

Enhancing Peaceful Co-Existence through Christian Education

Stephen Agada Alfa

Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education,
Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study examines how Christian education can be used as a catalyst for resolving and preventing religious conflicts thereby enhancing peaceful co-existence. It aimed at pointing out some of the factors that enhances peaceful co-existence as well as threats to peaceful co-existence in the society. Furthermore, Christian education is an instrument “per excellence” for effective national peace and security in any nation. However, it is important to stress that Christian education takes place both in formal and informal settings where people are taught the principles of peace and security. The realization of the importance of peace and security is also crucial to national development. Thus, as part of the five main national goals of the National Policy on Education, emphasis is laid on religious education given to all citizens. This type of education is imparted to achieve national peace and security in the society. The research went further to reveal that Nigerian National Policy on Education emphasized that Christian religious education should include practicing what is preached, creating fear of God, commitment and dedication in the citizens. In the recommendation, religious leaders are to ensure that religious education should be void of preaching violence and disunity, which are common features of most religious groups today, rather, religious education, whether Christian, Muslim or traditional should be centered on the teaching of honesty, fair play, justice, love, unity and contentment which are all actual virtues of peace and security. There are many children in Nigeria who are not opportune to obtain religious education that could also stress the importance of peace, conformity and believe by ignoring differences within their religious backgrounds. As the children grow, they must clearly understand their full role in the sustenance of peace and national development. It was concluded by saying that Christian religious educators can tailor the teaching of national peace and security into their curricular. Thus, the teaching of subjects like “peace studies and conflict resolution”, have a religious education background. The efforts of preventing conflicts cannot be realized if political office holders do not imbibe the basic concept of religious leadership, which is to maintain national peace and security. The political office holders should therefore endeavour to follow instructions given by the religious leaders in order to maintain peace.

Keywords: Peaceful, Coexistence, Christian, Education.

Correspondence to: Stephen Agada Alfa, e-mail: stephenalfa4@gmail.com

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Introduction

Peaceful co-existence is an indispensable ingredient that helps in the promotion of growth and development in a society. Peace is very essential for the progress of every society. Abindu (2002) underlined that the need for peaceful co-existence and conflict prevention movement in the society, start from the home with the examination of how children socialize and how they are indoctrinated. Peace is the actions that build bridges across social barrier, create harmony and promote peaceful co-existence and development. Peace promote social; and economic stability and so development will follow naturally, and that peaceful co-existence promotes freedom of worship of different religious groups, and creates room for the spread of one's faith. Daudu (2005), added that where there is peaceful co-existence, there is integration among people of different religions and tribal backgrounds. Peace in the society bring about good management which help in doing efficient work and promote the best use of resources.

The persistent conflict in Kaduna State has affected all spheres of lives, education, economic, social and otherwise. School children and the teachers are massacred, school buildings were burnt down, churches and Mosques were also set a blaze. The generations of children are growing up in an environment that is characterized with extreme violence and fear. Tank (2008), described the present situation in the area as an uneasy calm, or negative peace where the youths have become a depot from which to recruit merchants who unleash mayhem in the society. Hence the need to catch them young through Christian Religion Education and mold their character positively.

Christian education, be it primary, secondary, tertiary institutions, seminaries and theological colleges exposes students to principles of dialogue. Imo (1995) added that, apart from teaching courses that deal with dialogue, students study Islam and other world religions as part of their syllabi. This would help them respect other people's faith hence live in peace with one another. However, the teachings of Christian education have been given the barest minimum of time allocation on the school time table. Also, very little emphasis has been placed on teachers professional training in Christian Religion education, largely as a result of them is guided belief that anyone can teach Christian religion Education, (Ishaya, 2007). Illori (2004) said the possession of training specifically in Religion education is a first priority in the mind of appointing authorities. As a result, religion education has been taught in secondary schools over the years largely by teachers who have been either untrained or only partially trained in the subject.

Mamam (2007), in his view, explains that the need for peace cuts across tribal, ethnic, political and cultural lines. Therefore, Christian education often is the bridge that connects peace to people from different backgrounds and orientations. It is the source of unity for uniting and bringing people together to form a good community of believers.

Christian education teaches peace and tolerance, and it promote the virtue of peaceful co-existence such as, forgiveness, reconciliation, love, respect for life and other values that promote non-violence leading to progress and lasting peace in the school. Christian Religion education has always been a tool for peace building, because we all believe in the existence of God. The political uncertainty, conflicts and turbulence in Nigeria poses serious concerns for the citizens and noncitizens in the region. However, "Nigeria remains handicapped by political malpractice, deep economic contradictions, social inequality and a considerable potential for violence due to the politicization of identity" (International Crisis Group, 2006a) characterized by religious, ethnic and communal conflicts, insecurity, organized crime, human rights violations among others. Between 1999 till date, Nigeria experienced critical events that undermined her coexistence.

