

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

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### **Abstract**

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

**Keywords:** Conflict, Socio-Political, Church, Pluralistic Society, Resolution/Management

### **Introduction**

Federal state all over the world vary in many ways, such as; in the nature, character and significance of the underlying political, economic, cultural and social diversities. Indeed, conflict has received various definitions and interpretations, to the researcher it simply means, 'as a friction arising from the desire that I want something and you also want the same, but we both cannot have it all'. According to Lamle, (2015: 3) view conflict as "Opposition among social entities directed against one another". The term "conflict" is derives from the Latin *confligere*, which denotes "to strike together" (3). Fernandez in Ekpenyong (2011) viewed as difference in perspectives: what one sees, think, feel, and believe may be different from what another sees, think, feel and believe (118). This means that conflict is part of all human interactions, and it can have positive influence and sometimes negative influence depending how the parties in conflict want it to be. Again, DFID report of 1997 as quoted by Bassey (2007) has noted that: Violent conflict generates social, political division, reserves economic progress, impedes sustainable development and frequently results in human rights violations. Large population movement triggered conflicts threaten the security and livelihood of whole region (xvi). Best (2011) said conflict originated from the Latin word *confligere*, meaning 'to clash or engage in a fight'. It connotes a confrontation between one or more parties aspiring towards incompatible or competitive means or ends (23).

The Nigerian example of federalism like other developing African countries are confronted with a lot of complex challenges which on many occasions have shook the Nation to its foundation. Some of these challenges are the issues of politics, economic and social instability frequently stemming from bad governance, dictatorial governance, failed economic policies, fundamental human rights abuse and inappropriate development programs stemming also from exacerbated ethnic and religious differences in society. These problems have posed a lot of difficulty in the continent and government at all levels seems to be helpless and hopeless in the resolution of crisis and conflict arising from them. Most Nigerians who had lived peacefully together for years now suddenly take arms against themselves on issues bothering politics. Several communities that were previously living peacefully suddenly took arms against one another as a result of claim of ownership of the land and politics. The paper therefore examines the importance of land ownership in a multi-ethnic and pluralistic society like Africa and the importance attached to the socio-political status of citizens in the continent. The paper concludes that for Africa and the Church to make progress and to be a developed continent, it must find a way of tackling the problems associated with socio-political conflicts. It also explained the root

causes of conflicts, examined the ideological platforms and the role of socio-political conflicts by giving historical evolution of et ethnic, social, economic, politics and identities in Africa and to understand the African positions of the different constitutions on land and other root causes of conflict and relationship between claims to land, ethnic ideology, social and politics and how they either cause or escalate conflicts. The paper indeed shows that the Church and her leaders have the potential to manage and resolve conflicts in Africa through their religious resources or values and frameworks involving love, forgiveness, contentment, justice, peace, respect and tolerance (Dajwan 2021: 1-3).

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Here the researcher asks whether religion, social and politics are roots causes of conflicts and what role the Church can play in the management of conflicts in Africa. The seven broad categories have been singled out to guide our understanding and how religious identity is engaged in challenging governance; these are; relational theory, structural conflict theory, human needs theory, grievance and grievances theory and (protracted) social conflict theory.

### **Relational Theory**

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

### **The Socio-Political and Inter-Religious Conflict Nexus Relationship**

According to Jonathan (2000), religious belief systems are essential aspects of the identities of those who follow them. Accordingly, any attack, real or perceived, on one's religious framework is not an attack on the religion; it is also an attack on a vital element of one's identity. Given this, it is not surprising that this can cause a defensive reaction that is often violent. Wentz describes this phenomenon metaphorically as defending the 'walls of religion'. Lewis makes

this argument with respect to Islam and Christianity noting that these religions' claims to exclusive truths are a major source of conflict (Jonathan, 2000:7-8).

Again, Gurr in Jonathan said one way to understand the ethnic conflict process is described as basic model posits that discrimination or even differences in status between groups, causes deprived minority groups to form grievances. Gurr specifically deals with grievances over social, political, autonomy, and economic issues. These grievances cause the minority to mobilize for conflict. These mobilized groups finally engage in conflict. This is the core of Gurr's model. He also accounts for the influence of the group's cohesion, size, and geographic concentration, regime factors like democracy, democratisation, state power, and economic development, international contagion and diffusion, international support for both the state and the minority group, and repression. Although Gurr does not deal with religion directly, by analogy religious discrimination should lead to religious grievances which, in turn, should lead to mobilisation followed by conflict (Jonathan, 2000:9).

