

SOCIO-POLITICAL ROOTS OF CONFLICTS IN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Longkat Daniel Dajwan

Gindiri Theological Seminary

Affiliated to University of Jos, Nigeria

longkatdan@gmail.com

Abstract

Conflict is a major issue in any given human society, and often it is inevitable, but violence is avoidable. In Africa, conflict is very often the result of the interaction of political, economic and social instability frequently stemming from bad governance, dictatorial governance or dictatorship, failed economic policies, fundamental human rights abuse and inappropriate development programmes stemming also from exacerbated ethnic and religious differences in society. The paper therefore examines the importance of land ownership in a pluralistic society like Africa. The researcher adopted observational and qualitative method with the use of theories, such as relational theory, primordialism religious theory, instrumentalism religious and political theory, fundamentalism religious theory, structural conflict theory, human needs theory, grievance and grievances theory and (protracted) social conflict theories as methods in eliciting relevant data required to do justice to this research. The fundamental issues discovered in conflict are the religious beliefs and practices, land ownership and resource competition, political patronage and competition, the nature and character of the African nations' politics, ethnicity, boundary disputes, poverty, marginalization/discrimination, unemployment and underdevelopment. The paper 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. The paper concluded with some possible avenues of achieving this, which is through dialogue, interfaith dialogue, religious peace-building, seminars and workshops, as the church's media of evangelizing and restoring hope in the country with their gospel of peace.

Keywords: Conflict, socio-political, Church, pluralistic society, sesolution/management

Introduction

Federal states 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. For 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’. Lamle (2015: 3) views conflict as “Opposition among social entities directed against one another”. The term “conflict” is derived from the Latin word *confligere*, which denotes “to strike together” (3). Fernandez, in Ekpenyong (2011), views it as difference in perspectives: what one sees, think, feel and believe 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 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, reverses economic progress, impedes sustainable development and frequently results in human rights violations. Large population movement-triggered conflicts threaten the security and livelihood of whole regions (xvi). Best (2011) says 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, is confronted with a lot of complex challenges which on many occasions have shaken the nation to its foundations. 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 programmes stemming also from exacerbated ethnic and religious differences in society. These problems have posed a lot of difficulties to 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 up arms against themselves on issues bordering on politics. Several communities that were previously living together peacefully suddenly took up arms against one another as a result of claim of ownership of land and as a result of 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 for Africa to be a developed continent, they 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 the 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 including the relationship between claims to land, ethnic ideology 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 root causes of conflicts and what role the Church can play in the management of conflicts in Africa. Seven broad categories have been singled out to guide our understanding of how religious identity is engaged in challenging governance. These are: relational theory, structural conflict theory, human needs theory, grievance and grievances theory and (protracted) social conflict theory.

Relational Theory

Relational theory attempts to provide explanations to violent conflicts between groups by exploring sociological, political, economic and historical relationships that have existed between groups. Culture, values and interests all have a way of influencing the relationships between migrants – settlers- indigenes, more especially at the sociological level where differences between cultural values is a challenge for group identity formation processes which, in turn, creates the tendency to view others as intruders who should be prevented from encroaching into established cultural boundaries (Best, 35-37).

The Socio-Political and Inter-Religious Conflict Relationship

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 alone; 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, says 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 is 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 (Nigeria 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).

Human Needs Theory (HNT)-Maslow, Burton, Rosenberg and Max-Neef

Dinshak affirms that human needs theorists argue that conflicts and violent conflicts are caused by unmet human needs. Violence occurs when certain individuals or groups do not see any other way to meet their need, or when they need understanding, respect and consideration for their needs. In order to live and attain well-being, humans need certain essentials called human needs or basic human needs. Human needs theorists argue that conflicts and violent conflicts are caused by unmet human needs. That violence occurs when certain individuals or groups do not see any other way to meet their need, or when they need understanding, respect and consideration for their needs (Dinshak 2018:9-12).

Greed and Grievances- Collier and Hoeffler

Greed versus grievance is an argument that seeks to understand the motivations of combatants in civil warfare. The greed model holds that combatants perform a cost-benefit analysis and take up arms when fighting in order to better their situations. It also holds that the grievance-based explanations of civil war are wrong, and that combatants in civil wars fight for economic benefits such as loot, and that economic agenda appear to be central to understanding why civil wars get going. Conflicts are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by the grievance model. 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).

(Protracted) Social Conflict Theory- Azar

Protracted social conflict is “the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions an economic participation”. Azar identified the major impetuses in the creation of contemporary violent conflict to be: communal content (identity issues), deprivation of human needs (e.g. security, development and political access), failure of structural governance to provide for those needs, and international connections and dependency (Dinshak, 2018:17).