Conflict is a dynamic phenomenon, which consists of five stages: initiation, escalation, controlled maintenance, abatement, and termination/resolution (Sandole 1993). In recent decades, Church leaders have frequently made statements in support of peace. In some cases, these statements have been specific

appeals for peace in particular circumstances, however, on other occasions they have also published more comprehensive statements on the need for peace and the means of achieving it. The teaching of Christianity which is guided by the dictates of the bible (word of God) has constantly encourages the members to ensure peace and harmony in the society.

Moreover, there has been increased cases of disruption to peace and harmony in Nigeria today, despite the church's tireless efforts to sustain peace as demonstrated by Jesus Christ. The church has always taught the members on the act of non-retaliation as taught by Jesus which helps to absorb violence instead of escalating it. Hence, every cycle of violence provoking revenge, which in turn provokes more violence is broken by the simple act of tolerating the violence and avoiding retaliation. Religious crisis, cultural or ethnic conflicts, political agitations arising from the feeling of marginalization, tribal or ethnic politicking whose result is always negative and anti-unity. Kidnap activities across the country, bandits' attacks on officers and the Fulani herdsmen brutality have become a reoccurring security challenge in Nigeria. Recently, the Nigerian Defense Academy (NDA) and many police stations were overpowered by "unknown gunmen" who kidnapped and killed officers on duty in the country. Notwithstanding all these insecurity challenges, every human being treasures and values security, without which there cannot be unity, peaceful co-existence, development, Unity and Progress. Hence there is need for Christian education to enhance peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

Communities in Nigeria have been bedeviled by numerous development challenges including: severe economic, political and social crises, decline in the standard of education, moral and infrastructural decay, cultural crisis predicated on the fact that traditional values in the people's cultures have been heavily impacted by materialism, science and technology and ideologies. Health facilities are in total decay. All these problems call to question the role of the Church in still contributing to the provision of needed succor in these problem areas. In view of these problems and issues, the big question is the relevance of the Church in the present situation. Since relevance is an important feature of any meaningful phenomenon, event or institution, especially in the sphere of human life, the Church's role in the solution of problems in the 21st century Nigerian society may be definitive in the justification of its existence among the Nigerian people. Moving from the great signs of vitality and great contributions of the Church to community development since the advent of the early missionaries to Eastern Nigeria, this work will look at the role of the Church in Nigeria today and set how it can help address itself to several problems of poverty and other social problems facing the people and see how it can further join the government and other stakeholders in bringing sustainable development among the people for which it was a source of hope in the past.

The Concept of Christian Education

Christian

The word Christianity etymologically comes from the Greek word 'Christos; meaning "follower of Christ" and anointed one". It is used three times in the New Testament of the Bible (Acts 11:26, 1 Peter 4:16). The Bible tells us "It was in Antioch of Syria that the followers of Jesus were first called "Christian". The question that borders the mind of the reader, which the researcher considers in this definition process, is 'who is a Christian? The answer to this question can be formulated only in a cumulative fashion. Thus, a Christian is a social human person in whom God is present in grace but who is at the same time, prone to act against the divine preference and belief in Jesus Christ or follows the religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Anole added that a Christian is a person who adheres to Christianity and Abraham, monotheistic religion based on the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, whose Christian belief is the Messiah. Okoro (2010) opines that a Christian is a particular kind of human being, not in the sense that a Christian has a

different biological or psychic structure, but in the sense that a Christian has moved to a different level of human consciousness. Anih (2010) equally state that a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ, that a person who believes and practice the tents of the Christian faith in the holy scripture (Bible). However, in the context of this study, a Christian is referred to as students who practice Christianity and learn it in school as one of a religion in the works. Religion in the other way has been heated with lots of debate about the meaning and its practices in human society. Its etymology can help to define the concept. Religion is derived from the latin noun 'Religio'. But with some ambiguities aring from these different verbs that are allied with the noun – 'Religion' (to turn constantly" or to observe conscientiously") 'Religari [to bind on self] (back) and Religere' ('To choose again') (Okoro, 2010). Each of these verbs accotding to Okoro points to three possible religious attitudes. Though it ois clear from which verb the noun is derived, each of the verbs is consistent with the view that rreligion "A Relation to God". McBrien in Okoro (2010) says that religion thus has to do with the whole human existence, and not merely with some special sector of it. He further stress that religion is the whole complex of attitudes, convictions, emotions, gesturesm, rituals, beliefs and institutions by which we come to terms with and express our most fundamental relationship with reality (God and the created order, perceivedas coming from gods creative hand). Religion therefore, presupposes and flows from faith. It is an individual social and institutional manifestation of some implicit faith in God. Religion not only has to do with the impact of the holy upon us, but with human responses to the holy as well. From this thought there is no doubt on the saying that a religion without the element of the divine is like a house without foundation.

