

RELIGIOUS APPROACH TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is as old as man. It can be traced from the biblical stories of disobedience and fratricide found in the book of origins down to the present society and it is inevitable. Conflict arises from disagreement and it is a natural phenomenon in human societies just as religion is the worship of super natural being which lives with man. Conflict is man-made and it has been a problem to mankind, if not well managed or resolved, escalates to destruction of lives and properties. It has not helped in the growth and development of any nation but rather it destroys the peaceful co-existence and makes live unbearable. However, dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation among others should serve as tools with which to douse the tension, emanating from conflict. The poor management and resolution of conflicts by Nigerian government has led to crisis in almost all parts of the states which has resulted in calling for restructuring, protest, criminality, agitation by Biafrans and Oduduwa for secession, etc. In Nigeria, we have three major religions, namely; Islamic, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Though among the adherents of these three major religions, conflicts do exists among them but still they play vital role in settlement of disputes in the society. This is done through prayer, consultation, dialogue and fair hearing to both parties involved in the conflict. Without peace, oneness and fairness to all the members that make up the political zones, the country cannot progress positively. The paper examined the non existence of peace, fairness, equality and oneness in the country. Therefore, with the use of comparative phenomenological method of analysis, this paper proved government efforts not good enough and there was need for religious approach in order to significantly reduce the rate of conflicts in the country.

Keywords: Conflict, Religion, Management, Marginalization, Poverty.

Introduction

Conflict has been with man right from time immemorial. No matter how careful or how men avoid it, it must come. Conflict is a phenomenon that is an important part of human existence and a natural part of our daily lives. It is an integral part of human life. It is generally

experienced as human beings find their interest clashing with other groups of people. It is a “state of disagreement between two or more people, groups or people or countries”. According to David (2009), conflict is the pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different groups”. A conflict has the potentials to accelerate or retard the progress and development of a country. Conflict can arise in virtually any social setting, be it between or within individuals, groups, communities, tribes, status or nations. Conflict brings about changes and change also brings conflict and both are inevitable part of life (Abosed etal, 2014). In Africa society, there is a preference ways of peaceful resolution or settlement of disputes prescribed by the institutions and values of the community which is not left out. Violence is always frowned at and in a few instances where it may be tolerated; the community rather than the individual has to be the sanctioning authority (Gaya, 2009). Though some are using violence as a means of settlement of conflicts more especially the clash between herdsmen and farmers, communal clash. The religion or Christianity has an important role to play in settlement of conflict in the society. In traditional means of settlement of dispute or conflict, dialogue is required but when unless on some cases when it fails, comes in. people fear it more because the result is without delay and it can clear the existence of Christian ways is always dialogue or plea, but when it fails to work the next option becomes swearing of the bible which do not normal affect the offender immediately but rather after years. Conflict is not a welcome development as it leads to destruction. In Nigeria there are lots and lots of conflict namely; religious, EndSars#, herdsmen, secession, communal.

Nigeria before now has been managing to live together as one but these days they are facing serious challenges of peace and instability. Nigeria is facing not only Boko Haram and banditry in the north, secession in the southwest, southeast secession and unknown gunmen, communal clashes, Middle belt in Benue and Plateau the Fulani herdsmen. These are mainly caused by ethno-religious conflict and maladministration. Book Haram alone has killed thousands in the North while down East, there is agitation of the Independent People of Biafra. The Boko Haram and insurgence have killed thousands of both Christians and Muslims alike in a bid of institutionalizing Islam and destroying westernization while Fulani herdsmen have killed many more especially those from the Middle Belt. Their plan is not only for open grazing which destroys people’s farm lands but also to establish their colony over there. The South East and the Niger Delta have been agitating for marginalization, this is the major reason behind the Independent people of Biafra have been making moves for secession though westerners have followed suit. Some conflicts are meant to address the effect of marginalization or neglect of a particular zones or groups while others are meant to cushion the effects of aviaries, greed and selfishness of some groups.