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 similar vein, Takaya, in Dajwan et al (2018:109) and Batson, Schoenrade and Pych (1985) emphasize the behavioural 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 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 with 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 in (Dajwan et al, 2018:110). Muslims are estimated to be 50%, Christians 40% and practitioners of African Traditional Religion are put at 10% (Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2005 in 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 Religion, 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 in the best position to manipulate the figures in favour 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.

The Socio-Political Causes of Conflict in Nigeria(Summary)

a) Land Issue

In the Nigerian state, indigeneity is associated with land ownership. This is not only limited to Nigeria; land ownership is an issue all over Africa. As such, anything that affects the land affects the people and must be resisted by all means. Eme Awa supports this view when he asserted that indigeneity is strong in Nigeria because people are seeing the land as a primary form of property or inheritance in the traditional society and is seen as a form of wealth (Awa, 1985). This accounts for the deep-rooted animosity between the indigenes (land owners) and the settlers (tin miners and traders) in Plateau State. The desire of the settlers to have access to the land at the expense of the indigenes is the major problem in the state. The crisis in Plateau is first and foremost a struggle over land, as majority of Plateau State indigenes are Christians who are tied to land as peasant farmers or workers in the civil service, while the settlers, mainly Muslim minorities, are Hausa dry-season farmers and cattle rearers; while the Igbo, Urhobo and Yoruba are dominating the business life of the state (Danfulani 4). The crisis remains intractable and the dominant Christian (indigene) population in Plateau State is insisting that until the problem is given a constitutional solution, the hospitality of the people of the state should not be abused by settlers, particularly the Hausas who make

outrageous and bogus claims for rights and privileges which do not exist anywhere else in the Federation (4).

b) Political Patronage/Competition

One of the major factors that triggered the indigene/settler crisis in Plateau State is political exclusion. The return to civil rule in 1999 saw the indigenous people using their population to advantage by voting massively for Plateau indigenes, while the settlers are finding it very difficult to occupy positions of authority as a result of their minority status. This is contrary to what obtained under military rule. During that period, the Hausa/Fulani dominated the strategic positions in various military governments and they always used that to their advantage in putting Hausa settlers in Plateau State into positions, against the wishes of the indigenous people. Therefore, the opening up of the political space under civilian rule has been accompanied by intense ethnic competition at all levels in the state. The indigenous elite have consolidated their power and control of the state, excluding the settlers, particularly on the basis of religion and ethnicity (Higizi, 2011).

The creation of Jos North Local Government in 1991 by the Babangida administration was the major issue that sowed the seed of discord between the indigenous people and Hausa/Fulani settlers. The new local government was created to cover the area inhabited by the Hausa-Fulani settlers. It can be said that it was created solely for the Hausa-Fulani settlers. The indigenous population saw this as an affront and a deliberate plot by Northern-Muslim dominating military regime to legitimize and legalize the indigenous status of the Hausa-Fulani settlers. In the real sense of it, it seems this was what was in the mind of the military top brass, since such a thing was not replicated in other areas. For example, in Kano State, there is an area known as Sabon Gari solely inhabited by the settlers'- such as Yorubas, Igbos, etc.; but instead of creating a separate local government, the military government divided the area into different local governments. In such local governments, settlers are in minorities and cannot be seeking to

occupy any major political position. If the creation of a separate local government for the settlers in Plateau State is good, why is it that has not been replicated in other states, particularly the Northern-Muslim States? (National Orientation Agency (NOA) 21).

c) The Nature and Character of the Nigerian State Politics

To situate the phenomenon properly, it is necessary to point out that the current central paradigm of Nigerian politics allows the state to have dominating and unchallenged sole distributive clearing power for economic and political spoils, and as such, Fadakinte (282) asserts that the enormous resources at the disposal of the state accruing from the sale of petroleum resources have led to the intense competition for power, leading to the widespread use of money and armed thugs. The state, as the avenue for the control of decision-making apparatus of political spoils and economic patronage, raises the competition to the level of vicious struggle (Fadakinte, 283). According to a special report by the National Orientation Agency (NOA) (1-15), some of the socio-economic characteristics of the zone which when manipulated negatively prepare the ground for the conflicts and result into the situation at hand presently in the zone include, but not necessarily limited to, the following:

- 1. Over 50% of the ethnic groups in Nigeria are found in the zone.*
- 2. Apart from rich mineral resources, the zone is endowed with massive land and grazing activities (this explains the massive influx of people from other areas, particularly cattle-rearing Fulanis from the North to the zone).*
- 3. In terms of development, the zone is one of the least developed, in spite of the location of the federal capital close to it.*
- 4. The zone has a very large pool of ex-servicemen and it is important to note that majority of these ex-servicemen were disengaged from service at very young ages and have not really been gainfully employed since their retirement (NOA 1-15).*

