

Implications of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts on Northern Nigeria Christians with Focus on Pastoral Care

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implications of ethnic and religious conflicts on Northern Christians. The aim focuses on pastoral care. Qualitative data gotten from the secondary source were used to back up the study. Findings from the study reveal that there is actually nothing wrong with conflict; no society that seeks to develop can absolutely do without it. What is often questioned is how man responds to conflict. A poorly handled conflict persists for too long a period of time and seems to defy easy solution. The priests must be sensitive to conflict indicators. There are always signs of conflict before it starts. So we must be observant and take appropriate actions before it happens. The priest must open communication channels as a guide to control misconception and misinterpretation of intention of either party among others were made.

Keywords: *Ethnic, Religious, conflict, Pastoral Care and Christians*

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts and crises are found at every stage of life. Individuals, groups, associations, clubs, societies, local, national and even world community continue to experience conflicts and crises in one way or the other. Conflicts and Crises are features of life and they have been since the beginning of creation—conflicts between darkness and lights and even between and among the first set of human beings created on earth. So, conflicts and crises are permanent features of life which humanity have come to live and cope with and resolve from time to time. Their existence cannot be terminated in life unless we want to terminate life itself. However, a poorly handled conflict or crisis could become violent or destructive which could hinder national peace and security. Thus, effective strategies that can nib conflict in the bud and prevent it from escalating if it erupts, as well as to sustain peace to avert future occurrence, sustains any nation that seeks peace, growth and development.

The World Book Encyclopedia (2004) sees crisis as a turning point in the course of anything, uncertain time or state of affairs, moment of great danger or difficulty. Conflict, on the other hand, according to Kasterner and Ray (2002) is a social factual situation in which at least two parties (individuals, groups, states) are involved and strive for goals which can only be reached by one party, and or want to employ incompatible means to achieve a certain goal. It thus implies struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce but to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals. The two words: crisis and conflict, as earlier stated are “foreign bodies” in human society or relationship. The two situations are

a disturbance to peaceful coexistence in human society and they cause a dent to harmonious relationship within and without a group. Harks (2000) throws more lights into these words as he gives synonyms of crisis as “catastrophe, calamity, emergency, disaster” and that of conflict as “quarrel, squabble, disagreement, difference of opinion, desertion, discord, friction”. Thus, a conflict refers to a disagreement or differences in opinion as to how certain objectives could be achieved. A typical example is the Niger Delta crisis which has been raging for over three decades with a little chance of abatement until recently when the regime of the late President, Umaru Yar’Adua initiated an amnesty programme. The issue of conflict in Nigeria in recent times has gained or attained public notoriety. It is almost at the door step of every person either as a perpetrator or a victim. It is consensual among scholars that conflict is an inevitable part or process of social life (Aja, 2009) and a continuing reality of social existence. Conflict involves two or more parties that have or perceive incompatibility in both interest and values, or in strategy of achieving the ends desired.

Conflict is a strain in relationship that goes with emotion. The higher the emotion, the higher the tendency of evolving conflict intensity, conflict index includes mutual image of misunderstanding, hostile utterances, actions and responses that seek to put the interest(s) of other party in a disadvantaged position. Conflict is a frustration based attitude or a protest against lack of opportunities for development and against recognition and identity. As Aja (2009) succinctly puts it “whether conflict or violence has its origin in class, status, ethnicity, sex, religion, nationalism or resource control, we are dealing with the same fundamental issue. Conflict is many a time seen from its negative side. Many see conflict as setback and disintegrative in nature. Nonetheless, conflict has its positive side. Conflict can symbolize as much as lead to positive development for individuals, groups and society at large. Conflict can be a corrective signal, or warning. It can be an integrative process and development driven. One thing must be borne in mind. Whether conflict is negative or positive, it needs to be tailored towards the support of existing norms and rules of social existence for an uncontrolled conflict situation can be counterproductive.

There is a common saying that “there can be no smoke without fire”. In the same vein, there can be no conflict without signals, crisis warnings, utterances, attitudes, decisions and actions. Conflicts occur when parties are insensitive to early conflict indicators. Vigilance and timely response to conflict indicators will enhance understanding of each party’s perception will help alter the mindset of the primary actors in support of well coordinated and appreciated intelligence on conflict avoidance prevention.

Effects of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts

In assessing the effects of ethnic and religious conflicts the basic idea is to find a way of controlling conflict to achieve peace. According to Obasi (2009), there is the tendency to resolve conflict but peace may not be achieved. Religion is expected to play the role of peace making in conflict situations but at times it remains the highest identity marker for conflict. It is generally agreed that religion has a unifying factor in the society. However, it is also clear that out of narrow mindedness, misunderstanding, fanaticism, religion may also block social progress and break down the social order. The negative effects of religion

make some people doubt whether anything positive may come out since religion has been used to justify killing in the name of God. The issue of Boko Haram being a clear example in Nigeria, some States have been held hostage; many lives and property have been lost as a result. The forms of violence inflicted on people were not only physical but psychological. As such many Nigerians have been displaced, disoriented and traumatized. Violence can be carried over time by traumas left behind by its effects on the body, mind and spirit. Violence leads to physical, psychological and moral deformities. Ethnic conflict is now on the increase. People are now more sensitive about their cultures and places of origin. This tendency has affected their outlook in life, economy, education and social amenities that are due to them. There are complaints of domination, marginalization and monopoly of political powers by some groups against others.

