce religious conflicts special are the unique effects of religious doctrines on the perception of the adversaries, the formation of the motivational psychological values as well as religious values towards the religion, and the central role of feelings and emotions for group identification (2018:110).

SOCIO-POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICT AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS IN NIGERIA

Before delving into the discussion of socio-political and religious conflicts in Nigeria, it will be useful to devote some space to introduce the country's religious communities that form the conflict parties. Nigeria has two major religions (Christianity and Islam) that are always in constant conflict and a third one- African Traditional Religion (ATR) which has a current population estimate of about 178.5 million WPR 2016, as in (Dajwan et al, 2018:110), Muslim are estimated to be 50%, Christians 40% and practitioners of African Traditional Religions are put at 10% Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2005) as observed by (Dajwan et al, 2018:110). This estimation excludes practitioners of alternative religious ideologies from the eastern world. This population estimate of the different religious groups as imagined by the Human Rights watch (2005) has been heavily disputed by the Christians and followers of African Traditional Religions, who argue that the long time domination of the nation's polity by military dictators, who are mostly Muslims from the Northern part of the country (1960-1966; 1975-1976, 1979-1999), placed them into the best position to manipulate the figures in favor of Muslims. A second argument against the above mentioned figures which appears to be true is the erroneous generalization of all Northerners including all people from the Middle-belt States as Muslims (Dajwan et al, 2018:110). The introduction of “borrowed religions” Christianity and Islam is said to breed conflicts in the nation both socio-political and religious wise.

Religious Conflict: Christians and Muslims Experience in Nigeria

Conflict as defined early is said to be a state of disagreement between people, groups, and nations over political patronage, power, scarce resources, divergent opinions, values, sentiment, feelings or impression. Conflicts are interrelated because they can occur between enemy-connected individuals such as farmers and herdsmen, and among connected individuals such as teachers and students, employers and employees, neighbors, religious associates, religious bodies or other persons whose interests within the same space, and whose positions or stance influence others ((Dajwan et al, 2018:111).

Religious conflict may arise when each of the two different religious persons claim a

monopoly of religious truth (Ayantayo, 2010) and looks at the other as being inferior. This has always led to antagonism, hostility, clashes, disputes, fights, quarrels, and wars between the religions usually referred to as inter-religious conflict. From the fore gone, interreligious conflict is a state of disagreement between two religious bodies, faiths or groups regarding who is or who is not holding absolute religious truth: It occurs when members of different religions are engaged in argument which often goes with bickering, controversy, demonstration, debate, or squabble over religious beliefs and practices (Best, 2011; Mwantu&Agbo, 2014).

To social psychologists, conflict is a state of disharmony or discord with oneself, between two persons or a person and a group within itself or with another group or a community within itself. It may be over a political patronage, or a nation within itself or between nations usually referred to as international conflict. All of which arise from a misunderstanding, or misrepresentation of an intention or an action, and occasioned either by genuine error of commission or omission; or by a deliberate mischief and /or aggression; usually motivated by selfish reasons. It is clear from the above that conflicts are inevitable in human interactions but violent is avoidable and therefore inextricable in human relations (Mwantu&Agbo, 2014).

In Nigeria, especially in the Northern part of the country Christians and Muslims are always intolerant to one another when it comes to conversion of prospective followers or defection from one religion to the other. Debki as in (Dajwan et al, 2018:111) posits that the antagonism to Christian evangelism from the Muslim is much more than it is with any other religion. In the same way, some Christians provoke the Muslims which is often very rare but very few cases by openly condemning their tenets and practices at Church meetings and other gatherings. According to Dajwan et al (2018), the level of intolerance and threats to life seems to be more on the side of Muslims.

CAUSES OF INTERRELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Over the years, notable causes of conflict between Christians and Muslims have been identified and discussed by different scholars (Dajwan et al, 2018:111).