The Major Causes of Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria is a place where survival is of the fittest and due to this; so many issues are obvious factors that have led to escalation of conflicts. Such include the following:

1. Land Disputes:

Land is a treasure to the people especially in Igbo land where it is not enough. The importance of land cannot be overemphasized as many needs it for the purposes of settlement (building houses, developments or even for sale. In Nigeria for instance, many people are fighting for land, for instance the Middle Belt like Plateau, Adamawa, Kogi and Benue State etc. There are

not communal clash so to say but between the indigenes and Fulani herdsmen. In recent times, Fulani herdsmen are threat to their lost communities, with numerous killings and memory against their lost communities. It has a lot of effect on the two groups like lost of lives, cattle, lost of harvest and it affects the economy. According to Akinotu (2017) farmers have accused the herdsmen of trespassing on their farmland to graze their cattle, destroying their crops. The type of attack is not new to the people as it takes place periodically. In Plateau and Benue for instance, it has been a sort of custom of Fulani herdsmen which has metamorphosed to bandit to attack on a regular basis. In Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State, four youths were killed, many houses burnt down, including food barns by suspected herders (Vanguard, 2021). This had stirred fears in farmers to the extent that they find it difficult to farm in their fathers land. In Guma Local Government of Benue State for instance, were it has been a reoccurrence, on the 25 April 2021, seventeen persons were killed while several others were injured. Also, in a related development Tiv in Doman Local Government Area, suspected Fulani bandits killed eight persons including women and children (Wantu and Abogonye, 2021). It is by these that Fulani through the federal government intends to get colonies in all the states of the federation to graze their cattle (Nwonu, 2020).

In Ebonyi State for instance, if it is not between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo, it is Alike and Izzi. These land disputes have disastrous and life threatening effects on individuals as well as on groups, communities and even entire nations (Ngwoke, 2019). On the other hand, some communities are fighting over land because of the mineral resources found on the land. A good example is the Niger Delta militants fight because of oil deposits in their land.

2. Marginalization

Marginalization breeds suspicion, disintegration, distrust heightens ethnic tensions and may eventually lead to conflict over sharing of power and national resources and might lead to separation.

Whenever marginalization is mentioned in Nigeria, the picture that appears is the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria or "Ndigbo". The present predicaments of Igbo people can be traced from the Nigeria Biafra civil War of 1967 – 1970 which they planned to secede from Nigeria and have their own independent country called Biafra. After the war, it was declared no victor no vanquished but in the country, they have been made to feel vanquished. It is true that the physical war has ended since but the one invoke is more destructive and dangerous against only the Igbos. Some of the reason behind this marginalization that led to conflicts are the failed government that refused to apply the federal character principle which was enshrine in the constitution of Nigeria. That there should be equitable distribution of positions in the military, police, other security agencies, public service etc (Constitution of the Federal Republic, 1999). The government of the day instead of uniting all, was hell bent on practicing sectionalism There is no equality in the creation of state and local government which favours the Northerners. Among the six political zones in the country, South East has only five states while others have six states (Ezeakukwu, 2019). Imagine that since Nigeria Civil War, Igbos are denied of being the President of this country. He Igbo, in all honesty, without harbouring any animosity against any person or section of Nigeria, have been forward-looking to a time an Igbo blood would be allowed to become President in Nigeria. This is despite the fact that in terms of making sacrifices to build Nigeria, the Igbo have been in the forefront. Imagine Okipe saying openly that the forthcoming 2023 general election is concerned, that the

North has not forgiven Igbo for the death of Bello and as such, the Igbo cannot be President in Nigeria (Onyekakeyah, 2021). It was all these and more hatred and marginalization of the Igbo people that indigenous people of Biafra came into existence. Also the feeling of alienation experience by the Igbos which they believed they have been sidelined from the main stream of Nigerian In south east where the security cars, office, and security agents are being killed nor favour them. Seventy agents are being killed comprising the Police, Navy and Prison Wardens, have been killed by gunmen in the south (Vanguard 2021). It was this marginalization of the Igbo people that degenerated to the conflicts in Biafra states that gave birth to unknown gunmen and Eastern Security Network (ESN). This brought unrest not only to civilians but also to the government security agent and burning of police stations. Also Unknown gunmen burnt down the house of a sitting governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma (Premium Times, 2021).

3. *Creation of Autonomous Communities and Chieftaincy Tussle*

Findings occurring from research has it that those clamoring for unity of Nigeria or that the unity of Nigeria is not negotiable are mainly those politicians that have benefited immensely and are still benefitting majority of their home not taken drastic action to keep Nigerians United.