Religion

Religion is a medium through which man unites himself with God in worship, adoration and service. Anih (2010) maintained that religion refers to both personal practices related to communication stemming from shared convictin. It is often described as a communal system for the coherence of belief focusing on system that is considered to reverence for a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator or governor of the universe. Religion therefore, has to do with the whole of human existence, and not merely with some special sector of it. In the context of this study, religion is conceived as the belief in the teaching of Jesus Christ such as love, provision, protection, leadership and the nature of heavenly kingdom among other which help people to live peacefully and harmoniously in the society.

Education

To an average layman or the non-professional, education means formal schooling or learning of some sort, which is rather a facile or superficial understanding. For the expert, however, the definition of education is much more difficult and complicated. The problems of the various definitions are not really our concerns here, but a detailed exposition of some of them. The one definition which most scholars would endorse is that education is a transmission of knowledge, worthwhile skills, values, belief etc of a culture

In this brief conception, the mode of transmission whether by formal schooling (elementary, secondary or tertiary institutions) or by particular social agencies (family, church, state) is of no great significance. But, the purpose is namely, preservation of culture, which indeed means the preservation of a people and their history.

When most people talk about the education of their children, they almost invariably refer to the learning in school, which culminates in the acquisition of certificates. They tend to equate education to mere reading and passing examinations. A school child who fails the primary school learning certificate examination and the secondary school learning certificate examination which would enable him to gain admission into the university, is hardly said to be educated.

However, specifically speaking, the word education came etymologically from two Latin words Educere and Educare. The former, meaning to form or train, denoted the act of teaching. In this case, the young are left in the hands of the adult to impart on them whatever knowledge they deem fit for acquisition. The latter, that is, Educare means to lead out or to draw out and is similar in nature to bringing up. This shows that education is much more comprehensive than the mere process of learning to read and write and acquiring certificates in one field of specialization or another. It goes much deeper. It is concerned with the growth of habits and life style that makes a man what he is.

We can therefore say that; this conception of education is associated with formalistic viewpoint that the child should be left to develop on his own uninfluenced by any agent. This process of drawing out or leading out makes education greater than schooling. Schooling here refers to formal institutions, where activities are systematically organized in order to induce learning.

Given the above understanding, education has been defined in various ways by several authorities. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines it as the “systematic training and instruction of people; and that it involves acquiring knowledge and abilities from such training. Krishnamurti J. (1978) goes on to define education as that which bring about an integrated individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole. According to him also the dominating purpose of education is the development of moral qualities. Education in the true sense, he holds, is helping the individual to be mature and free, to flower greatly in love and goodness.

Christian Education

Christian education is an aspect of learning that deals with inculcating in the students' certain element of education intellectual theory and practices of Christ as contained in the holy bible. Eluu (2011) defines Christian education as the education for the development of spiritual, moral and mental, growth of students in essence, christian religion education is expected to give children an understanding of the universe and the interpersonal relationship between human beings and the supreme beings. Ugwu (2001) opines that Christian Religious Studies is a type of religious studies that bases its teachings in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, Ali and Akubue in John (2009) observe that Christian Religious Studies is a subject which aims at developing and fostering in the lives of the students' Christian attitudes and values such as respect for life, obedient to constituted authority, responsible self, selfless services to God and humanity. They further said that Christian religious education study is an academic discipline that is designed to provide the learner with moral and spiritual transformation. In the context of this study, the researcher viewed Christian Religious Studies as a Social Science subject that teaches students good moral behavior, fearing of god, knowledge and skills that will make them to contribute their quota in socio-economic, political and moral development in Senior Secondary Schools in Nigeria.

The introduction of Christian Religious Studies in school curriculum is not a new thing. During the missionary administration of schools, Christian Religious Studies was given a priority in the school curriculum because of its moral values. Following the government take-over of schools, Nigeria Secondary School & tertiary curriculum was reviewed and more emphasis was placed on the studies of science and technological subjects who invariably affected the growth of the discipline (Njoku, 2009) in Nigeria, many Secondary Schools equate Bible studies or “Religious education” lessons with moral education. The nation curriculum of Religious Studies in Secondary Schools approved by the Nigerian educational research and development council (Nerdc) through Universal Basic Education programmers (UBE) (2013) and the Federal Ministry of Education recognized the need for be sound citizen who will be responsive and responsible to national calling. The curriculum covers the introduction of Christian Religious Studies; man,

and his relation to God, historical activities of prophets, teaching of Christ and Apostles, significance of birth of Jesus Christ, death and resurrection of Christ, Holy Spirit, Acts of Apostles, Jews and Gentiles.

