



## THE CHURCH AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

Conflict resolution is a process of resolving a dispute or a conflict by providing each side's needs, and adequately addressing their interest so that they are satisfied with the outcome. Conflict leads to loss of lives and property. This paper was aimed at putting an end to conflict in Nigeria. The method used in this study is Descriptive Phenomenology. The paper identified a person to a person, a person verses group, functional and dysfunctional as the types of conflict. The paper also examines the causes of conflict in Nigeria. After the examination of overt cases of ethno religions conflicts in Nigeria, the study observed that the church through some organizations such as the Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria, the Priest and Religious and from conflict resolution in the Bible e.g Genesis 13:1-18 Matthew 5:9-48, Rom 12: 18 and Samuel 25 has been trying to end conflict in Nigeria. The paper recommends, among others, that the church should educate their adherents on the need to live in peace with others, the church should always be proactive in preaching against conflict and violence and the church should provide employment for the youths.

**Keywords:** Church, Conflict, Resolution and Nigeria.



## **Introduction**

Nigeria is a nation with multifarious tribes, cultures, custom and multi-ethnicities. These differences couple with the population of the country is sources of conflict. This is why Okenyi, (2012) Stated that conflict occur as a result of the differences in belief system, culturalpractices, value system and personal idiosyncrasies.

The entire Universe is faced with conflict. There are conflicts in Europe, American, Asia, Middle East, and Africa where people are more than one there is likelihood of conflict. Conflict could also be found in marriages when there is disagreement between husband and wife or parent and children over a given matter.

Over the years Nigeria has experienced series of conflict resulting from clash in belief system and practice between Christians and Muslims, we have conflict between one brother and another, e.g land disputes, family conflicts and other perilous conflict like the use of thugs and military in Nigeria democracy and the issue of Boko Haram (Aynam, 2004) inter communal clashes and fighting among youths.

Conflict is a major problem in contemporary Nigerian society. Many lives and properties were lost through conflict, it retards the socio political and economic progress of the nation. Conflict lead to insecurity of lives, properties and large scale displacement. This paper therefore discusses causes of conflict, types of conflict and the roles of the church in conflict resolution with the aim of putting an end to conflict in Nigeria. The paper adopted Descriptive Phenomenological method.

## **Contextual Delimitations of Terms**

For better understanding of this paper, it is important to define some of the keywords such as conflict, resolution and church. Conflict according to Ezein Ibenwa (2009) is the expression of disagreement over something important to two individuals, groups, states or nations when they have different views, different goals, different needs and different values and they fight over limited resources to address them. Gotan (2004: 68) defines conflict as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponent are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Conflict, therefore, is a disagreement among people.

Conflict resolution on the other hand is the process of resolving a dispute or a conflict by providing each side's needs by adequately addressing their interest so that they are satisfied with the outcome. Conflict resolution aims to end conflict before the start as lead to physical fighting. When Agreement is reached between the two parties in conflict then conflict is resolved. When the deep –sorted sources of conflict are addressed and behaviour is no longer violent nor attitude hostile while the structure of the



conflict has been changed, it means that conflict has been resolved (Udaya 2010)

The church (Greek Ekkelesia), according to Ononogbu in Adama (2018) is a community of believers whose mandate- is to be the sign of reign of God among men. It is the microcosm of the larger community and closely mirrors its composition. Selyon (2006) defines the church as the people who share the love of Jesus. A divine institution which exists because Christ founded it to continue the work which he began.

Types of conflict

There are several types of conflict in Nigerian Society. According to Udaya (2010) these are:

- A person to person conflict
- A person versus group conflict
- Functional Conflict and
- Dysfunctional Conflict

A person to person conflict is the commonest type of conflict. This is because no person has the same approach in life. This type of conflict occurs when people are at odds over a particular thing such personality, values or loyalty problem.

A person verses group conflict is when an individual disobeys the rules of a group or association. The person who breaks the rule of the group is expected to plead because the rule of the association can't be bent in order to satisfy a person and the group is more powerful than one person.

Functional conflict or constructive conflict is the type of conflict which brings about progress and based on the reason the conflict is justifiable.

Dysfunctional conflict is the type of conflict that does not bring about progress. It only encourages destruction. According to Udaya (2016) this type of conflict occurs because of jealousy or malice.

According to Onyishi (2014) there are two types of conflicts. They are minor conflict and intractable conflict.

Minor conflict, according to Akabogu in Onyishi (2014), is the type of conflict that can lead to growth and development if properly managed and they are the usual problem of everyday living.