It is, therefore, worrisome that despite the fact that the people of this zone are known to be hospitable, accommodating and peaceful, how

come they suddenly changed and began to engage in frequent violent inhuman clashes?

d) The Problem of Nigerian Constitution

No doubt, the crisis in Plateau State has opened a renewed debate on the use of the terms “settler” and “indigene”. In the nation’s 1979 Constitution, the phrase “belongs or belonged to a community indigenous of Nigeria” was used in the definition of citizenship (Section 23, Sub Section (1) (a), while the phrase “federal character” also entered the Nigerian Constitution in 1979 to denote a principle of minority group inclusion in the federal government and its affairs (Ostien 2-4). Section 147 (3ii) of the 1999 Constitution also states that “...the President shall appoint at least one Minister from each state, who shall be an indigene of such a state” (FRN, 1999). Subsequently, conflicts persist in Plateau State and Chief Obasanjo Olusegun, in a seminar which the African Leadership Forum (ALF) organized on Conflict Prevention and Management, in his opening speech, stated that:

The concept of settler or non-native syndrome has of recent hardened into a theory of ethnic exclusiveness and molded and propagated to foist a pejorative meaning to advance economic and political control among competing elite groups for interest during democratic regimes.

In Plateau State, among the key flashpoints (areas) where the indigene/settler confrontation has raised and is raising dusts intermittently in Jos are between the indigenous Afizere, Anaguta and Berom against the settler Hausa-Fulani, and the indigenous Wase-Kadarko tribe against indigenous Taroh and Jukun. In Shendam, the Bakin Chiyawa and Saya areas are also witnessing armed rivalry between the indigenous and settler tribes. Accordingly, it applies to and endows a person with full political and civil rights within the context of the modern state. In the history of political community, the question concerning who are settlers and who are indigenes exhibits the fact that the whole argument is within a realm of citizenship. Thus, it remains a fertile ground for exclusion and permanent contestation

(op.cit 2-4). The most significant cause of political and communal violence in Nigeria is the entrenched divisions throughout the country between people considered indigenous to an area and those regarded as mere settlers.

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 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 beliefs motivate and direct their political behaviours (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. For 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, 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. He states that, “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). Although 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 and 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 a 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.

Listed below are some of the phrases used by people who have engaged in dialogue in different schools, corporations, government, non-profit organizations, communities and families:

- a level playing field with respect for all
- a chance to get all our cards up on the table and play with a full deck
- space and pace that allows for all to hear and be heard, recognition and strengthening of relationships
- an exploration of our individual and group assumptions to reveal our thinking and generate new possibilities
- building shared understanding of differing points of view
- ability to hold the tensions of complexity and paradox and see systemic patterns

Dajwan (5-6) defined the concept of dialogue as the conversation between two or more persons of different faiths and belief systems, ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds, norms, philosophy and people of different understandings. He went further to say that the purpose of dialogue is “seeking mutual understanding and harmony”. Again, that it is essentially a process of shared thinking, in the course of which a valuable form of relationship may emerge. He concluded that dialogue encompasses a broader range of activities in which people of different cultures, religions, social, political or professional groups come together and interact. Dialogue is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible. Therefore, dialogue can be seen as the mode of interaction which makes any human life, in any society, worth living example is the Africa value of communality (6).

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, nor 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 for 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 working 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, 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 on 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 umbrellas, 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, 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 of prayer for the nation, the Church also addresses societal ills (1Tim. 2:14). Pike corroborated this fact 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 den, 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 cannot 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 her 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, “The Inseparable Social Trinity: Religion, Morality and Law” II 2003).

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 is 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 a 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 are 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 or individuals in the conflict discuss their experiences of the conflict and devise practical ways of tackling the conflict. It is at workshops 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 of the need for development, promotion of social justice, forgiveness and peace in Nigeria. They should also intimate the leadership of Nigeria of the need to learn to feel the pulse of the nation, to hear the cry of the people, and to react with utmost 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).

They should 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, Christians, that is the Church, are responsible for peace making, while the military are often responsible for 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 warlords 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 attempt to deal constructively with the conflicts in Nigeria must address the roots of conflict, such as ethnic differences, poverty, high unemployment, revenue distribution imbalances, electoral malpractices, corruption and political godfatherism.

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, Church leaders should speak out strongly against the vices and ills of their society. Besides, Church leaders must do all within their power to inculcate in their members and the general public the virtues of peace, honesty, love justice, forgiveness, tolerance and public integrity, and must also see that men/women of proven integrity, honesty and transparent character are placed in public officers (Ekpenyong, 2011:134).

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