

THE FAILURE OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE PROPER HANDLING OF THE RISING CASES OF ETHNO-POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the failure of Christianity in handling the rising cases of violence in Nigeria, using a documentary technique with an analysis of some efforts made by secular societies to dissolve the divisive barriers and solder the country together. It is argued that the outbreaks of violence have become unprecedented across the ethnic and political groups Nigerian, while successive attempts at promoting peace in the country are yet to succeed significantly. This situation is examined in the light of the dynamics of ethno-political crises, its concomitant outcomes on the peaceful coexistence of the Nation and the growing number of churches across the nation. It is apparent that the quantitative growth of Christianity in Nigeria has little or no effect on the lives of people in order that peace building will be a concern of all. The findings in this paper suggest the need for fundamental change in the concept of church unity before the ethno-political unity can be realized. The unity of Christians based on doctrine of Christ should be given priority above the church doctrine and union of believers, so that Christians first become one in belief and practice, before attempting to resolve the continuous conflict in Nigeria.

Keywords: Failure, Christianity, Ethno-Political, Conflict.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country referred to by some scholars as a “rainbow coalition” or “mega states” on the account of its multi-ethnic groups which are conservatively put at about 250 (Alao 1 and Mbaeze, Okoli, and Okonkwo 22). Over five decades after independence, Nigeria, with over such multi-ethnic groups, in this 21st century continues to experience ethno-political conflicts, claiming thousands of lives and properties worth billions of Naira. Joseph C. Ebegbulem observes that Nigeria is confronted with problems which have resulted in the dramatic upsurge in ethnic conflicts, which is a by-product of ethnic nationalism and political demands based on ethnicity (91). He went further to note that, from the colonial period to the return to civil politics since 1999, and even till date, Nigeria has witnessed the resurgence of political demands along ethnic lines. Ethnic loyalty takes priority and appears more

paramount in the minds of Nigerian citizens than national patriotism. In fact, Nigerians prefer their ethnic glory at the expense of the Country’s survival. According to Jacob, the origin and history of ethnic conflict can be traced from internal state rivalry to external [physical] (13). The root cause of these conflicts is not very far from power competition and decision making over economic resources and other important human factor, like position. The implementation process and resource control of the nation or a given states are in the hands of limited few, only those related to those at the top. Availability of jobs is only for the relations of those at the top as well, paper qualification and experiential knowledge are no more necessary, as everything depends on whom you know or rather the one who knows you. To get some jobs like Nigerian Security and Civil Defense, you must have your Senator sign a paper for you. That automatically means if one did not campaign

for the said senator, he/she would not stand a chance of getting the job. The empirical research by Bernard Oladosu Omisore and Bernadette Ivhaorheme Okofu (289) reveals that ethnicity and religion play active role in recruitment and selection exercises in the public services in Nigeria. Thus, in work place, ethnicity is a factor for working in certain offices.

This situation often threatens the corporate existence of the nation as tension and conflict between various ethnic groups are like a recurring decimal in the country. The liberalization of the polity and the expansion of the political space appear to have provided additional fillip to the ethnic demands. At the present moment, Nigeria has well over 90 political parties, showing how fragmented the Country stands politically. Ikeke adds that from Nigeria's independence until now the Country's story is coloured by conflicts, violence, warfare, and turbulence (91).

In Ray Ikechukwu Jacob's view, the history of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria is traced back to the colonial transgressions that forced the ethnic groups of the northern and southern provinces to become an entity called Nigeria in 1914 (14). The disturbing history of colonialism generated hatred and conflict among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. The task of addressing this seed of conflict planted by the British since then has been a complex one because of the unique nature of the country. After weakening the former diverse kingdoms, empires, chiefdoms, etc, now called Nigeria, and reordering the groups' politics, the colonial powers failed in nation building and providing for the people's basic needs. Hence, unemployment, poverty increased and with these, conflict over scarce resources. The Southern and Northern protectorates were also being amalgamated into a nation. Thereafter, the merging of different colonies into one country called Nigeria was forcefully done

without the people's consent. This was a major seed of conflict sown by the Colonial masters that is still troubling Nigeria today.

However, literature reveals that ethnic conflict in Nigeria predated colonial era. Unfortunately, the colonial government did very little or nothing to properly integrate the fragmented political ethnic entities they met on ground. They forcefully attempted to bring the different ethnic groups, whose division defies every reasonable uneven cleavage for some selfish interest. For instance, a record shows that as early as 1923, the then Colonial Governor of Nigeria, Sir Hugh Clifford, opined that it was virtually impossible to weld the "collection of self-contained and mutually independent Native States" that now make up Nigeria into "a single homogeneous nation" (Alao 2). This trend continued all through the colonial period.