Many communities are not united due to conflict arising from creation of autonomous communities and mainly on chieftaincy tussle. There are lots of competitions arising from who become the traditional rulers in those affected areas. The contendants see as a do or die affairs due to the salaries and prestige involved. While some kill their opponents through assassins or other means, others bring divisions among the communities. Some even seek redress in court and most of the times the case will linger for years. All these bring retardation of progress and development in the affected areas. In some places, in Nigeria, the kingship is by hereditary, some by appointment while in Igbo land, they struggle over it and these have affected both the unity and the growth of those communities. Actually in Igbo land, they do not have or believe in kingship due to that everybody struggle on his own and do not depend on nobody.

According to (Nwonu 2020) he is of the opinion that:

The government has a role to play to cultural all the atrocities perpetrated in the name of selecting who becomes the traditional ruler of the local communities. This is not the question of any person with the highest bidder. In most cases, contestants who have people in the government of the day are given special treatments. The only panacea for all these problems is for the government to come up with white paper and recommendations for anyone who wants to assume the office as traditional ruler (p. 113).

However, some traditional rulers are dubious to the extent that they divert some development meant for the communities to others due to love of money. In most cases, the government gives the traditional rulers financial grants for development; they will pocket it to the detriment of the communities. Some of them due sell community land to foreigner to other people and pocket the money without the consent of the members of the communities and these have generated a lot of problem which has resulted to death of many.

4. ***Fake news/hate speech:***

Having generated a lot of conflicts not only in Nigeria but also across the globe, fake news/hate speech are sources of cases. Fake news is a means of fabricating non existing ideas or news or giving wrong information about someone or group. Therefore, it can be said that fake news is wrong information that is misleading but presented as genuine. Apuke and Omar in Ugwuanyi (2020) cited example of the fake news in social media of death of President Buhari and the cloned or replaced by a Sudanese called "Jubril" which caused uproar and confusion in the country in 2017.

5. ***Religion:***

One of the most causes of conflict in Nigeria is religion. Christianity, Muslim and African Traditional Religion are the three main religions in Nigeria. Religion is the worship of a supernatural being in which the above mentioned religion believed on. In Nigeria, the religions crisis or conflicts emanates from both Christians and Muslims and anytime it occurs, many lives and property will be wasted. Kaduna state is almost the centre hob or the epicentre ethno-religious conflict. The first crisis was in 1980, following disagreements over farmlands between the indigenous Adara ethnic group and the Hausa Fulani, which resulted to the destruction of hundreds of lives and properties worth billions of naira, another bloody clashes were the 1987 riots at College of Education, Kafanchan, the Zangon Kataf riots of 1992, the Sharia riots; the 2002 Miss World riot, the post presidential election violence in 2011, another occurred in October 2018, in the market that left fifty five persons dead (This Day, 2018).

Moreover, in 2,000 people were killed and thousands displaced in religious violence that spread across the Middle – Belt State of Benue, Plateau, Taraba and Nasarawa. Violence that erupted in Jos, Plateau State which lasted for a week left at least 1,000 people dead and many displace. In 2004, there was a clash between Christians and Fulani herdsmen due to stop and search organized by the army. This triggered riots which led to the death of many churches and mosques were destroyed and above 72 villages were burnt down too (Omotosho, 2014). Furthermore, the ongoing killings and destruction of properties in the North East caused by Boko Haram has affected not only the Christians but also the Muslims even though it is being perpetrated by the Islamic extremists. According to Okoroafor and Ukpabi (2015), he stated that:

In December 2011 Boko Haram bombed St. Theresa's Catholic Church Madalla in Niger State near Abuja, about 48 persons died and over 200 Christians were hospitalized. In 2012, they also bombed three churches in Kaduna and a reprisal attack took place by Christians which many Muslim losted their lives. Also in Kaduna, Shalom Church, Christ the Catholic Church, ECWA etc were bombed and many lives lost (p. 253).

These has happened time without number in the country. On the month of July....., about 32 churches, about 300 homes were burnt down and more than 250 people killed in over a week (Guardian 2015).