Intractable conflict according to Akabogu in Anyishi (2014) are more problematic adurate, unyielding and more deeply rooted than minor conflict. In this type of conflict, Akabogu in Onysishi (2014) stated that emphasis of such intractable moral differences anchor on rigidity of belief, which could be related to religious, cultural and personal values. Such rigidly held views are traits of fundamental groups that are unable to negotiate compromises or engage in genuine dialogue. In such a group or individual, any clash of values is a do or die affair and the conflicts are ethnically judged and viewed as “necessary act of God”.



### **Factors Responsible for Ethno Religious Conflict**

Conflict in Nigeria is caused by many factors, especially in the areas that conflict has been manifesting. Some of these factors are discussed below.

Sentiment is one of the factors that cause conflict in Nigeria politicians use religious sentiments and flimsy excuses to fan hostilities in order to achieve preconceived plans (Udaya 2010). Politicians use religious and ethnic sentiments to win votes to their advantage for example in order to win support of his people and international community the secessionist leader tried to link religion with the crises it was clear that the main issue of the Nigeria civil war was political and economic, the secessionist leader presented it as Hausa Fulani Muslims against the Christians Igbos (Buga in Udaya 2010) Religion is also used to incite people to vote along religious line. For example Buhari called on Muslims to ignore and not to vote for Christians in 2011 election. Christians were not happy with this statement and such statement create favorable condition for ethno religious conflict. Some religious and ethnic groups saw themselves as superior to the other; such superiority complex can cause religious conflict.

Colonialism is another factor. Nigeria is a nation with diverse culture, religion, customs and tribe. Before the amalgamation of these diverse cultures, tribe's religion and custom in 1914 by Lord Lugard, the people lived in peace independently with their system of governance. The colonial government place embargo on the missionary enterprise in the northern emirates. According to Salifu and Adama(2022) the refusal of the colonial government caused a bitter sense of feeling from the missionaries who could not evangelise the North. The missionaries started to play one religious group against the other through ethnic politics, hence the missionaries succeeded in sowing seed of discord and disunity among Nigerians with the method of divided and rule policy, when they discovered the success they encourage the land and native right ordinance of 1910 which was aimed at separating the northern ethnic groups from the Southern counterpart. These encourage ethno religious conflict.

Poverty is another cause of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. Poverty can lead to killing and wanton destruction of properties. The poor are exposed to hunger daily. Because of this their condition the wealthy people offer the poor heavy money or food or cloth and when they are told to go and cause problem they will compromise. This is why Salifu and Adama (2022) stated that "this poor condition frequently caused religious fanaticism in Nigeria" (p. 10).

Unemployment is another factor that causes ethno-religious conflict. The government of Nigeria does not create job opportunities for the educated youths. Many idle educated youths are used by selfish rich people as tools to propagate violence against the interest of the nation for their personal gain.



Idle minds are the devil workshop and because of idleness this expose them to violent dictate.

Ignorance is another factor. The various religious adherents are ignorant of the teaching of the various ethnic and religious beliefs. Those who live in ignorance will not even try to get clarification on controversial issues before acting. The manipulation and exhibition of ignorance often leads to violent confrontations and manipulative tendencies in attempt to resolve simple matter that borders on misconception pertaining to religious or ethnic difference (Udaya, 2010). Ignorance is disease as in most cases as the real actors during crisis could not justify the reason why they are involved.

### **Cases of Ethnic Religious Conflicts in Nigeria**

S/ N	YEA R	STATE	INCIDENT	CONSEQUENCES
1.	2022	Adamawa	Dumo ethnic crisis	10 civilians and 8 policemen died in the incidence
2.	2003	Adamawa	Dumo Ethnic Religious crisis	Mosques, Church, private and public buildings were set ablaze.
3.	2001	Bauchi	Ethnic Religious Conflict	No define number killed
4.	2001	Bauchi	Sheria conflict	Many people lost their lives and many properties were destroyed.
5.	2001	Benue	Massacre in ZakiBiam	6 solders died and 19 kidnapped. A number of civilians died and properties worth millions of niria destroyed.
6.	2002	Benue	TivJukur conflict	Many lives were lost
7.	2002	Benue	Otukpo political conflict	Armed men were killed.
8.	2004	Benue	Political conflict in Kwande	100 person killed and also 100 person displace
9.	2000	Bornu	Biu ethno religious conflict	Properties worth 100 millionsof naira was destroyed.
10.	2000	Gombe	Book launchethno religious crisis	Christians property was destroyed.
11.	2004	Kebbi	Ethno religious conflict in Jega town	2 people died several wounded and property worth millions destroyed.
12.	2001	Kogi	Idozi and Idozimi inter communal conflict	80 people died and property worth millions of naira destroyed.
13.	2002	Kogi	Local government creation conflict	Police vehicle burnt, 5 people killed and property destroyed.
14.	2004	Kogi	KabbaBunuwater communal conflict	Property worth over 50 million destroyed and many lives were lost.
15.	2000	Kwara	Police clash with civilian	Many suffered bullet wounds.
16.	2001	Nasarawa	AzaraTiv conflict	Several people died.
17.	2001	Nasarawa	Tiv militia attack on Agawanshaki	2 people died 20 women and children injured.
18.	2000	Niger	Emir of Suleja conflict	Feed people injured.
19.	1996	Ekiti	Osobo Muslim youth and member of GwariMarahaja	The mandated the palace to prevent the visit.
20.	1992	Kaduna	Disagreement between Christians Kataf and Muslim Zango	Over sixty people were killed and property worth 2 million naira was destroyed. These include residential houses and farm land.
21.	2006	Anambara	Repriaisal attack by the Igbos on the Hausa indigence as result of	Over 50 people died in Maduguri and over 30 churches were burnt.