The first is the drive for membership. Both religions always embark on activities that are aimed at winning souls. This often leads to bickering and physical combat between adherents of the two major religions (Dajwan et al, 2018:111). It should be noted that each of the two religions use various strategies to win converts. For instance, Christian missionaries introduced Western Education, Social services such as hospitals while the Muslim missionaries introduced Islamic education, as instruments for converting prospective members into Christianity or Islamizing Nigerians.

The intolerance among Christians and Muslims has been on the increase which often results in open confrontations and the use of dangerous weapons and fir-arms to fore-stall each other's programs (Fatokun, 1996). Mwantu and Agbo (2014) Dajwan et al (2018) further observed that there is mutual suspicion and distrust amongst adherents of the two religions which has made them to create demarcated settlements in some towns and cities of the country.

Another reason is the introduction of the Sharia law in some States in Northern Nigeria that has brought about serious conflicts and relational damaged between adherents of the two religions (Adam, 2002). The issue of Islamic sharia law has long been a controversial matter that threatens the unity and peaceful coexistence of a multi-religious and pluralistic nation such as Nigeria.

The prevalence of religious misconceptions among adherents of these religious groups is another very serious factor that is responsible for conflict between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Religious misconception is tantamount to holding a religious idea which is wrong or untrue, but which people believe because they do not understand it properly. There are evidences of how Christians hold wrong conception about Islam and vice-versa (Gwamna, 2010; Mwantu and Agbo, 2014). Examples are the concept of Trinity (Ephesians 2: 12; Deut. 6:4) in Christianity and the concept of slaves of Allah by the Muslims.

Therefore, the causes of Interreligious conflict in Nigeria are summarized by the researcher in these three (3) theories as indicated below:

Primordialism Religious Theory

They views religious strife as the climates of strain in relationships as a result of cultural, identity and historical differences. Ancient hatreds create diverging interest and it is possible for conflict to take place over or between two civilizations. Perhaps out of the desire to be politically correct some have wished away the primordial issues that laid the foundation for the use of religion to create conflict in Africa. According to Turaki (2012), it is not possible for Africa to have a proper grasp of the nature of religious and communal clashes, frictions, riots, conflicts and violence without understanding our primordial, religious, cultural and colonial past; what we were before the arrival of Christian mission, Islam and colonial masters, and what we became during and after the Christian mission, Islamic, colonial and post- colonial eras.

Instrumentalism Theory of Religious Conflict

Instrumentalist argue that although religion may aggravate conflict once it has occurred and been caused by other factors, religion is hardly a cause of conflict, let alone violent conflict. They believe that the polarization of religion and religious identities and the radicalization of religious communities become a possibility when there is a situation of economic and political decline (Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000). The instrumentalisation of religion has been made possible by many factors, among them, the failure of development, (structural conflict), and failed modernization that have created vacuums which are conveniently filled by religion.

Fundamentalism/Fanaticism Theory

This perspective has it that religious conflicts are work of fundamentalists and fanatics and persons who are religiously overzealous and misguided and who follows extreme and often potentially confrontational interpretations and forms of religious teaching. The follower ship and sponsors are also considered fundamentalists who confront each other because they are intolerant of other faiths and cannot accommodate other beliefs in a religious plural society (Gwamna, 2007).

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Ekpenyong (2011) maintains that the proper role of the Church or religion (Christianity) has been:

To provide a higher purpose and meaning to human life, one that transcends limited self-interest;

To counter-balance the disruptive tendencies of politics and economics with shared values able to hold society together;

To provide a moral structure in which human beings act (social ethics);

To stand up for and protect the “little ones”, those who are marginalized and oppressed within the usual power schemes (125).

Writing on the impact of Christianity on any society Kukah according to Ekpenyong (2011) observes and agrees as follows; that:

The new trends especially among Christians on seeking to use religion for social and political change may offer a new perspective to the definition of the trends in political competition in Nigeria that is assuming that both Muslims and Christians can let their religious belief motivate and direct their political behaviour (125).