The Concept of peaceful Co-existence

Peace

Literally, the word peace is derived from the original Latin word “pax”, which means a pact, a control or an agreement to end war or any dispute and conflict between two people, two nations or two antagonistic groups of people ((New York: New market Press, 1995, p. 16). According to the definitions or the explanations of Wikipedia encyclopedia, peace can be a state of harmony or the absence of hostility. "Peace" can also be a non-violent way of life. "Peace" is used to describe the cessation of violent conflict. Peace can mean a state of quiet or tranquility an absence of disturbance or agitation. Peace can also describe a relationship between any people characterized by respect, justice and goodwill. Peace can describe calmness, serenity, and silence. This latter understanding of peace can also pertain to an individual's sense of himself or herself, as to be "at peace" with one's own mind (Longman Dictionary, 2006, p. 1281).

The meanings of peace and harmony in accordance with the peace scholars, obviously, are same in some point and different in another point depending on their personal views. Peace and harmony is the state prevailing during the absence of war, harmonious relations; freedom from disputes, the absence of mental stress or anxiety, the general security of public places, and a treaty to cease hostilities.

According to (Johan, 1995), Norwegian peace scholar, the term peace and violence are linked. Peace is the absence of violence and should be used as the social goal.

Harmony has many different meanings. If it is applied in music, a pleasant sound can be heard. Harmony is all about finding the right balance in different situations in order to obtain peace and happiness. In religion harmony mean the harmonious and common development within and between individual religions as well as between the religious community and the larger society which is realized through the dialogue-generated enhancement of mutual understanding and empathy and the sharing of the common responsibilities of peace and justice on the precondition of recognizing religious diversity and differences. Within a religion, it is important to approach issues of faith and doctrine with tolerance, and enhance coordination and cooperation between different denominations.

Peaceful co-existence

Peaceful co-existence refers to a situation where people of different races, religions, cultures /traditions and value systems live peacefully together in the same place and at the same time. It is a situation in which, for example, the French, the German, English, Spanish, Swahili, Zulu and Aramaic (Hebrew speaking people) live successfully side by side. Coming nearer home, Nigeria with well over 250 ethnic nationalities, language, traditions and cultures is a typical example of co-existence of people of diverse ethnic groups and languages living together in a particular geographical area under one sovereign government.

Christian Education and the Promotion of Peace

Numerous individuals and corporate bodies are involved in peace making. However, the most fundamental way in which the Church promotes peace and conflict resolution is by preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a Gospel of love for others, of humility, of justice, of reconciliation and of service (Arinze, 2003: 110). In particular, over the past half century the Church has evolved into a religious institution at the forefront of the struggle to promote peace and justice based on the dignity of the human person (Fetzko, 2006). This

institutional pre-occupation with peace making is rooted in the modern Catholic social teaching planted in Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical entitled *Rerum Novarum* which strongly articulated Catholic notions of peace and justice grounded in human rights and the common good. Its mature germination is however, in the 20th century Second Vatican Council (Fetzko, 2006) which reiterated and made contemporary the Church's perennial teaching on peace and justice. For Drew Christiansen, John XXIII's Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* was instrumental in shaping the Church's current peace orientation (Christiansen, 2001: 3). The encyclical illuminated the Church's evolving, expansive understanding of peace, basing the Catholic vision in four elements identified by Christiansen as human rights, development, solidarity and world order (Ibid). But among these pillars the foremost is the protection of human rights as John XXIII noted in that encyclical: Any well-regulated and productive association of men [and women] in society demands the acceptance of one fundamental principle that each individual is truly a person. His is a nature that is endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties which flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable (John XXIII, 1963: 9). John XXIII was the pope that called for Vatican II Council with the aim of "opening the window." His all-inclusive vision of the Church's mission that involves collaboration between the hierarchy and the other Christ's faithful showed itself also in his Catholic vision of peace building. Hence his call to help realize "peace on the earth among mankind" (John XXIII, 1963: 1) was extended to all Catholics, not only the leader of the hierarchy. This was consistent with Vatican II's more inclusive understanding of the Church, which encouraged collaborative ministry: Hence among the very serious obligations incumbent upon men [and women] of high principle, we must include the task of establishing new relationships in human society, the mastery and guidance of truth, justice, charity and freedom – relations between individual citizens and their respective states, between states, and finally between individuals, families, intermediate associations and states on the one hand, and the world community on the other. There is surely no one who will not consider this a most exalted task, for it is one which is able to bring about true peace in accordance with divinely established order (John XXIII, 1963: 163). The papacy of John XXIII and the Vatican II are the high points of Catholic peace building efforts based on the protection of the fundamental human rights. The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* reaffirms the peace making principles laid down in the previous encyclicals, notably in John XXIII's *Mater et magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*. It takes a clear stand on the matter of war and especially of total warfare and proffers directives on attaining a lasting peace (Neuner and Dupuis, 2001: 992). It has been termed "the most authoritative Church's social document (Uwalaka, 1995: 97). The document recognizing man's innate desire for "a truly human world" outlined the true and noble nature of peace, condemned "the savagery of war" and exhorted Christians to cooperate with all in securing a peace based on justice and charity and in promoting the means necessary to attain it under the help of Christ, author of peace (GS, 77) on the nature of peace the Council, in this same document, states that "peace is more than the absence of war: it cannot be reduced to the maintenance of a balance of power between opposing forces nor does it arise out of despotic dominion; but it is appropriately called the effect of righteousness (Is 32:27). It is the fruit of that right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be actualized by men thirsting after an ever more perfect reign of justice" (GS, 78). As a commentary on the Council the Catechism of the Catholic Church (art 23: 17) states that "injustice, excessive economic or social inequalities, envy, distrust and pride raging among men and nations constantly threaten peace and cause wars. Everything done to overcome these disorders contributes to building peace and avoiding wars.