Economic perspective on the causes of civil war and based on empirical patterns globally over the period 1965-98. During this period, the risk of civil war has been systematically related to a few economic conditions, such as dependence upon primary commodity exports and low national income. Conversely, and astonishingly, objective measures of social grievance, such as inequality, a lack of democracy as in political, and ethnic and religious divisions, have had little systematic effect on risk (Collier, 2006:1). Identities have historically been significant in the African political process (Nigerian in focus), under colonial rule as well as in the post-colonial dispensation. Under colonialism, administrative exigencies warranted "the invention of traditions", and the nurturing and exacerbation of an "us" *versus* "them" syndrome: Muslim *versus* Christian; Northerner *versus* Southerner; Hausa-Fulani *versus* Yoruba *versus* Igbo, and so on. Religious, regional and ethnic differences were given prominence in conceiving and implementing social, educational and economic development policies and projects under the indirect system of colonial administration favoured by the British. Thus, the differential impact of colonialism set the context of the regional educational, economic and political imbalances which later became significant in the mobilization or manipulation of identity consciousness in order to effectively divide and rule, as well as in the politics of decolonisation and in the arena of competitive politics in the post-colonial era (Jega, 2000:15-16).

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

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

### **Greed and Grievances- Collier and Hoeffler**

Greed vs. Grievance is an argument that seeks to understand the motivations of combatants in civil warfare. Greed model- that combatants perform a cost benefit analysis and take up arms when fighting will better their situations- that the grievance-based explanations of civil war are wrong, and that combatants in civil wars fight for economic benefits such as loot: that economic agendas appear to be central to understanding why civil wars get going. Conflicts are far more likely to be caused by economic opportunities than by grievance model- that combatants are motivated by religious, ethnic, identity, and social class grievances: ethnic or religious hatred, political repression, political exclusion, economic inequality and social discrimination (Dinshak 2018:15).

### **(Protracted) Social Conflict Theory- Azar**

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

### **Socio-Political and Religious Conflicts**

In religious conflicts, it is clear which aims are achieved. Gopin (1997) however regards political, ethnic and economic aims as primary. In his view, religious conflicts form a specific form of conflict between groups which differ ideologically along religious lines within a pluralistic setting with each striving for socio-political relevance. In a seminar vein, Takaya in (Dajwan et al 2018:109) and Batson, Schoenrade and Pych (1985) emphasize the behavioral and political character of religion. To them, "religions are parochial and emotional socializers. They specialize in building one-faith exclusive brotherhood communities. Religion, at some point, is politics and is the most potent and long lasting political association. Moreover, religious creeds excite and extract the deepest possible sociopolitical and psycho-emotional and physical loyalties from their adherents when in political competition with people of other faiths" Richardson as in (Dajwan, et al 2018:109).

One significant element driving conflicts of this type is the attitude of superiority that religious persuasions often adopt in their dealings or assessment of others that is mainly related to the sense of stenotype, prejudice and discrimination shared by members towards people from other faiths (Allport, 1954; Franzoi, 2000). This attitude tends to exclude others, seeing them as out-groups and classifies them as ignorant and doomed which invariably, creates an atmosphere of conflict and hostility. This atmosphere of hostility tends to intensify where opposing religious and political persuasions see their numerical strengths as social and political advantage. In such a situation, the leaders think that new socio-political and religions perspectives as threats to the hegemonies enjoyed (Brown, 1985; Richardson, 1985). Furthermore, where the social, political, religious or economic factors are unfavorable, messianic rhetoric can exacerbate the tensions by way of playing on the psyche and mind-set of adherents.

Nwaomah as observed by Dajwan et al (2018) that conversation campaigns, as in Nigeria, "by opposing religions(s) and fanaticism arising from indoctrination of the adherents, mostly due to parochial education, which can also reinforce religious conflicts special are the unique effects of religious doctrines on the perception of the adversaries, the formation of the motivational psychological values as well as religious values towards the religion, and the central role of feelings and emotions for group identification (2018:110).