To make the matter worse, some Nigerian political elites who took over power from the British colonial government did not make any serious attempt to foster national unity in the Country as well. And till date, Nigerian politicians have continued to operate on the divide and rule colonial policy. Example of this is seen in the statements made by the following: Chief Obafemi Awolowo once argued that Nigeria was no more than a "geographic expression (Dike 2). In like manner, the then Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, referred to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria as "the mistake of 1914" (Alao 21). Similarly, Malam Abubakar Imam, captured the mood of those times with the following remarks,

We despise each other, we call each other ignorant. The South is proud of its western knowledge and culture, we are proud of our eastern culture. To tell you the plain truth, the common people of the North put more confidence in

the white man than in either their black southern brothers... (Dike 4).

Since the return of democracy in 1999, there is no election that Nigeria does not experience political conflicts, and most of the time, such conflicts are along ethnic and party cleavages. As a result, several villages are no more habitable by the original occupants, and many more are under serious threat of disappearing at the moment because of ethnic and political conflicts. The various political crises that led to the 1967-1970 civil war left devastating effects on unity and peaceful coexistence of Nigerian nation (Akah 174). Since, there exist mistrust between the South and the North, and even with the Southern Region, there exist lack of truth. Sad enough, even with the presence of Christianity in Nigeria, ethnic and political conflicts continue to assume new dimensions that challenge human wisdom. Interestingly, new denominations are springing up on regular basis at different regions of the Country and more Christian based groups are emerging on daily basis in Nigeria. Yet crises of ethnic dimension are tearing the Country and the sub-regions apart. What is the church doing about the rising conflicts in the Country?

Due to differences in tribes and multiple political parties, there are numerous incidences of hostilities, resulting in destruction of lives and properties all over the Country as previously mentioned. In some states of the Federation, news of violent conflict involving ethnic or political groups are frequently reported. For instance, Odi Massacre in Bayelsa State, Urhobo - Iteskiri crisis in Warri, Jimeta clash in Jos, the Tiv-Jukun crisis in Taraba and Benue States,

Jukun-Kutep in Taraba State, Iregwe and Fulani in Plateau State, Igede and Fulani in Benue State, Tiv and Fulani in Benue State, Berom and Fulani in Plateau State. In these conflicts, "people are displaced, properties are destroyed and lives are lost" (Orude, 4). Paul Oyeleye notes that insecurity and fear are in the minds of most people living in certain part of Nigeria; millions of people have been killed, many disabled, children left without parents and parents lost their precious children. Several women are living without their husbands and husbands are deprived of their wives (1). Presently, the entire nation is experiencing ethnic conflicts of varying magnitude. Today, millions of Nigerians are living as refugees in their own country.

It is not an overstatement to say that conflicts in Nigeria have become so pronounced that unity of the nation is under threat. Due to the incessant threats to life and properties, calls for separation of the Country are made from different regions. It has become very difficult for an individual of a different ethnic group, or belonging to a different political party to settle in Nigeria outside his/her area of influence without being afraid of being attacked. This is probably why S. K. Olawale tagged Nigeria a "security risk nation" to which many international communities have warned their citizens not to live or even travel to Nigeria (21-28). Sadly, Nigerian Government saddled with the duty of protection of life and properties seems to be confused, unserious in dealing with the problem and at some point, worsen the problem by acting indifference to the plight of the people and even causing the conflict at some points. Some leaders contribute to the problem by preferring some ethnic groups to others. Worse of all is the fact

that the church, which is the last hope of man has failed in uniting the ethnic groups through the message of the cross.

What has Christianity done about this menace? Shouldn't Christianity be a source of unity of the Nation? Or do messages preach by the church a fuel to the already existing conflicts in the Country? The dominant religion in many parts of the places mentioned above experiencing ethno-political conflict is Christianity. This raises questions on effort made by Christianity in uniting the various groups. But it is noted that Nigeria as a whole is dominated by Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. This paper is more concerned with the role of Christianity in handling conflict that occur along the line of ethnic and political differences.