Again, Ekpenyong stresses the fact that those who believe that religion should play this political role need to think out more clearly and gauge the claims of charlatans from the gospel, emphasizing more on the potentials of human goodness, justice, love and service. To him “the poverty of the Nigerian state makes it impossible to keep all forms of sentiments away from the political process” (126).

Tracing the origin of conflict from the disobedient attitude of Adam and Eve as we see in Genesis account of creation, Adam Olekun (2006) opines that, conflict comes into the society due to misunderstanding, communicating gap, injustice, and power imbalance, clash of interest or values, and intolerance. He further stresses that Christians should engage in peace making rather than the government strategy of peace keeping in their communities through dialogue, love, and reconciliation and states, “a just community must be built on honesty, truth, and social justice” (22). From the above wisdom and scholarly discussions, one can comfortably conclude and submit that Christians are called and meant to be peacemakers. In this light Oyeshola (2005) postulates that: working for and promoting peace is an intrinsic content of Christianity. ... Therefore, we may not run away in the face of conflict, war or civil strife or friction. We must confront them according to our capacity and responsibility. More importantly is the fact that we must work and create the enabling environment for peace (35).

It is in this capacity that the Church has been called to be a good tool for managing conflict today in Africa and the world at large. Acknowledging the above assertion Hays (1996) writes thus: “when the Church as a community is faithful to that calling, it prefigures the peaceable kingdom of God in a world wracked with violence” (343). Though, various peaceful negotiations have failed to achieve the desired peace or conflict resolution in Nigeria, Christianity on the other hand has served as a great instrument of mediation and peaceful resolution of many conflicts in many parts of the country- Nigeria and the world at large. This fact therefore, means that Christianity does not compromise her mediatory and peace-building functions as an ideology because Christ is the Prince of Peace. This also means that for peace to reign in Nigeria, Christians Churches have to marshal out their instrument of peace which is the gospel of Christ andand also a life of holiness and righteousness and pursue peace with all men (Hebrew 12:14).

The Christian Churches play this role of conflict management and resolution through: Dialogue

Etymologically, dialogue means a speech across, between, through two or more people. Dialogue comes from the Greek *dialogos*. *Dia* is a preposition that means “through,” “between,” “across,” “by,” and “of.” *Dia* does not mean two, as in two separate entities; rather, *dia* suggests a “passing through” as in diagnosis “thoroughly” or “completely.” Logos comes from *legein*, “to speak” Crapanzano cited by Emilia and Chukwuemeka (354-355). Logos means “the word,” or more specifically, the “meaning of the word,” created by “passing through,” as in the use of language as a symbolic tool and conversation as a medium. As Onians points out, logos may also mean thought as well as a speech–thought that is conceived individually or collectively, and/or expressed materially. Consequently, dialogue is a sharing through language as a cultural symbolic tool and conversation as a medium for sharing. Accordingly, dialogue refers to the mutual exchange of experience, ideas and opinions between two or more parties; i.e., a conversation. Dialogue is two-way or multi-way communication. It presumes the opportunity to reply on several occasions in order to enhance a line of reasoning. The concept of dialogue contains a dimension of simultaneity and direct contact, either physical or via technical aids. In order to achieve genuine civic participation, there must be some form of dialogue between citizens and those in positions of power. In a dialogue, everyone taking part must be given the chance to study the other parties' suggestions and opinions, contemplate them and respond (31-34). According to Turner cited in (355)

Dialogue is a culturally and historically specific way of social discourse accomplished through the use of language and verbal transactions. It suggests community, mutuality, and authenticity—an egalitarian relationship. So understood, dialogue provides a meeting ground, *communitas*, and manifests itself in a variety of spontaneous and ritual modes of discourse in which nature and structure meet.

Dajwan (5-6) defined the concept of dialogue as the conversation between two or more persons of different faiths and beliefs systems, ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds, norms, philosophy and people of different understandings.