### **Socio-Political and Religious Conflict and its Manifestations in Nigeria**

Before delving into the discussion of socio-political and religious conflicts in Nigeria, it will be useful to devote some space to introduce the country's religious communities that form the conflict parties. Nigeria has two major religions (Christianity and Islam) that are always in constant conflict and a third one- African Traditional Religion (ATR) which has a current population estimate of about 178.5 million WPR 2016, as in (Dajwan et al, 2018:110), Muslim are estimated to be 50%, Christians 40% and practitioners of African Traditional Religions are put at 10% Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2005) as observed by (Dajwan et al, 2018:110). This estimation excludes practitioners of alternative religious ideologies from the eastern world. This population estimate of the different religious groups as imagined by the Human Rights watch (2005) has been heavily disputed by the Christians and followers of African Traditional Religions, who argue that the long time domination of the nation's polity by military dictators, who are mostly Muslims from the Northern part of the country (1960-1966; 1975-1976, 1979-1999), placed them into the best position to manipulate the figures in favor of Muslims. A second argument against the above mentioned figures which appears to be true is the erroneous generalization of all Northerners including all people from the Middle-belt States as Muslims (Dajwan et al, 2018:110). The introduction of "borrowed religions" Christianity and Islam is said to breed conflicts in the nation both socio-political and religious wise.

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

#### **a) Land Issue**

In the Nigerian State, indigeneity is associated with land ownership. This is not only limited to Nigeria; land ownership is an issue all over Africa. As such, anything that affects the land affects the people and must be resisted by all means. Eme Awa supports this view when he asserted that indigeneity is strong in Nigeria because people are seeing the land as a primary form of property or inheritance in the traditional society and is seen as a form of wealth (Awa, 1985). This account for the deep- rooted animosity between the indigenes (land owners) and the settlers (tin miners and traders) in Plateau State. The desire of the settlers to have access to the land at the expense of the indigenes is the major problem in the state. The crises in Plateau are first and foremost a struggle over land as majority of Plateau State indigenes are Christians who are tied to land as peasant farmers or workers in the civil service while the settlers, mainly Muslim minorities are Hausa dry-season farmers and cattle rearers; while the Igbo,

Urhobo and Yoruba, are dominating the business life of the State (Danfulani 4). The crisis remains intractable and the dominant Christian (indigene) population in Plateau State is insisting that until the problem is given a constitutional solution, the hospitality of the people of the State should not be abused by settlers particularly the Hausas who make outrageous and bogus claims for rights and privileges which does not exist anywhere else in the Federation according (4).

### **b) Political Patronage/Competition**

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

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

been replicated in other States particularly the Northern-Muslim States? National Orientation Agency (NOA 21).

### **c) The Nature and Character of the Nigerian State Politics**

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

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

It is therefore worrisome that despite the fact that the people of this zone are known to be hospitable, accommodating and peaceful, how come they suddenly changed and began to engage in frequent violent inhuman clashes?

### **d) The Problem of Nigerian Constitution**

No doubt, the crisis in Plateau State has opened a renewed debate on the use of the terms "settler" and "indigene". In the nation's 1979 Constitution, the phrase belongs or belonged to a community indigenous of Nigeria was used in the definition of citizenship Section 23, Sub Section (1) (a) while the phrase "federal character" also entered Nigerian Constitution in 1979 to denote a principle of minority group inclusion in the federal government and its affairs (Ostien 2-4). Section 147 (3ii) of the 1999 Constitution also states that "...the President shall

appoint at least one Minister from each state, who shall be an indigene of such a state” (FRN 1999). Subsequently, conflicts persist in Plateau State and Chief Obasanjo Olusegun in a seminar which the African Leadership Forum (ALF) organized on Conflict Prevention and Management in his opening speech that:

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

In plateau state, among the key flash points (area) where the indigene/settler confrontation have raised and are raising dusts intermittently in Jos are between the indigenous Afizere, Anaguta and Berom against the settler Hausa-Fulani, while it is the indigenous Wase-Kadarko tribe against indigenous Taroh and Jukun. In Shendam, Bakin Chiyawa, Saya areas are also witnessing armed rivalry between the indigenous and settler tribes. Accordingly, it applies to and endows a person with full political and civil rights within the context of the modern state. In the history of political community, the question concerning who are settlers and who are indigenes exhibits the fact that the whole argument is within a realm of citizenship. Thus, it remains a fertile ground for exclusion and permanent contestation (op.cit 2-4). The most significant cause of political and communal violence in Nigeria is the entrenched divisions throughout the country between people considered indigenous to an area and those regarded as mere settlers.