Literature on religious peace-building and conflict resolution in some parts of the world abound, there is a growing body of literature specifically on religion and conflict resolution in Nigeria. This paper has a primary purpose of highlighting the failure of Christianity at the present time in addressing the increasing ethno-political conflict in Nigeria. Additionally, it will create more scholarly interest on the roles Christianity can play in curbing the rising ethno-political conflicts in Nigeria, pursuit of peace, unity and improve security of lives and properties of those residing in Nigeria. To achieve its aim, the paper argues that Christianity by virtue of its teaching and practice has the potential to destroy the causes of ethno-political conflicts in Nigeria through its undiluted gospel of reconciliation. It further posits that a lot needs to be done for Christianity to actually help to create progress in conflict resolution

endeavors seeing the multiplicity of beliefs in Christianity today. It states that if Christianity is to play a mediatory or reconciliatory role in ethno-political conflict resolution in Nigeria, it has to return to Jesus teaching on the unity of his followers and pursuit of peace with everybody. Today, Christianity is widely divided along several lines, from beliefs to ethnic/cultural differences. Will it be possible for the Christianity to bring about the solution to ethno-political conflict while those professing Christianity themselves remain divided along several lines of interest? The focus of this paper is on role of Christianity or resolving ethno-political conflicts in Nigeria. The specification of "ethno-political" implies a focus on conflict where the core incompatibility is one between different so-called ethnic groups and their political organization.

The Meaning of Conflict Resolution

Before examining in more details, the role of Christianity in resolution of conflict in Nigeria, it is useful to establish what conflict resolution is and what it is not in order to locate conflict resolution efforts in an appropriate framework. The first then is to understand what conflict is. Tjosvoid argues that scholars have not paid sufficient attention to defining conflict, and this oversight has contributed to the continued negative attitudes that conflict is destructive and to the wide spread belief that conflict escalation "just happens" without human choice. Conflicts, especially that involve fundamental values or relationships, for example, are often hypothesized to be destructive; strong, emotional conflicts are thought to be inevitably costly (88).

Confusions about definitions have also contributed to a walling off of conflict research from related areas. For example, for some researchers and professionals, conflict has little relevance for the increasingly popular issue of teamwork in organizational studies. Conflict is seen as a subset, and perhaps not such a critical one, independent of the major issues of coordination, exchange, support, and decision-making. However, the idea that conflict can be constructive is basic to the very rationale for structuring teams and negotiating conflict is, arguably, the key to making teams work. It was on this note that Jesus said in Matthew 10.34-36, that he came for war and not for peace. In view of this, leadership research has emphasized the value of quality relationships but there is less recognition that these relationships are valuable because they contribute to construct conflict or that managing conflict cooperatively is a way to develop these relationships. The writer of the book of James acknowledges the fact that, friendship with the world is enmity towards God. Conflict between Christians and God is here mentioned as a result of Christians' unfaithfulness. And perhaps, this is the primary cause of conflict in the world.

J. M. G. Dennen defines conflict as incompatibility of interests, goals, values, needs, expectations, and/or social cosmologies (2). In that wise, he notes that conflict on all levels of organic existence is pervasive, persistent, and ubiquitous (2). Conflict is the universal experience of all life forms. Emily Pia and Thomas Diez define conflict as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals (2). Thomas Diez, Stephan Stetter, and

Mathias Albert, define conflict in its broadest terms when they write that, conflict denotes the incompatibility of subject positions (565). This definition, which is the traditional definition of conflict emphasizes the opposition or incompatibility at the heart of the conflict, and initially leaves open the exact nature of these incompatibilities, that is, whether they are between individuals, groups or societal positions; whether they rest in different interests or beliefs; or whether they have a material existence or come into being only through discourse. This expresses why conflict is ubiquitous in nature.

Tjosvold quoting from Morton Deutsch, defines conflict as incompatible activities. He notes that conflict exists when one person's actions interfere, obstruct or in some way get in the way of another's action (90). Incompatible activities occur in both cooperative and competitive contexts. Whether the protagonists believe their goals are cooperative or competitive very much affects their expectations, interaction, and outcomes. Sheriff F. Folarin defining conflict from political perspective writes that conflict is said to exist when two or more groups engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals (2).

In line with Tjosvold idea, Pia and Diez further note that, conflict is not always characterized by violence. However, conflict can escalate and lead to destructive results, in particular in the form of physical violence that is increasingly seen by some people as legitimate as conflict intensifies. However, conflict can also lead to a new social or

political organization and therefore be productive if the parties involved are able to deal with their incompatibilities so that such a new organizational form is achieved. But when conflict leads to a new religious organization, it is viewed differently, as it causes fragmentation of the body and belief. Today, there in existence several denominations all calling on the name of Jesus, yet would not agree with each other. It is pertinent therefore to answer the question posed by Paul the apostle in 1 Corinthians 1. 13, "Is Christ divided?" Is the multiplicity of denominations a sign of love for God or a sign of conflict of interest?