			killing innocent citizens over the guise of protecting against the publication of prophet Muhammed in Danish paper.	
22.	1991, 1995	Bauchi	Crisis between the natives	The crisis was between of sayawa and hausa Fulani settle's the cases was as a result of sayawa domination as a result of the feeling of domination and intimidations of sayawa by the Hausa Fulani

Sources: Akparu- Aja 2009 &Nwosu, 1996.

### **The Role of the Church in Conflict Resolution in Nigeria**

From time immemorial church has played a significant role in conflict resolution in Nigeria. In the Bible, Abraham in his fatherly spirit was sensitive to detect the strife between his herdsmen and Lot's. He quickly called Lot for peace dialogue. In order to achieve peace, he humbled himself and he had not hold on to his Ego. Status, prestige and his position as an elder but humbles himself to achieve peace. Abraham's attitude remains a model and challenging to contemporary Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. If these two groups resort to dialogue the matter of conflict will be forgotten (Okenyi 2012).

Bishop and priest have taken great personal risk to try to resolve long standing conflict by facilitating peace negotiations at the national and local levels. For example, in strike action embark upon by Enugu State government and Enugu state University of Science and Technology, according toonyishi, (2014) Onaga of Catholic Diocese of Enugu mediated between them and saw to a peaceful resolution to strike action that lasted for almost a year.

Provision of basic amenities is one of the basic roles of the church in conflict resolution. The church has been in the forefront in the provision of basic amenities for the needy. The presence of Mission Schools and Hospitals in all parts of the country are good testimonies. The Catholic Church is involved in farm where crops and animals are produced. This also creates job opportunities for the unemployed youths. Drilling of bore holes is also a good example. Example is the drilling of bore hole in Awo Akpali in Ankpa LGA.

The church as part of Christian body has a lot to do in the resolution of conflict in contemporary Nigeria. In view of the above, Kukah in Udaya (2010) observes that.

*The church, more than any other organization, has a lot to offer in the area of conflict management. This is because the adherents of Christ teachings know that Christ was never violent even in face of attacks and provocations. He always believed in dialogue and spirituality. It is important for us to remember the Sermon on the Mount and other areas in the Bible (P23).*



From the above expression, people who attend religious programme can easily be influence by Christian teaching and doctrines in conflict resolution. In the gospel according to Mathew 5:9\_48 Jesus stated that blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called sons of God. This shows that God wants peace and for man, there is need to apply anything humanly possible to have peace. Also, in Roman 12:18, 1cor. 7:15, 14:33,2 St Paul said strive as much as possible to live in peace with all men. To Paul peace is better than war and situation of conflict, peace become farfetched but God infinite love, wants people to be against rancor and bitterness. Roman 12:18 emphasis living in peace with another. This implies that peace is needed for people and when there is peace resolution of conflict will be easy.

In 1Samuel 25 Nabals attracted the wrath of king David and this made king David to prepare his men against him. When Abigail, Nabal's wife got the news of David's plan, she gathered gift materials and went to meet King David. She prostrated herself at the feet of King David. She apologized for her husband's rudeness and begged David to accept gifts she came with, thereby resolving conflict (our Christian heritage in Ogiri 2012).

### **Recommendations**

From the discussion above, the following recommendations are put forward.

- The Church should educate their adherents on the need to live in peace with others.
- Christians and Muslims should imbibe the spirit of selflessness, faith, caring and humility and to ensure mutual relationship.
- The Church should always be proactive in preaching against conflict and violence.
- Political leader should adopt dialogue as means of resolving conflict in Nigeria.
- The Church should provide employment opportunities for the youths. This will reduce conflict and violence in the society.

### **Conclusion**

The paper discusses meaning of conflict and conflict resolution. It went further to discuss types, causes and overt cases of Conflict in Nigeria. Christians have to live a Christ - like life which is embedded in the teaching of Christ on forgiveness, peace and harmonious relationship among people. People should approach conflict with affection, humility, selflessness and consideration and call for dialogue.



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