6. **Corruption:**

Corruption causes serious conflict in the society. The level of poverty and recession that Nigerians are facing today mainly caused by the high level of looting by the politicians is high. Corruption is the modus operandi in Nigeria politics. Asogwa (2018) viewed corruption as “any act of illegality, immorality and dishonesty, it implies acts of financial and material dishonesty” (p. 112). The illegal and dishonesty way in which our so called leaders have looted the national treasury is alarming and it is affecting everyone. Nwonu in Teshome (2020) explained that:

In Nigeria, corruption has become accepted way of life. The government’s income is generated mostly from natural resources revenues. This income, instead of being used for developing purpose, is then circulated among the political office holders and their families, leaving the rest of the people to wallow in poverty (p. 13).

However, the money meant for development in the country are being looted by those we elected to lead us right and now they are leading votes given to the governors/local government chairmen are enormous and still criminalities are everywhere. The National Assembly members are not left out as their salaries and constituency project given to them runs into billions with nothing to show for it. With these, the poverty rate is going higher by the day and the poor getting poorer. These are the major reasons why there will continue to be conflict or crises in the land as far as mismanagement and embezzlement is not quenched.

7. **Poverty:**

One of the major causes of conflicts in the society is poverty. That many Nigerians are poor today does not mean that they are government inability to manage the resource in a positive way. The government keeps on being redundant in their duty due to the fact that they have come to collect their shares in the national cake instead of making things to be workable for the good of the masses. Government have failed in the area of establishing and manufacturing companies which will help our youths to have gainful employment and even the ones we had has been sold off. According to Asogwa (2020), the prevalent situation of mass poverty in Nigeria is on the poor policies and implementation of government policies, poor management of our natural resources and poor performance of people due to fixing the wrong people in the right position. In most cases, these are caused by government application of favoritism, sectionalism and ethnic chauvinism etc. any government that practice these, causes social conflicts, disunity, unproductivity and frustration in the society.

The Effects of Conflicts in the Society

The effects of conflicts in the society are enormous even though it has both positive and negative dimensions.

Threats to Human Life: The major effect of conflict in any given society is the lost of human lives. Life wasted cannot be brought back to life. Life is sacred and it is only God the creator that has the right to take it when it pleases Him. When a life of a man/woman is lost in the process of conflict and he happens to be the breadwinner of the family, it affects not only the immediate family but the extended families and close friends who depended on him. A good example is the one that took place in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State

where the only son was killed over land tussle (Okose, 2021). When human life is lost, human labour is loss too and it affects production and services in the society.

It affects Food and Security: Herdsmen and farmers conflict in no small measure affect food productivity. In any given any given state where there is clash between the two, farmers are being displaced from the area and the farm land/crops abandon for the fear of attack and it drastically reduced agricultural production (Okoro, 2018). The displacements of farmers in the North and Middle Belt where foods are produced in quantity forms have been one of the major reasons for the price hike of food commodities in country today. According to Duru et al (2018). Farmers, food vendors and residents in the Middle Belt region of the country have raised an alarm of an impending famine and hunger in Nigeria. This was caused due to persistent attack by the insurgents and herdsmen on the farming communities in the region. The farmers in their thousands have fled their home and farms and are taking refuge in Internally Displaced Person's IDPs. All these have caused not only poverty, hunger and unemployment but also affected the economy of the country.

It affects the Economy: Nigeria's economy has been poor for sometimes, but it grew up to this level today due to conflicts in every part of the country. These have affected the economy adversely in the following ways. In area there is conflict, it collapses all the business activities because of the fear of the unknown. It can lead to a decline in income which leads to more citizens falling below the poverty line and make more families getting poorer. Conflicts drive foreign investors away thereby affecting the economy of the country. For example, Borno State which is the strong hold of Boko Haram, no business be it local or foreign is progressing. In the Niger Delta region, the conflict among Niger Delta militant, government and foreign oil producers effect economy as Nigeria government depends mainly on oil.

Religious Approach

Religion is the worship of supernatural being who in order of sequence created the universe through peace and tranquility. While religion can be seen as a causal factor in conflict, it is also considered to be a peace builder in any society. Religion has continued to play an important role in resolving conflicts through dialogue. Dialogue is open conversation, between two or more parties/groups in order to ascertain the standing truth in any matter. In dialogue, every party is entitled to their opinions and religious leaders uses it to ascertain the root cause of the problem, and inquire from them how best the the problem could be solved. Religion as a mediator must be active listener, away of every verbal menace or utterances the parties make as well as a good reader of body language before passing out judgment.