The next thing to note is that conflict resolution is a comprehensive term. It implies that the "deep-rooted sources of conflicts are addressed and transformed" (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 31). Transformation in this context involves non-violent behaviour, non-hostile attitudes, and changes in the structure of the conflict. Secondly, conflict resolution is a process – a process which births changes in conflict situations (Ilo 100). Nevertheless, there are meeting points in the two spheres of the description. In this field, theory and practice are closely linked. Whether the focus is religious, internal, international, or communal what people know about conflict affects how they approach it. Therefore, theories and ideas are readily available to influence actors in conflict resolution endeavour (Bercovitch, Kremenjuk, and Zartman, 543–563). Conflict resolution is a vibrant field of enquiry. It involves three cardinal areas: trying to resolve conflicts that already exist, trying to find ways to prevent new ones in the future, and trying to manage what cannot be fully resolved

(Bercovitch, Kremenjuk, and Zartman, 543–63). Since the onset of conflict in Nigeria, several means have been adopted to reduce the occurrences, but it seems such efforts have not yielded any good result. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, opine that conflict resolution should be:

- a. Multilevel: Analysis and resolution must embrace all layers of conflict: interpersonal intra-personal, intergroup (families, neighborhoods, affiliations), international, regional, global, and the complex interplays between them;
- b. Multi-disciplinary: In order to learn how to address complex conflict systems adequately, conflict resolution must draw on many disciplines, including development studies, politics, international relations, strategic studies, and individual and social psychology, among others;
- c. Analytic and Normative: The foundation of the study of conflict must involve a systematic analysis and interpretation of the "statistics of deadly quarrels," but this must be combined from the outset with the normative aim of learning how better thereby to transform actually or potentially violent conflict into non-violent actions of social, political, and other forms of change;
- d. Theoretical and practical: The conflict resolution field must be constituted by a constant mutual interplay between theory and practice. Only when theoretical understanding and practical experience of what works and what does not work are connected can

properly informed experience develop (8).

In summation, conflict resolution focuses on the deep-rooted causes of conflict, including structural, behavioral, moral, and above all, attitudinal aspects. There are many different understandings of resolution, which practitioners and scholars have long been at pains to distinguish. Generally speaking, conflict resolution should help parties involved to explore, analyze, question, and reframe their positions and interests as a way of transcending conflict. This is not happening in Nigerian situation. Sociologists and conflict experts all the long continue to deal with the remote causes of conflict, and sometimes blames even ethnicity as a cause, without paying attention to primary cause of conflict. Theologically, conflict started in Eden in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. And since then, conflict exist whenever man acts in Adamic way.

Ethnicity in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society. This by nature was to make the Country a unique one, but has turned out to be a devastating problem. Leaders when elected or appoint, do show to others that they are for a particular group not for all. Even the one that will declare, “I am for no body, yet am for everybody,” do turn out to deepen ethnic disparity than others. Daniel N. Posner correctly notes that for the reasons like the one described above, some African voters, may be Nigeria in particular, go to the polls with the goal of putting a member of their own ethnic group into office (1305). Because they know their interest alone will be protected. However, the problem with the simple rule that one should “vote one’s

group” is that both candidates and voters belong to many groups. Possibly, this is the reason conflict of interest sometimes generate more conflict even with a given ethnic group.

The then British colonial policy was autocratic and it denied the people's participation, basic needs, equality and social well-being, and thus led to conflict. For instance, the separation of governments which Colonial administration introduced in the North and the South were designed to lead to growing ethnocentrism (Jacob 14). This implementation and method governance distanced ethnic groups from each other by the way Lugard gave power to the traditional rulers who corruptly abused and misused it in the villages to amass wealth, land and establish patronage networks, which, seconded and encouraged in the long run, tribalism and nepotism. The segregation of the Nigerian colony was also reinforced by the colonial laws that limited the mobility of Christian Southerners to the Muslim North, created a separate settlement for non-indigenous citizens in the North, and even limited the purchase of land outside one's own region. Prejudice and hatred became the order of the day in the provinces as different ethnic groups started looking at each other suspiciously in all spheres of contact. Unequal and differential treatment of ethnic groups was responsible for the intense competition in the society. It created disparity in educational achievement and widened the political and economic gaps between northern and southern Nigeria. This was as a result of decision making implemented wrongly by the authorized power in the then leadership. Things keep worsening, even with the advent of so-called democracy. Some leaders use their ethnic group to form a protection around

themselves against the progress of the nation. Wani and Suwirta lament that the ethnicization of politics for purposes of constitutional experimentation has turned out to be a powerful obstacle to the working of Nigerian federalism. Because Nigerian federalism is based on ethnic and not geographical diversities, it has tended to exacerbate centrifugal forces in the country (58). Politics is defined along ethnic fault-line (66). Appointment and employment are determined by the person at the top. The issue of federal character is a forgotten issue. Every ethnic group becomes suspicious of another, and Nigeria continues to disintegrate.