- **Inter-Religious Dialogue**

According to Usman (2012) the word dialogue ordinarily means formal discussion between two people, or two groups. In the context of religious studies, dialogue means “formal discussion between two people of different religious faiths” (Ayantayo, 2002:2) it refers to inter-religious discussion aimed at resolving differences or disagreements. Religious dialogue is a process of conversation which aims at bringing about mutual understanding between people of different religious faith or opposing religions.

Dialogue is a word that is often misunderstood and, in some cases, even held suspect. This is so because there are those who see it as one of those tricks used to seduce someone into accepting the faith position of the dialogue partner. This is far from what dialogue is all about. In every simple term, dialogue is all about “You talk, I listen, I talk, and you listen.” The purpose of dialogue is attempting or trying to understand one another with a view to dissolving suspicious and prejudices and thus, paving the way for collaboration and mutual respect.

We must note that dialogue is not an easy exercise. One of the major problems with dialogue has to do with language and communication. Whereas we sometimes find ourselves using the same words, we often mean different things and thus we sometimes speak without communicating. Words such as prophet, revelation, and inspiration of the Scripture, are sometimes grossly misunderstood by others and we have therefore tended to judge and misjudge others on the basis of our understanding of some of these key religious concepts. Dialogue is therefore the way to mutual understanding. Having said this let me try to explain inter-religious dialogue.

- **National Unity**

According to Okam (2017) National unity refers to the feeling of oneness amongst different people belonging to the same country or nation. For example, the feelings of the different ethnic groups for religious groups in Nigeria that they are one as Nigerians, express national unity. National unity also refers to the People's willingness to live and work together in spite of their differences.

Nigeria is a country with very many ethnic, cultural and religious groups. They speak different languages and have different customs and traditions. National unity requires that these differences do not prevent us from living and working together to achieve our common goals.

- **Ecumenism**

The word ‘ecumenism’, according to Kato (1975:129), is the Anglo-Saxon transliteration of the Greek word Oikumene, which means “the inhabited earth”. From this root meaning, “ecumenism: comes to be used for” any gathering with a wide geographical representation”. This explains why some early church councils were tagged “Ecumenical councils”. The recent usage of the word “ecumenism” carried the technical meaning of an attempt to foster unity among Christians through formation of associations or unions that bring many churches or Christian bodies under one umbrella name. It has Christian brotherhood as its focus. Thus, ecumenism may refer to any organization or movement that aims at bringing together different Christian denominations. It is a drive for “Christian unity which envisage bringing all churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, under one ecclesiastical tent” (Lowell, 1969, cited by Kato 1975:130). It embraces initiatives and activities organized to encourage and promote Christian unity.

Modern ecumenical movements, unlike early ecumenical councils that discussed doctrinal issues, stressed service. It is contended that “doctrines divide but service unites”. Thus, modern ecumenism stresses unity in diversity. As Oshitelu (2000) observed, the word ecumenical in earliest time “denotes those things on which all Christians were agreed”, but that in modern times, and arising for a more visible unity among Christians, “ecumenical” has come to refer to a “movement which strives for a visible unity of all Christians throughout the world” (P.66).

Furthermore, according to Oyalana (2000:83) Oikoumene (ecumenism) has come to be used in modern times to refer to “the worldwide scope of the church’s fellowship explains that it “expresses the nature of the modern movement of the church, which aims at co-operation and unity”. In this understanding it may be seen that ecumenism seeks to preserve the “fundamental unity and universality of the church of Christ”, (Oyalana, 2000:83).

. Reconciliation

The role of the church in peacemaking and reconciliation is strengthened by the fact that the social and political crisis in the society questions radically the message of the gospel. The church’s initiatives for reconciliation were anchored on the concept that peace is the tranquility that flows from right order. When we put right order into the structures of our society, the tranquility that results are peace. Many people, however, perceive peace as the absence of war or violence Burton, (1997). In this model, peace is seen as the transformation of contextual and destructive interactions into more co-operative and constructive existence.