### **Christian Churches and Conflict Management**

Ekpenyong (2011) maintains that the proper role of the Church or religion (Christianity) has been:

- ✓ To provide a higher purpose and meaning to human life, one that transcends limited self-interest;
- ✓ To counter-balance the disruptive tendencies of politics and economics with shared values able to hold society together;
- ✓ To provide a moral structure in which human beings act (social ethics);
- ✓ To stand up for and protect the “little ones”, those who are marginalized and oppressed within the usual power schemes (125).

Writing on the impact of Christianity on any society Kukah according to Ekpenyong (2011) observes and agrees as follows; that:

The new trends especially among Christians on seeking to use religion for social and political change may offer a new perspective to the definition of the trends in political competition in Nigeria that is assuming that both Muslims and Christians can let their religious belief motivate and direct their political behaviour (125).

Again, Ekpenyong stresses the fact that those who believe that religion should play this political role need to think out more clearly and gauge the claims of charlatans from the gospel, emphasizing more on the potentials of human goodness, justice, love and service. To him “the poverty of the Nigerian state makes it impossible to keep all forms of sentiments away from the political process” (126).

Tracing the origin of conflict from the disobedient attitude of Adam and Eve as we see in Genesis account of creation, Adam Olekun (2006) opines that, conflict comes into the society due to misunderstanding, communicating gap, injustice, and power imbalance, clash of interest or values, and intolerance. He further stresses that Christians should engage in peace making rather than the government strategy of peace keeping in their communities through dialogue, love, and reconciliation and states, “a just community must be built on honesty, truth, and social justice” (22). From the above wisdom and scholarly discussions, one can comfortably conclude and submit that Christians are called and meant to be peacemakers. In this light Oyeshola (2005) postulates that: working for and promoting peace is an intrinsic content of Christianity. ... Therefore, we may not run away in the face of conflict, war or civil strife or friction. We must confront them according to our capacity and responsibility. More importantly is the fact that we must work and create the enabling environment for peace (35).

It is in this capacity that the Church has been called to be a good tool for managing conflict today in Africa and the world at large. Acknowledging the above assertion Hays (1996) writes thus: “when the Church as a community is faithful to that calling, it prefigures the peaceable kingdom of God in a world wracked with violence” (343). Though, various peaceful negotiations have failed to achieve the desired peace or conflict resolution in Nigeria, Christianity on the other hand has served as a great instrument of mediation and peaceful resolution of many conflicts in many parts of the country- Nigeria and the world at large. This fact therefore, means that Christianity does not compromise her mediatory and peace-building functions as an ideology because Christ is the Prince of Peace. This also means that for peace to reign in Nigeria, Christians Churches have to marshal out their instrument of peace which is the gospel of Christ

andand also a life of holiness and righteousness and pursue peace with all men (Hebrew 12:14).

### **The Christian Churches play this role of conflict management and resolution through:**

#### **Dialogue**

Etymologically, dialogue means a speech across, between, through two or more people. Dialogue comes from the Greek *dialogos*. *Dia* is a preposition that means “through,” “between,” “across,” “by,” and “of.” *Dia* does not mean two, as in two separate entities; rather, *dia* suggests a “passing through” as in diagnosis “thoroughly” or “completely.” Logos comes from *legein*, “to speak” Crapanzano cited by Emilia and Chukwuemeka (354-355). Logos means “the word,” or more specifically, the “meaning of the word,” created by “passing through,” as in the use of language as a symbolic tool and conversation as a medium. As Onians points out, logos may also mean thought as well as a speech–thought that is conceived individually or collectively, and/or expressed materially. Consequently, dialogue is a sharing through language as a cultural symbolic tool and conversation as a medium for sharing. Accordingly, dialogue refers to the mutual exchange of experience, ideas and opinions between two or more parties; i.e., a conversation. Dialogue is two-way or multi-way communication. It presumes the opportunity to reply on several occasions in order to enhance a line of reasoning. The concept of dialogue contains a dimension of simultaneity and direct contact, either physical or via technical aids. In order to achieve genuine civic participation, there must be some form of dialogue between citizens and those in positions of power. In a dialogue, everyone taking part must be given the chance to study the other parties’ suggestions and opinions, contemplate them and respond (31-34). According to Turner cited in (355)

Dialogue is a culturally and historically specific way of social discourse accomplished through the use of language and verbal transactions. It suggests community, mutuality, and authenticity—an egalitarian relationship. So understood, dialogue provides a meeting ground, *communitas*, and manifests itself in a variety of spontaneous and ritual modes of discourse in which nature and structure meet.