Ethnic groups are commonly defined by external markers as language, region of origin, culture, tradition and heritage (Posner 1306-1307). Ethnicity is generally regarded as the most basic and politically salient identity in Nigeria. Nigerians commonly identify themselves by ethnic affinities than other inclinations. In other words, a good number of Nigerians see themselves as members of ethnic or regional group. This is because, possibly by identifying with one's ethnic group, he/she will have access to the big man at the top from his/her locality. The struggle for political power, natural resource control, and recognition have historically been framed along these ethnic lines, and contemporary Nigeria (institutions and political parties) is suffering from the powerful influence of ethnicity.

The Ethno-Political Conflicts in Nigeria

Ethnic politics has always been the major source of growing political tension in Nigeria, which has resulted in periodic outbreaks of violence between different ethnic groups

across the country (Ebegbulem 91). Aver, Nnorom, and Targba equally observe that Nigeria in the recent decades has been in the news for very ugly reason of the unprecedented political violence which has occurred in different parts of the country but with specific dominance in the northern parts of Nigeria (261). This scenario has been detrimental to national unity and socioeconomic development of the country. It has robbed the nation of good leadership, as often ethnic sentiment clouds people's sense of reasoning in selecting a good leader. This conflict brings about all manner of outcomes such as poverty, death, destruction of properties, food shortage and disease, etc, (Akah 176). It is no doubt that political violence negates peaceful coexistence, law and order. In addition to security concerns, it militates against the consolidation of democracy and peaceful coexistence as a nation. This in turn impacts on the social and economic wellbeing of the nation and creates imbalances in social relations (Aver, Nnorom, and Targba 261). This unfortunate, states have plugged the nation into deeper crisis, poor interaction among the constituent ethnic groups, resulting to fierce elimination of people and wide spread of insecurity. The phenomenon has promoted extreme repressive measures that have threatened the rule of law, personal freedoms and human rights. Ethno-political conflict in Nigeria is a determinant of armed conflict, banditry, militancy, complex interplay of ideology, quest for power by competing groups, specific in the country and international conditions. The economic determinants of conflict, in turn, are often related to poverty, inequality, social exclusion and the alike.

As ethnic consciousness motivated the majority ethnic groups to develop regional political parties which stimulated inter-ethnic tensions, ethnic politics inevitably became the main deterrent to Nigerian nationalism. In each region, a party dominated by members of the majority ethnic group obtained office and provided services and patronage for the group. During the 2011 election in Nigeria political parties were arranged based in ethnic groups. The Hausa/Fulani led the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), The Yoruba region had the Action Congress of Nigeria, The Igbos had the APGA, while the other minority groups had the People Democratic Party (PDP), and All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP). Nigeria as a country voted along ethnic inclination rather than on the personality of the person seeking for vote. The same situation played out in the different states. This behaviour has thus contributed to the recurrent ethno-political conflicts experienced in different parts at different time in Nigeria.

The first major sign of conflict which brought tension among Nigerians came on the 15th January 1966 (James 120). As a result of coup, the Eastern Region made up of majority of Igbo people declared a republic known as Biafra. The rest of Nigerians led by Northern Nigeria declared war on the Igbo in July 1967. However, the war ended in January 1970. Since then, peace has eluded the regions despite attempts to unify the Country. Between 1999 till date, Nigeria experienced critical events that undermined her co-existence. The crisis reached an unprecedented level during the military regime especially "under Babangida and Abacha, as Nigeria was already facing serious

economic and political problems." During the last few years of democratic rule, Nigerian has equally witnessed political and ethnic motivated crises of different dimensions. There have been calls from different groups to end the unity of Nigeria because of insecurity promoted by ethnic alienation. Several villages have been sacked, forcing the original occupants to become refugees in public buildings. In 2011, a Northern group, who felt, Rtd General Buhari should have been the president elect began to attack innocent people, mainly the easterner, believing that they voted against their preferred candidate. This led to outbreak of violent in some parts of the Northern Nigeria, leading to loss of life and destruction of properties worth millions of Naira. This caused some people to relocate from one region to another.