The Church’s charisma and likewise her unique nature vis-à-vis reconciliation, at whatever level it needs to be achieved, lies in the fact that she always goes back to that reconciliation at the source. For by reason of her essential mission, the Church feels an obligation to go to the roots of the conflict, in order to bring healing and to re-establish, so to speak, an equally original reconciliation which will be the effective principle of all true reconciliation. Therefore, the Church has the mission of proclaiming this reconciliation Kelman, (2008). In the context of the change now taking place on the continent, the church has a role to play in reducing or eliminating all together the root causes of simmering or open conflicts and effecting true peace. One way of effecting true peace is by becoming agents of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

It is evident to note the characteristics and skills of a successful mediator in conflict situations, in our case, the church. Indeed, the church has impartiality regarding issues of dispute; it commands respect of and is acceptable to all protagonists; it has the knowledge and skill to deal out with challenging issues of conflict. These characteristics informed this study in its pursuit of structuring the complementary approach Magesa, (1996). Being a widely discussed issue in the area, we will also specifically address the question of forgiveness before we arrive at our definition of reconciliation. In the field of reconciliation there are diverse views as to whether forgiveness is part of reconciliation or not. According to the literature covered in the present study, all scholars writing from a theological perspective do include forgiveness in the process of reconciliation Kelman, H. (2008).

Reconciliation is here sometimes seen as part of an overarching forgiveness reconciliation in this case referring to restored relations in behavior and forgiveness to a deeper transformation based on God having forgiven mankind and that we can extend forgiveness to others. Within the framework of reconciliation, “forgiveness is at the heart of reconciliation” (Scheper, 2002).

Assefas adhere to the religious perspective, including forgiveness as a crucial step in the path toward reconciliation, while forgiveness must be separated from reconciliation. Those who wish to separate forgiveness and reconciliation argue inter alia that the two involve very different actions; forgiveness requires an emotional transformation in the individual victim but no change in the perpetrator and may result in forgetting, whereas reconciliation builds on a mutual undertaking and commitment from both sides to acknowledge the past and build more constructive relationships for the future. This implies that some deeds may for the individual survivor be unforgivable and that it is critical that survivors are never implicitly or explicitly expected to forgive but that they still may want to reconcile for the sake of creating peace for future generations.

Threats to Peaceful Co-existence

Conflicts

A conflict is a situation between two or more people in which one person perceives that another person has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect his or her life, (Holmes, 2010: p. 8). This definition contains three elements, all of which must be present in order for a conflict to exist. First, there is a specific perception on the part of one or more of the people involved in the conflict, whether the perception is accurate or inaccurate, it is held by the conflicting parties. Second, the perception is generally negative. One party believes the other is going to do something of negative effect directly or indirectly. Finally, the issue surrounding the conflict must be something both parties care about. Conflict is also seen, as a strain in a relationship that goes with emotion. The higher the emotion, the higher the tendency of evolving conflict intensity (Aja Akpuru Aja, 2007: p. 12). Hence, to many scholars, conflict is inevitable in social life process; for conflict occurs even in the best of human societies, (Sani Shehu, 2007: p. 12). Thus, we find conflict graduating into such phases like early conflict indicators, conflict resistance, explosive or exhaustive conflict and the most deadly spiral and the highest level of violence. Again, conflict can be a frustration-based attitude or protest against lack of opportunities for development and against lack of recognition and identity. Conflict can therefore originate in class, status, ethnicity, sex, religion, nationalism or resource control, yet same fundamental issues are being addressed.

The foregoing led us to postulate that conflict has both negative and positive underpinnings. It is considered negative when it is a setback, destructive and disintegrative. Conflict is considered positive when it leads to positive developments for the individuals, the groups and the society at large through corrective signal or warning. It also leads to integrative process of development. However, change is the real subject of conflict whether in its negative or positive form. Thus, it requires the need to tailor it towards the support of existing norms and rules of social existence for if conflict of any form is left uncontrolled, the situation may be counterproductive.

Other related concepts of conflicts, include conflict indicators, conflict prevention, conflict trigger, conflict resistance, conflict explosion, conflict dynamics, conflict intervention, conflict analysis, conflict resolution, conflict management, conflict reduction, conflict stability, conflict transformation, conflict suppression and identity conflict. Conflict indicators refer to the idea that conflict is no automatic imposition. It does not just occur in any given situation. It does not happen without signs. If action is taken immediately there is any sign, the damage is prevented or limited. Conflict prevention is a process of controlling and managing strained relationship early enough to avoid the threats of a conflict. It makes effective use of early warning system to detect and respond to early threats. Conflict trigger refers to provocative utterances, decisions or actions that suddenly give rise to an outburst of frustration or aggression through open violence. This is most often associated with armed conflict, mass murder, genocide against defenseless or unsuspected civilians. Thus, hardly do we have automatic violence without a particular trigger on the moment of aggression.