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

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

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

### **Forgiveness**

Christian Churches under different umbrellas such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should inculcate in their members the spirit to forgive and forget. They should also create effective awareness among their members that, this is not a time to sit down to recount the past, or to retaliate, neither is it a period for regretting or appraising any good done, but a period for forgiveness, reconciliation, constructive dialogue and a period for reconstruction, settlement and re-union. It is on this purpose that, “the Nigerian Church has recently gathered in Ibadan, its first national Pastoral congress with the theme, “the Church: family of God on mission” during the congress, the Nigerian Church among other things discussed on “what role Christians have to play in restoring peace to a troubled land (Nigeria), in

promoting mutual forgiveness for past hurts, in fostering mutual understanding and acceptance (Ekpenyong 2011:129).

Christians have the imperative of forgiveness; the practice of which Pope John Paul II says is “the only guarantee for lasting peace”. He observed in the *Encyclical Dives in Misericordia* that a world without forgiveness is a world of endless violence (Ehusani 2009:2). He again further stressed that, with the Christian virtue of forgiveness, past hurts and wounds, and bitterness and resentment over such hurts and wounds could be adequately healed, and wholesome human relationships can once again begin a fresh. He said that to buttress his deep thought of forgiveness (Ehusani 2009:2). Therefore, we can emphatically say that forgiveness is a balm that heals past wounds and our walk relationship thereby giving birth to a fresh wholesome human positive relationship and peace again.

### **Promotion of Social Justice**

Christian leaders and Churches should as a matter of necessity inculcate in their members and the public at large the need for social justice. On the relevance of social justice Socrates writes that justice is a moral physician and cures human beings of their excesses and makes them better people. Social justice advocates equal jurisdiction and judicial order in any given constituted group or society. It serves both the least as well as the greatest, the poor as well the richest, obviously speaking, social justice if given precedence, it audits injustice, oppression, suppression, denominationalism, sectionalism, apartheid, victimization, nepotism, tribalism, racism and even domination (Ekpenyong 2011:129).

Therefore, Christianity as a religion is to help inject the spirit of social justice, forgiveness, order, understanding, tolerance, discipline, reconciliation, peace and decorum into the lives of Nigerians. Consolidating this noble truth Ikwun (2002) opines that religion (Christianity) is that which promotes and encourages social justice and fair play, mutual trust and respect. Indeed, without religion (Christianity), morality and discipline suffer blatant decadence in the citizens and in the society at large (71). Ikwun again stresses that, religion (Christianity) is the primary and basic institution and source of morality and spirituality. Religion is said to be ‘a belief in someone else experience while spirituality is you having your own experience’. In the absence of religion (Christianity, man’s inhumanity to man reigns and anarchy becomes institutionalized (71). Christian

leaders and Churches should teach their members and the public at large the necessity of social justice which cures people of their excesses and makes them better human beings.

### **Evangelism and Prayer Convocation**

The Christian Churches under different umbrella such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should mobilize and inject in their members the spirit of mass evangelism and prayer convocation in various parts of the country- Nigeria especially in those dispute areas of the country. These bodies and their affiliates should as a matter of urgency move into the villages and communities in Nigeria for effective evangelism (Ekpenyong 2018:130).

Prayers bring down the power of God to solve human crises, checkmate the power of Satan and evil vices such as corruption, discrimination, dishonesty, conflict, violence, and prosper the work of God. Through her ministry (Church) of Prayer for the Nation, the Church also addresses societal ills (1Tim. 2:14). Consolidating this fact, Pike corroborated when he declared that: The United Nations is not the final court of appeal in the affairs of Nations. The church could dominate politics from her prayer room if this priority were observed (198). Indeed, these were the strategies used by the Four Hebrews while in Babylon, referring to Daniel, Meshack, Shedrack and Abednego in the Daniel especially from chapter one to chapter four. In the same vein Tennyson (1965) affirmed that: more things are wrought by prayer than this world can dream of. Wherefore, let thy voice rise like a fountain for me night and day (348), according to Engelkemier (1993), "*prayer can change conflict situation*" (128). There is nothing that prayer can't do!