Land Disputes

There are also land disputes which have caused conflicts across the country. Examples according to Mustafa are: "the communities of Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra state, the Brass and Nembe communities of Bayelsa and Rivers states are typical examples of conflicts emanating from prolonged boundary disputes." Currently, Nigeria is facing ethnic diversity conflicts involving the farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Nasarawa, Kaduna, Niger, Benue, Plateau, Zamfara, Katsina, Abia, Edo, and Enugu (Akah 179). The herdsmen attacked these States, killing thousands of people, destroying several farms and properties worth millions of Naira.

Political Crisis

Adejomubi in her article, "A Literary Understanding of Nigeria's Political Crisis: A

Construction of it Past and Future,” notes that the Nigerian political climate right from the civil war period or immediately after 1966, was characterized by lack of commitment to the virtues of honesty, equality, social justice, accountability, trust, peaceful co-existence amongst the different ethnic groups and respect for human rights (37). She went further to state that the Nigerian elites who took over from the British (at independence in 1960) made no serious effort to evolve any nationally shared values essential for national unity (37). The factors, which led to the Nigerian civil war, include North-South division and ethnic conflicts, minority group politics, the structural dilemma of the Nigerian army, the census controversy and the Federal election crisis of 1962 and 1965. All these structural problems though real, were manipulated by the political elite in their competition for power and resources, which led to the civil war (1967-1970). These same factors are still experienced in Nigeria 46 after the end the civil war. It is sad to observe that these factors are still making it difficult for Nigeria to exist as a nation in peace with one another.

In 2001, Benue State experienced a military assault, which was carried out by men of Nigerian Army in revenge for the killing of 19 soldiers. Over 200 unarmed civilians were killed” along Zaki Biam axis. The government failed to condemn any of the attacks. The nation is not confronted with external aggression, yet Nigeria is losing more lives and prominent citizens alike. There were series of assassinations in Nigeria, like on the 23rd of December 2001, according to Edemodu “the former Attorney-general of the Federation Chief Bola Igwe was assassinated

in his residence, and the killers are still at large20).Nwokocha reported that on March 5 2003,Marshall Harry-the national vice chairman for the South-South zone of the All Nigeria People’s Party(ANPP) was murdered at home, when the police was alerted, they said they had no fuel in their vehicle (5).

The worsening security situation in the North East during 2014 was blamed on the political and ethnic divides that occurred in the Country. While the Northern leaders were accusing Jonathan of laxity and incompetency, they were at the same time shielding the perpetrators of Boko Haram insurgency just to show how weak the government of Jonathan was. The opposition party (APC) then, was playing political gimmicks with the lives of the innocent Nigerians as they failed to collaborate with then government to exterminate Boko Haram insurgency. Today, Boko Haram insurgent has metamorphosized into different militant groups: “unknown gunmen,” “Fulani Headsmen,” and “bandits.” Lives and properties are destroyed on daily basis, kidnapping becomes the most lucrative business. The blame games continue while innocent Nigerians are dying on daily basis. During the recently 2019 concluded governorship election in Kogi State, the woman leader of PDP was ferociously murdered in the name of politics. How long will Christianity continue to preach “economic gospel,” focus on mega church buildings, without emphasizing on the transformational gospel?

Effect of Ethno-political Conflict on Christianity

Repeated political conflicts in Nigeria and the negative ethnicity deprives the Christianity of

its ability to create a new community. According to Waruta (6), "most religious groups and denominations, closely scrutinized, are very ethnic in their composition and leadership. Those that happen to be multi-ethnic with a national outlook are plagued with internal [interethnic] conflicts". Such a framework shows that the issue of ethnicity operates and creates tension in the Church as it does in the political arena. In some of the denominational churches, instead of Christ being at the center of activities, other matters predominate the reason of their existence. Culture takes over, as the church becomes an increasingly useful association for ulterior purposes (Ekitala and Wasyanju 3). The major problem is that some denominations mostly have departed from the mission of Christ, and some exist for economic purpose, and some for political reason. This affects the type of gospel they preach.

The Role of Christianity in the Search for Peace

Before examining the role of Christianity in search for peace, it is important one understands the biblical concept of peace. In the Hebrew Scriptures shalom means completeness, soundness, welfare, peace. "Shalom is a broad concept, embracing justice, mercy, rightness or righteousness, compassion, and truthfulness all together. There is no peace without justice. But justice is not only about fair judgment and rectitude; it is also about giving what is right and just to the afflicted. Therefore, peace (shalom) is the effect of righteousness, and the practice of truth and justice. It is a condition where God leads nations to settle their conflicts and beat

their swords into ploughshares (Micah 4.3; Isa 2.4).