Conflict resistance connotes a protracted conflict situation that has long been endured. In Nigeria and African societies, many cases of conflict resistance abound. Conflict explosion means heightened level of violence. This kind of conflict situation fails to observe the sacredness of life liberty and property and as such extreme use of arms of demonize and dehumanize human nature. Example of this conflict explosion is terrorism where people are involved in engaging in killing, destroying their targets and dying for their faith. Such actions include rampant suicide bombing in the Middle East, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel and Lebanon. Terrorism and its activities are frequently experienced in advanced countries of Britain and USA, September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the USA has remained the highest display of conflict explosion. Terrorism activities also exist in African countries leadership like Abacha, Obasanjo and Yar Adua extreme violence

in Nigeria, Mobutu in Zaire, Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Idi Amin in Uganda and recent Sudanese and Syria leadership. Conflict dynamics is in form of conflict analysis using the factors like history of the relationship, the primary and secondary actors, the structures (factional goals, attitudes and behaviour), the intensity (low, moderate or extreme), strategies adopted by conflicting parties, pattern of regime responses and facilitators of conflict transformers.

Conflict resolution is the process of systematizing intelligence and strategies on “dos” and “don’ts”. So as to enhance their capacity building in favour of bargaining, negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration, (Miall et al., 1999: p. 2). Conflict resolution is to help parties develop common, norms, rules and regulations on utterance, attitudes, and actions and hopes to give peace a chance. No readymade “conflict resolution for any conflict case. It differs from conflict case to another. Conflict management refers to the open and clear dialogue in assisting opponents to develop agreement against hostile images or actions, but compliance to agreed resolution and strategies. Conflict management operates as a drive from conflict resolution. Conflict management is where the two parties concerned share the same ideas, principles in their capacity to make peace reign. The third party involvement can be from states or “regimes” multilateral actor’s initiatives and non-governmental organization initiative. Conflict stability is also known as crisis stability which means a condition whereby each party perceives parity in an overall balance of military power. It tends to serve as deterrence that helps to restore peace.

Conflict transformation refers to the state of new situation involving conflict issues, perceptions, relationships and communication patterns. It is a change initiated by a third party for readjusting the emotional, perceptual and spiritual approaches to a conflict situation. Conflict suppression of a sub-concept of conflict transformation, positive oriented that enables interveners to work hard in the direction of positive change.

Conflict identity refers to the environment of the individuals involved in the conflict. e.g., Ethnic identities, kinship groups necessary for development of out-groups and in groups. This is the issue that breeds the “us’ and “them” syndrome. In multi- linguistic societies like Nigeria. Ethnic problems emerge as a result of competition of the following:

Control of state power, Different development plans, educational controversies, resources control struggles, religious intolerance, land disputes, Indigene-settle syndrome (migration and compete conquest).

These differences in issues become entangled in themselves and cause ethno-national to manage or resolve. This penetrates the very fabric of society and engenders living misunderstanding among groups within nations.

Cases of conflict situations abound in Nigeria right from pre- colonial period till date. Examples of these conflicts include the following among others:

Nigeria-Biafra Civil War (1967-1970), The Inter-Communal Conflicts like Zango-Kataf Crisis (1992), Ife-Modakeke political and religion crises (pre-colonial to date) Aguleri-Umuleri conflicts (since 1933), Religious conflicts in Kano State, Religious conflicts in Kaduna State, Social and Political Motivated Federal Election Crises of 1964, National Census Controversy of 1962, Western Nigeria Election Crises of 1965, Niger Delta crises in Ogoni, Ijaw and Warri.

However, apart from political and military issues mentioned above, potential causes of conflicts in Nigeria have increased and diversified to a large extent. These causes include recruiting ground for international terrorist networks, organized crime, drug traffickers, new tensions created by refugees across borders and state failure to cater for the citizens and those in special needs.

The Boko Haram Issues

The Boko Haram sect is a militant Islamic group, their agenda is to see that Sharia Law is imposed in the Northern States of Nigeria. The term Boko Haram means that western education is a sin and western

civilization is forbidden. The group started in 1995, led by Lawan Abubakar and later handed over to Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf. Until the death of Mohammed Yusuf on 30th of July, 2009, the sect had recruited about 500,000 members. Boko Haram is seen in some quarters as Nigeria Taliban because they operate and have all the features of Al-Qaeda – they target security outfits e.g. police stations and they are against the state interests. They stationed in Kanamma, Yobe State, Northern Nigeria and their base is called Afghanistan. Their major attacks and operation are in various parts of the Northern states like Bauchi State, Yobe state and especially in Idah 127 Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state. They maim, kill and destroy and invade churches. Boko Haram insurgency remains the latest and a very big threat to Nigeria peace and security. The dreadful sect is known for their bomb blasts and bows with poisoned arrows. Many innocent lives have been wasted as they made Nigeria ungovernable by launching a total ‘jihad’ on the Nigerian state. June 17, 2011 was a terrible date in Nigeria history as she witnessed the first suicide bombing attack at the Louis Edet House – Nigeria Police Headquarters at Abuja targeting Hafiz Ringim - the Inspector General of Police. Boko Haram had vowed that more bombs will be detonated in time to come in the major cities of Southern Nigeria, stating that they will not stop until Nigeria is Islamized. To address the menace of Boko Haram, Nigerian government should engage in dialogue with all stakeholders, it does not require the use of force since the situation is out of hand now. Furthermore, government should strengthen and restructure the security agencies where appropriate, especially in the area of intelligence gathering with necessary training both home and abroad. It is absurd that intelligence gathering in Nigeria is almost near zero while militants and criminal are having a field day. For instance, recent happening have proved that Boko Haram have more intelligence than the government security agencies.