Moreover, Religious leaders and faith-based NGOs have frequently played prominent roles as mediators in conflict management. Due to the respect society accord to religious leaders, they have been able to use their position of authority to work toward build lost hopes for the conflicting parties. A good example is the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) of the Catholic Church which was structured response to the second Vatican council appealing for the church's involvement in the building of a just and peaceful world.

The church does not have all the means to solve conflicts and tensions.
However, we believe that in the midst of violence contexts referred above, the

church should continue to be prophetic, that is an agent of justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. As a prophetic voice the church will be vigilant, outspoken, informed by gospel values and the social teaching of the church. We challenge our theologians to develop a theology of truth and reconciliation through justice and peace.

As a mediator plays an important role in the success of intervention as religious actors have often acted as mediators in conflicts. In most cases, participants in the conflict request faith-based mediators rather than secular ones. The FBOs may use religion mediation strategies to help parties reach an agreement. These could include prayers, mediation, religious rituals, religious vocabulary, values and myths (Bercovitch & Orellana, 2009).

In Jos, Plateau state, after violence in 2001, many organizations participated in or established seminars for peace building and dialogue. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) organized meeting between Christians and Muslims, participated in inter-faith seminars and build dialogue with Muslim counterparts. The Islamic organization Jamatul Nasiru led Christian – Muslim dialogue and participated in all the peace committees organized by government. Religious mixed appeared to have helped build trust between participants. Other strategies included mixed workshops appeared to have helped build trust between participants (Best & Rakodi, 2001).

African Traditional Religion is known for peace, harmony and it serves as a uniting factor in the society. African Traditional Religion through some of its festivals uses it in conflict resolution. A good example in Igbo land is during the new yam festivals. This period is a festive period that everyone is happy and many people come home to celebrate. It is used as a period to settle dispute. Some of these conflicts are settled in families, community or even at shrine which steers fear in them to say the truth or face the consequences of that particular shrine. In Igbo land people are more afraid of swearing with shrine than that of the bible. Moreover, Igbo people use consultation of deities as final arbiters in dispute management or settlement more especially those that could not be settled in the family or in the village assemblies. These cases were usually referred to the courts and institutions of their gods and goddesses which are capable of restoring peace positively among the parties in conflict (Akano and Bamigbhos, 2019).

On the other hand, the Islam also has ways of settling dispute/conflict. Example, in Islamic jurisprudence, the concept of Sulh which includes compromise, settlement or agreement between parties is the oldest practice of dispute resolution. Its purpose is to end hostility and conflict among believers so that they can live in harmony. They try to settle a dispute without the involvement of third party. The strength of Sulh is its flexibility and its process includes negotiation, mediation or reconciliation (Igbal, 2001).

Recommendations

Peace is essential in human life without which, there will be no meaningful progress in the society. Peace should be pursued with every cost for human beings to live in harmony. Every government should go back to the drawing board and look into his way of governance. Sectionalism, marginalization, lopsided appointment should be addressed to avert conflict.

Government should be up and doing when it comes to security of life and property. Playing of politics with human lives cannot do us any good but rather than bad. Government should take prompt action by sending security agencies to the waving zone. Religious leaders should put more efforts on inculcating to their followers about the sanctity of life. That only God has the ultimate power to take life.

Conclusion

All religions are one as all worship a supernatural God. There is no religion that teaches war as all teaches about peace and living in harmony with one another in the society. There must be conflict between one another as conflict lives in every human being but when it result to fighting and killing human being, we are going contrary to the will and dictate of God. By doing the contrary, we are violating the will of God. It's the dictate of God that we should be out brother's keeper meaning that we should accommodate one another and resolve any conflict amicably. Conflicts are better resolved through peaceful protest or dialogue than fighting, killing and destroying of properties which affect not only human lives but also our economy. Nigerians are facing this hard situation in economy was caused by corruption and conflicts. When our money is being looted by bad politicians, maladministration and conflicts all parts of the country, the result therefore is abject poverty.

However, treating some people or a particular religion as the first class and others as second or third class is another way of inciting conflict in the country. With equity, justice and fairness in the country, the story of marginalization, secession, unknown gunmen, and Fulani herdsmen will be a thing of the past.

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