Church Perspective of Dialogue: Looking at (ACTS 6:1-7)

The Hellenists (Grecians), verse 1, were Jews who adopted the Greek language and customs. The Hebrews clung to Aramaic and Jewish practices. “To serve tables,” verse 2, included financial and temporal duties. “Prayer and the ministry of the word,” verse 4, are always primary in a presbyter or bishop. The leader's or deacon's office was to guard this calling from encroachment by other necessary functions of a minister of Christ. A proselyte, verse 5, was a Gentile convert to Judaism prior to becoming a Christian. The growth of the Jerusalem Church, verse 7, is indicated. These converts were “added to the Lord” (5:14; cf. Rom. 6:3-4). The laying on of hands, verse 6, speaks of simple identification of the apostles and the assembly with the chosen in their work (cf. Lev. 3:2) (Unger 72).

Contextualizing ACTS 6:1-7 as a Church role in Managing Conflicts

According to Sproul said that the Old Testament required care of the poor and needy (Ps 9:18). This concern is seen in the social action set forth in 2:44, 45; 4:34-37. Possibly the Widows

among the Hellenists, that is, Greek-speaking Jews were being overlooked in the food distribution due to cultural discrimination: having resettled in Judea from the dispersion, they were considered outsiders by native-born Hebrew- or Aramaic-speaking Jews. Or, since the Jerusalem Church at this point numbered in the thousands and likely worshipped in home gathering in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), the Widows' needs taxed the distribution network beyond the capacity of the apostles to oversee it directly (1922). The unity of the Church must be intensified for its effectiveness in the nation.

Early Christianity in Jerusalem witnessed a case of ethnic or cultural discrimination that nearly rocked the unity of the Church. It was desensitization and dialogue that saved the situation. The paper therefore discusses the relevance of the method adopted for resolving this crisis in the early Church to Nigeria. There are several approaches, techniques, methods and strategies to solving a crisis. The method adopted by the Disciples was identification of the crisis through desensitization that is given fear hearing to the Widows, having understood the nature of the crisis; it was extensively and freely discussed. This strategy involved dialogue, deliberation, tolerance, resolution, and recommendation. The resolution was given immediate implementation where the seven deacons were chosen (Sproul 1923).

Different steps were observed taking by the Disciples in resolving the conflict in Acts 6:1-7 (Dialogue Strategy)

First, there was identification of the nature of conflict and the cause, and then a meeting was summoned for discussion and dialogue. These are non-violent crisis and the cause is ethnic discrimination in sharing food.

The issues involved were extensively discussed with open mind by listening to the widow's grievances and suggestions which was welcomed by all (Acts 6:5).

There was good understanding among the apostles and the widows, because Acts 6:5a confirm that: "And what they said please the whole gathering ..." (English Standard Version).

A practical positive step was taken to implement the resolution and recommendation arrived at by appointing the seven deacons full of the Holy Spirit to take care of the food distribution while others to be dedicated to prayers and ministry of the word.

It is to be noted here that good understanding and workable agreement was reached that satisfied both parties in the conflict. This satisfaction confirms the statement or belief that conflicts are better settled or solved through dialogue and not in the battle field or as in coercion management approach. Onaiyekon (10) asserts that "Dialogue calls for understanding among the conflicting parties." If two opposite parties understand each other, they would be able to settle their differences through genuine dialogue. This was the suggestion of Paul to numerous conflicts of interest in the Church in Corinth and other Pauline Epistles.

Forgiveness

Christian Churches under different umbrellas such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should inculcate in their members the spirit to forgive and forget. They should also create effective awareness among their members that, this is not a time to sit down to recount the past, or to retaliate, neither is it a period for regretting or appraising any good done, but a period for forgiveness, reconciliation,

constructive dialogue and a period for reconstruction, settlement and re-union. It is on this purpose that, “the Nigerian Church has recently gathered in Ibadan, its first national Pastoral congress with the theme, “the Church: family of God on mission” during the congress, the Nigerian Church among other things discussed on “what role Christians have to play in restoring peace to a troubled land (Nigeria), in promoting mutual forgiveness for past hurts, in fostering mutual understanding and acceptance (Ekpenyong 2011:129).