### **Eschatology**

This is one of the greatest instruments the Nigerian Church can use in resolving conflict. The Church enlightens humans with an adequate and satisfying eschatology, through an acceptable explanation of the mystery of death and life-after death. Christianity in discharging this eschatological function of religion, offers their adherents the prospects of a personal God who will, after death, judge every human being for reward or punishment according to each person's stewardship here on earth (Iwe 2003 "The Inseparable Social Trinity: Religion, Morality and Law" II).

Further, the judgment will be based on motives and deeds of everyone, believer and/or unbeliever. St. Paul declares as follows: “so each of us shall account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12).

### **Serving as the Prophet and Conscience of Society**

The Christian Churches under different umbrellas such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should serve as the prophet and conscience of the society. Christianity plays this revolutionary role by calling on both humans and society as they go astray along the path and precipice of self-destruction, crisis, corruption, dishonesty, anarchy, and other social vices and injustice. Christianity armed with its transcendental reference points and standing as the acknowledged custodian of ideals and values formations which constitutes eminently the necessary and salutary critique for any given prevailing situation in human society (Iwe 2003:9).

According to Convey (1990), the character ethic is principle-centred paradigm, which is on the fundamental idea that there are principles that govern human effectiveness. These are natural laws in human dimension that are just real, just as unchanging and arguably “there” as laws such as gravity in the physical dimension (32). He further reaffirmed that, these principles are not values per-se, but they are guidelines for human conduct that are proven to have enduring values. They are self-evident and therefore, are unarguable, like the Ten Commandments.

### **Workshop**

The Christian Churches under different umbrellas such as Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should organize workshops in the different parts of the country, for the different groups in crisis. The Christian Churches can use a workshop or seminar in solving a conflict. According to *Longman dictionary of Contemporary English*, workshop is a meeting at which people try to improve their skills by discussing their experiences and doing practical activities (1653). Therefore, in conflict resolution, the two or more parties, individuals in the conflict, discuss their experiences of the conflict and devise practical ways of tackling the conflict. It is at workshop that decisions and resolutions are made, and agreement reached on practical ways of providing viable solutions.

### **Advocacy Visits**

Christian leaders of PFN and CAN should organize quarterly advocacy visit to the governors and the president intimating them on the need for development, promotion of social justice, forgiveness and peace in Nigeria. they should also intimate the leadership of Nigeria on the need to learn to feel the pulse of the nation, to hear the cry of the people, and to react with almost sense of responsibility to the desires and aspirations of the constituent units of the country for that kind of unity and peace that iss based on mutual forgiveness for past hurts and wounds, and a mutual commitment to righting the wrongs of the past, and building our society on justice and fairness (Ekpenyong 2011:132-133).

They further create in the mind of the leadership of Nigeria, an understanding that, dialogue is the answer to all conflicts and it brings peace and not deployment of military troops which breeds killings, bitterness, hatred, anger and genocide. Indeed, Christian that is the Church is responsible for peace making while military are often responsible in peace keeping by the use of arms. Finally, the Church should be bold enough to speak against the suppression, oppression, discrimination, ethnicism and injustice in the country and to call on the youths and warlord of different ethnic groups to sheath their swords and down their weapons for peace to reign. They should also call on the faith-based organizations and the government to address as a matter of urgency, the issues of unemployment and underdevelopment (133).

### **Conclusion**

This writer from the available facts is of the view that any realistic attempts to deal constructively with the conflicts in Nigeria must address the roots of conflict such as ethnic differences, poverty, high unemployment, revenue distribution, electoral malpractices, corruption and political godfatherism.

It is also the possible of this work that the Churches and her leaders should draw the attention of their members to the fact that everything in this world is temporary and man will give account to God about his/her stewardship here on earth on the day of judgment. Again, the Church leader should speak out strongly against the vices and ills of their society. Besides, the Church leaders must do all within their power to inculcate in their members in their members and general public the virtues of peace, honesty, love justice, forgiveness, tolerance, public integrity and must also see that men/women of proven

integrity, honesty and transparent character are placed in in public officers (Ekpenyong 2011:134).

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