The Hebrew concept of shalom is related to the Arabic concept of Islam, "submission of oneself to God." Seen in this light, peace can only be achieved by opening one's self to God's will and purpose. The Hebrew Scripture gives us the understanding that peace is of God, and the wholeness of human life includes obedience to God who is just, merciful and righteous. Peace, therefore, is the fruit of righteousness and practice of justice. It is the effect of an upright life and faithfulness to God. This is a form of life that man cannot achieve on his/her except in Jesus.

In the New Testament, Jesus himself is the source of peace. His life reveals the Spirit of Peace, a peace that the world cannot give. The peace that Jesus is and gives is a central feature of the kingdom, which manifests itself in all forms of peace both in daily life and in the messianic fulfilment (John 14.27; 2 Thess. 3.16). The peace of Jesus makes it possible to overcome enmity and division (Eph. 2.14-16), for it is a peace that has come through the blood of his cross (Col 1:20). Through his death, Jesus has overcome the very sources of enmity, making it possible for all creation to be brought together in unity through him and to be reconciled to God (Eph 1.10; Col. 1.16.19-20).

The intense and frequent occurrences of ethno-political crisis in recent times is an issue of great concern to all who love God. This is happening when the number of churches has increased rapidly (Akah 175). Nearly, every street in some of these regions and states have one or more churches. Then the question is, why has Christianity not helped in promoting

peacebuilding? Some scholars are of the view that Christianity cannot play any role towards peacebuilding, because “religion is arguably one of the single most significant cause of conflict in human history (Abu-Nimer 365). This complain would be true if conflict is only limited to religious conflict, and in areas where Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions. But unfortunately, there are case of conflicts reported in areas where Christianity alone is the dominant religion.

It is important to call to mind that the successful expansion of the Christian missions in Nigeria “began in the 19th century through the activities of freed slaves from Sierra Leone” (Anene, 1991). Missionaries’ activities carried with it the building of schools, churches, roads, hospitals and of course other institutions of government. It should be borne in mind that social reforms came with Christianity-commitment to national, moral and political advancement (Akah 175). Christianity featured prominently in the “series of events that led to the development of Nigerian nation, and were able to bring about certain political, economic and technological changes in the region” (Ajayi, np). Their activities helped to break down ethnic prejudices and to bring their converts in loyalty transcending ethnicities. Hence, patriotic Nigerians came to believe that by practicing Christianity, they were paving the way for the creation of the Nigerian nation. The Nigeria state of their dream was one in which Christianity would flourish, inter-tribal wars would cease and the industrial, technological and intellectual revolutions which had occurred in Europe would repeat themselves in Nigeria. Today, according to Akah, there are over 400

Seminaries/Bible Colleges, and Christian universities established by some Christian organization across the present Nigeria (186), reducing the level of illiteracy in the Country. There are more churches in existence than ever before in the history of Nigeria. By encouraging a common consciousness, Christianity would reduce to a minimum all other sectional loyalties such as the many incipient tribal/crisis groups that divided Nigeria (Akah 175). Yet, the incidence of ethno-political conflict is on the increase. It becomes very necessary to ask if Christianity, being a major religion in Nigeria, has no capacity to contribute to Nigeria’s peaceful co-existence. Where then has Christianity failed?

The Failure of Christianity in Uniting Ethnic Groups

Today’s Christianity is a worldwide religious tradition with diverse representations, beliefs and practices against the prayer of Jesus for unity and oneness in John 17. Christianity has continued to grow and change in the twenty-first century, with the rapid multiplication of Christian denominations in Nigeria, including many mega independent churches. Today Christianity has three major streams, each possessing its own internal pluralism — the Catholic Communion, the Orthodox Christian Churches, and Protestant movements. It becomes difficult for them to agree on the simple principle of Christianity. The division alone already has weakened the unity of the religion. Jesus said, a house that is divided against itself cannot stand (Matt. 12.25). It is apparent that the form of Christianity some people practice today deviates from the primitive pattern of Christianity. If the house

is divided, it becomes difficult, if not impossible for it to confront any from outside challenge. Until Christians become united in doctrine and practice, their effort to resolve conflicts by uniting ethno-political groups will continue to be a wasted effort. Christians must realize that ethnicity and political affiliations will not go beyond the bounds of this world. Hence, oneness of the body of Christ is above every other interest.