Christians have the imperative of forgiveness; the practice of which Pope John Paul II says is “the only guarantee for lasting peace”. He observed in the *Encyclical Dives in Misericordia* that a world without forgiveness is a world of endless violence (Ehusani 2009:2). He again further stressed that, with the Christian virtue of forgiveness, past hurts and wounds, and bitterness and resentment over such hurts and wounds could be adequately healed, and wholesome human relationships can once again begin a fresh. He said that to buttress his deep thought of forgiveness (Ehusani 2009:2). Therefore, we can emphatically say that forgiveness is a balm that heals past wounds and our walk relationship thereby giving birth to a fresh wholesome human positive relationship and peace again.

Promotion of Social Justice

Christian leaders and Churches should as a matter of necessity inculcate in their members and the public at large the need for social justice. On the relevance of social justice Socrates writes that justice is a moral physician and cures human beings of their excesses and makes them better people. Social justice advocates equal jurisdiction and judicial order in any given constituted group or society. It serves both the least as well as the greatest, the poor as well the richest, obviously speaking, social justice if given precedence, it audits injustice, oppression, suppression, denominationalism, sectionalism, apartheid, victimization, nepotism, tribalism, racism and even domination (Ekpenyong 2011:129).

Therefore, Christianity as a religion is to help inject the spirit of social justice, forgiveness, order, understanding, tolerance, discipline, reconciliation, peace and decorum into the lives of Nigerians. Consolidating this noble truth Ikwun (2002) opines that religion (Christianity) is that which promotes and encourages social justice and fair play, mutual trust and respect. Indeed, without religion (Christianity), morality and discipline suffer blatant decadence in the citizens and in the society at large (71). Ikwun again stresses that, religion (Christianity) is the primary and basic institution and source of morality and spirituality. Religion is said to be 'a belief in someone else experience while spirituality is you having your own experience'. In the absence of religion (Christianity, man's inhumanity to man reigns and anarchy becomes institutionalized (71). Christian leaders and Churches should teach their members and the public at large the necessity of social justice which cures people of their excesses and makes them better human beings.

Evangelism and Prayer Convocation

The Christian Churches under different umbrella such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should mobilize and inject in their members the spirit of mass evangelism and prayer convocation in various parts of the country-Nigeria especially in those dispute areas of the country. These bodies and their affiliates

should as a matter of urgency move into the villages and communities in Nigeria for effective evangelism (Ekpenyong 2018:130).

Prayers bring down the power of God to solve human crises, checkmate the power of Satan and evil vices such as corruption, discrimination, dishonesty, conflict, violence, and prosper the work of God. Through her ministry (Church) of Prayer for the Nation, the Church also addresses societal ills (1Tim. 2:14). Consolidating this fact, Pike corroborated when he declared that: The United Nations is not the final court of appeal in the affairs of Nations. The church could dominate politics from her prayer room if this priority were observed (198). Indeed these were the strategies used by the Four Hebrews while in Babylon, referring to Daniel, Meshack, Shedrack and Abednego in the Daniel especially from chapter one to chapter four. In the same vein Tennyson (1965) affirmed that: more things are wrought by prayer than this world can dream of. Wherefore, let thy voice rise like a fountain for me night and day (348), according to Engelkemier (1993), *“prayer can change conflict situation”* (128). There is nothing that prayer can't do!

Eschatology

This is one of the greatest instruments the Nigerian Church can use in resolving conflict. The Church enlightens humans with an adequate and satisfying eschatology, through an acceptable explanation of the mystery of death and life- after death. Christianity in discharging this eschatological function of religion, offers their adherents the prospects of a personal God who will, after death, judge every human being for reward or punishment according to each person's stewardship here on earth (Iwe 2003 “The Inseparable Social Trinity: Religion, Morality and Law” II).

Further, the judgment will be based on motives and deeds of everyone, believer and/or unbeliever. St. Paul declares as follows: “so each of us shall account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12).