Religious Rivalry

Religion is one of the main sources of conflict in Nigeria. Religious conflict occurs over religious beliefs, doctrines, practices or interpretation of scriptures between individuals or groups. Rivalry between Muslims and Christians has obviously ignited violence in Nigeria, especially with regard to the adoption of strict Islamic law (Sharia) by states in the predominantly Muslim North like Zamfara State. Some Christians, who are in the majority in the South, have perceived this as a threat of Islamization, and in flashpoints such as Kaduna in the North and Jos in Central Nigeria this has been a source of Christian – Muslim violence.

Current Trends

Christian education has made so much impact on peaceful living in Nigeria in the twenty first century. A lot of Christian leaders through their education has encourage and achieved peaceful co- existence among Nigerians. Cardinal Onaiyekan, Catholic Arch bishop of Abuja [2021] state that: Despite the image often projected by the mass media in modern times, the fact is that in 21st century, Christian and Muslim live together in peace in Nigeria. They are together in the market and business houses, in the offices and work camp in the armed forces and police, in the political parties and social clubs, the children and youth study live together in the same schools and institute of higher learning. Cardinal Onaiyekan went further to emphasize the fact that currently in the Nigerian society, most of the time religious differences are taken for granted, it is more than mere tolerance. It is a mutual acceptance than gladly say Amen to one another prayers.

Peaceful co-existence in the current Nigerian religious group especially Christians and Muslim can be seen when in a public gathering and official occasions prayer of a Christian and a Muslim religious leaders are a regular first item on the programmed of events, each other's religious festivals are being celebrated perhaps because of this current state of generally good relations, there has not been much feelings for the need for formal inter- religious dialogue. It is only recently that a Nigerian inter- religious Council (NIREC) was set

up by the leaders of the two group, at the initiative of the Christians with the firm and generous support of the government. The motivation for this kind of initiative was precisely because of the frequent occurrence of conflict with religious colouring.

Currently despite the fact that we enjoy peace in some areas, Inter- religious relationship has become a contentious one in the light of incessant Boko Haram attacks on churches and mosques in the northern part of Nigeria like Suleja and Madalla area of Niger State, Nyanya and Kuje areas of FCT Abuja, Kafanchan and other part of southern senatorial zone of Kaduna State, most areas in Borno, Kano, plateau and Yobe State are also affected. Also, cases of retaliatory violence experienced in Jos and in Kaduna south is worth mentioning. This attack has claimed thousands of lives in Nigeria in recent times. The Boko Haram crisis has provided an environment that triggers mutual suspicion amongst Christian and Muslims. There are accusations of complicity and counter accusations of violence mongering. Government has lost the credibility in playing any meaningful role in promoting inter-religious relationship. it is mostly overwhelmed by the violence in the country. In areas like plateau and Kaduna where there was existing sectarian crisis, Boko Haram and Fulani headsmen has ridden on the religious coloration of the crises to further complicate the process and provoke violence. Since 1994, Nigerians have been dying and government has largely been unable to provide any meaning leadership to address these challenges. Regarding Boko Haram and Fulani headsmen, government has failed and allowed the group to continue to provoke religious- tension in the north.

Conclusion

The causes of conflict in the Nigerian society are so numerous, so the approaches in tackling them should also be wide enough to reduce it to the lowest level. Although the church acts as a mediator in most conflict reconciliation and peace keeping process. Peacebuilding in Nigeria however continues to face numerous bottlenecks as conflict systems fight back. Most Churches used their pulpits to teach and preach genuine forgiveness and reconciliation and encourage society to participate in dealing with the past justly and comprehensively so that the nation can truly be healed of its multiple wounds. The Church had an ongoing responsibility of healing of the trauma of the violence among its own members and the society at large.

In conclusion, the Church lived as much as possible as a reconciled community and thereby become a model to the rest of society of what can be accomplished if people live together in harmony.

Recommendations

Based on the major findings of the study, these recommendations are made:

- The government should address various cases of riots, conflicts, protest and police brutality in Nigeria.
- Christian Religious Education should include a course on Human Rights in their academic curriculum.
- Churches should focus more in preaching the message of peace and harmony rather than prosperity message that is the order of the day in most churches today.
- Churches should also discourage violence greatly as this aids peace and harmony in the society.
- Inter-community and inter-religious dialogue should be facilitated. The various efforts in the country trying to build a culture of community reconciliation and peaceful existence should be recognized and encouraged.

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