It is also necessary to note here that, Christ's promise to build his church in Matthew 16:19-19 never suggested the divisions experienced today. It should thus behoove every reasonable Christian to understand that the present divisive names are the devil's doing. It is necessary then to return to the Bible and begin to do the Bible things in the Bible way.

Recommendations

Ethno-political conflict is a wind of anti-social phenomenon, which blows no one any good. In its aftermaths both its perpetrators and victims are losers. Also, that conflict is not native to man but rather a consequence of his fallen nature, his frequent transgressions against the grains of his nature

- a. **The local congregation** -The local congregation of believers should seek to live within the tension of unity and diversity as taught in the Bible. Corporate worship may thus involve the coming together of peoples from multiple backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, class and age, to glorify God and to help each other to follow him. Such gatherings will require sacrifices in terms of preferred styles of singing and preaching. Yet there will need to be other occasions where differences

are recognized – such as in the organization of small groups for fellowship. Each congregation will have to find a balance between the unity of the gospel and how God calls us as people with different identities. One issue which is particularly important is that of leadership: the local congregation should seek to recruit into its leadership members that reflect the multiple backgrounds of which it is composed. The idea of having one ethnic group in the leadership positions suggest an ethnic church arrangement.

The multiethnic church is a tremendous resource for evangelism. By drawing attention to the diversity of its members, the church might present an attractive alternative to the cultural relativism so prevalent today. The post-modern onlooker might reduce Christianity to the needs of a particular local community, or might explain it in terms of the attractiveness of its symbols and ideas for individuals (Sivasundaram 2). They might seek to differentiate black Christianity from white Christianity. The multiethnic church challenges these assessments by presenting the gospel as something that holds for people everywhere, and which is visibly followed by all ethnicities. The need to make the gospel indigenous become very relevant at this point. Irrespective whether a particular ethnic group dominate every other groups in a local congregation, the language of the locals should be seen as the major language of communication. Attempt to suggest that the locals being few and may be less educated compared to others will continue to create the divides even in the church.

- b. The global church** - The centre of gravity in the Christian church is speedily shifting away from Europe to Africa. Christianity is not owned by one region nor some ethnic groups. The Bible is not a product of ethnic ideology, its universality is attested by its relevancy to all groups at all time.

In thinking through the principles of unity and diversity at the global level, it is important to remember that there is only one body, the church. Believers should therefore see themselves as members of that one body, a communion of Christians from multiple nations and backgrounds. All of us might find ways of learning from and supporting the expansion of the church elsewhere by praying and giving. But care must be ensured that whatever we do has its foundation in the Bible. This ranges from the name to the doctrine of the church.

In addition, believers across the world need to learn humility in their dealings with others. One practical application may for the Southerners to prepare itself to receive more evangelists and preachers from the Northern Nigeria. It is a fundamental mistake for one ethnicity to believe its understanding of the gospel is somehow superior to that of the other; or that it has the right to teach and not learn. In learning from each other, it will be possible to challenge aspects of culture and cultural influences on theology that are not consistent with the Bible's teaching. At the same time, in keeping with the principle of diversity, there will undoubtedly be differences in how we apply the Bible's message in different cultures, and there will be a need to respect to respect the authority

of the Bible on matters of doctrine. The division existing today among Christians is due to differential doctrinal beliefs.

- c. Peace building** - The church should play a paramount role in peace building in the region. Church leaders mostly preached and emphasized on the need to stay harmoniously and to love one another despite the various different ethnic background.
- d. Education** - Education: the church should be actively involved in educating people and Christians to view each other as members of one body in Christ and not different Christians with different ethnic groupings. The current attempt by some mission groups to build school is purely economic. Christianity should promote enlightenment for all. In a case where the school fees charged in mission schools are unaffordable by the majority of Nigerians, makes education a privilege for selected few.
- e. Evangelism** -The church should be actively involved in spreading the pure Gospel of Christ which carried the message of salvation and belonging to one big family-the family of Christ.
 - i. Church leaders need to entrench inter-ethnic peace and reconciliation committees in the church to ensure that negative manifestation of ethnicity in the church is mitigate.
 - ii. Church leaders and Christians should be involved in inter-ethnic Christian exchange programmes especially with other tribes/regions to promote peaceful coexistence among various tribes since the society we live in is homogeneous.

- In addition, Inter-ethnic cooperation and dialogue should therefore be promoted as a Christian ideology.
- iii. The leadership in the various churches should also facilitate enactment of leadership structures that are reflective of the national outlook. The leadership structures should incorporate various tribes to give a sense of belonging in the church and society at large.

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