Serving as the Prophet and Conscience of Society

The Christian Churches under different umbrellas such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should serve as the prophet and conscience of the society. Christianity plays this revolutionary role by calling on both humans and society as they go astray along the path and precipice of self-destruction, crisis, corruption, dishonesty, anarchy, and other social vices and injustice. Christianity armed with its transcendental reference points and standing as the acknowledged custodian of ideals and values formations which constitutes eminently the necessary and salutary critique for any given prevailing situation in human society (Iwe 2003:9).

According to Convey (1990), the character ethic is principle-centred paradigm, which is on the fundamental idea that there are principles that govern human effectiveness. These are natural laws in human dimension that are just real, just as unchanging and arguably “there” as laws such as gravity in the physical dimension (32). He further reaffirmed that, these principles are not values per-se, but they are guidelines for human conduct that are proven to have enduring values. They are self-evident and therefore, are unarguable, like the Ten Commandments.

Workshop

The Christian Churches under different umbrellas such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should organize workshops in the different parts of the country, for the different groups in crisis. The Christian Churches can use a workshop or seminar in solving a conflict. According to *Longman dictionary of Contemporary English*, workshop is a meeting at which people try to improve their skills by discussing their experiences and doing practical activities (1653). Therefore, in conflict resolution, the two or more parties, individuals in the conflict, discuss their experiences of the conflict and devise practical ways of tackling the conflict. It is at workshop that decisions and resolutions are made, and agreement reached on practical ways of providing viable solutions.

Advocacy Visits

Christian leaders of PFN and CAN should organize quarterly advocacy visit to the governors and the president intimating them on the need for development, promotion of social justice, forgiveness and peace in Nigeria. they should also intimate the leadership of Nigeria on the need to learn to feel the pulse of the nation, to hear the cry of the people, and to react with almost sense of responsibility to the desires and aspirations of the constituent units of the country for that kind of unity and peace that is based on mutual forgiveness for past hurts and wounds, and a mutual commitment to righting the wrongs of the past, and building our society on justice and fairness (Ekpenyong 2011:132-133). The need to advocates like prophet Amos in his days as in Amos 5:20-25 (An advocate of social justice).

They further create in the mind of the leadership of Nigeria, an understanding that, dialogue is the answer to all conflicts and it brings peace and not deployment of military troops which breeds killings, bitterness, hatred, anger and genocide. Indeed, Christian that is the Church is responsible for peace making while military are often responsible in peace keeping by the use of arms. Finally, the Church should be bold enough to speak against the suppression, oppression, discrimination, ethnicism and injustice in the country and to call on the youths and warlord of different ethnic groups to sheath their swords and down their weapons for peace to reign. They should also call on the faith-based organizations and the government to address as a matter of urgency, the issues of unemployment and underdevelopment (133).

CONCLUSION

This writer from the available facts is of the view that any realistic attempts to deal constructively with the religious conflicts in Nigeria must address the roots of conflict such as religious intolerance, pre-mordialism, instrumentalism and fundamentalism religious conflict theories. It is also the possible of this work that the Churches and her leaders should draw the attention of their members to the fact that everything in this world is temporary and man will give account to God about his/her stewardship here on earth on the day of judgment. Again, the Church leader should speak out strongly against the vices and ills of their society. Besides, the Church leaders must do all within their power to inculcate in their members in their members and general public the virtues of peace, honesty, love justice, forgiveness, tolerance, public integrity and must also see that men/women of proven integrity, honesty and transparent character are placed in in public officers (Ekpenyong 2011:134).

The Christian Church plays this role of public officers and this role of conflict management and resolution through inculcating in her members and the public at large the spirit and importance of dialogue, forgiveness, promotion of social justice, mass evangelism and prayer convocation, through their teaching of eschatology and serving as the prophet. The Church leaders must do all within their power to inculcate in their members and the general public the habit of tolerance, peace, and justice, honesty and public integrity. The Church leaders are to speak out with one voice against the ills of the society (Ekpenyong 2011:134).

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