One ethnic group accuses the other of dominating the economy and public service. Allegations of ethnic discrimination in appointments, jobs and admission into schools, business transactions and the sharing of amenities abound. In fact, there is hardly any official policy that has not been seen to derive from the sole aim of promoting one ethnic interest or the other (Kesterner and Ray, 2002). Sometimes ethnicism and religion come into play. This is the case when one particular ethnic group belongs or professes a particular religion. For example the Hausas from the north are mainly Moslems while the Igbos in the south are mainly Christians. Any conflict that occurs can be seen from the lens of religion and ethnicity. This can be dangerous (Ahtisari, 2009). A typical major conflicts in Nigeria is shown on the table 1 below.

Table 1: Major Conflicts in Northern Nigeria

Location	Date	Religious Group	Reported Cause
Ilorin riots	1998 & 1999	Muslim students and non-Muslim students	A non Muslim place of worship was demolished by Muslims (1998). Muslim elders insisted that all non-muslim places of worship be moved from the town.
Kano	(Osama Bin Ladin riots) 2001	Hausa (Muslims) and Igbo & Yoruba non Muslims	Protest against America's attack on Afghanistan
Kaduna riots	2001	Hausa (Muslims) & Igbo	Suspected against America's attack on Afghanistan.
Kaduna riots	2002	Hausa (Muslims) and Igbo and Yoruba non-Muslims	Planned hosting of the Miss World Beauty Pageant in Nigeria.
Kano	2004	Hausa (Muslims) and Igbo & Yoruba non Muslims	Reaction to the Yelwa/Shendam crisis in Plateau state where many Hausa-Fulani (Muslims) were killed.
Kano riots sumaila	2008	Muslims and non Muslims	Cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad purported to have been drawn on the school wall.
Book Haram Jihad	2009	The sect against all non Muslims and non adherents (Muslim) to the sect.	Intra-religious Islamic fundamentalism
Jos riots	2010	Muslims and non-Muslims	Building of a mosque in a non-Muslim area of the city.

Source: Aja A. (2009). Islam and Conflict in Northern Nigeria

Table 2: Fact Line on Ethno-Religious Conflicts Scenario in the Northern States of Nigeria

S/N	State	Incidents	Year-period	Casualties
1.	Adamawa	Dumo ethno-religious conflict Dumo ethno-religious conflict. Numan riot and deposition of Homa Bachama	2002 2003	10 civilians dead, 8 policemen dead Mosques, churches, private and public buildings set ablaze
2	Bauchi	Ethno-religious conflict Sharia conflict	2001 2002	No definite number killed Many lives and properties lost
3	Benue	Zaki-Biam massacre Attack on Hausa community Ipav-Ukan crisis Tiv-Jikun conflict Oturkpo political conflict. Political conflict in Kwande LGA	2001 2001 2001 2002 2002 2004	19 soldiers kidnapped and 16 soldiers feared killed. A number of civilians died and property destroyed. Houses, mosques and property lost. Many lives and property worth millions lost. Many lives lost, many beheaded. No definite record. Armed men killed. 100 persons and displace about 100 indigenes
4	Borno	Biu ethno-religious conflict Danish cartoon riot in Maiduguri.	2000 2006	Property worth N100million destroyed Ritual killing of a teenage girl. Over 900 refugees. Millions of property lost; many killed in the North and South too.
5	Kano	Afganistan US ethno-religious conflict Jos reprisal ethno-religious conflict.	2001 2001	Hundreds of people killed, 40 churches burnt, billions of Naira lost. Many lives lost, properties destroyed.
6	Plateau	Wase ethno-religious conflict. Quaan Pan-ethnic conflict spillover of Wase conflict to Langtang Jos Jumaat prayer conflict Jos North LC Council conflict. PDP LG congress crisis, Fulani-Beron conflict in Barkin Ladi, House vs Taro ethnic religious conflict. Jumaat prayer conflict in Dilimi Barlom; Ado ethnic crisis. Wuse ethno religious conflict 1&2, Fulani Taro conflict over cow theft. Hausa-Fulani against indigenes conflict.	2004 2001 2001 2002 2004 2004	No clarity. Lives and property lost. 5378 lives lost. Wives and children saw their husbands and fathers killed brutally. Widows and orphans produced. Lives and property lost. No fewer than 1,500 Germai people killed, 60 refugees produced. Millions of naira worth of property lost. 1,500 death tool; roasted or slaughtered about 350 people died. Several houses and property destroyed.
7	Taraba	Kuteb=Chamba sectarian conflicts. Fulani Mambilla conflict.	2001 2002	200 people killed due to early army intervention. Over 53,791 cattle were allegedly killed; several lives lost; about 23,647 pastoral Fulani fled to Cameroon.
8	Yobe	Assault in Igbos in Potiskum Assault on Igbos	2003 2004	Few lives lost. Millions of naira worth of property destroyed. Property lost

Source: Miriam Ikejiani-Clark as cited in Obasi (2009). Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

Assessment of the Effect of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts

The effects of religious and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are many and varied. It will take a lot of space and time to cover. However, the presenter will limit himself to some selected dates and areas where such conflicts took place. A survey of the figures of churches and Christians affected both in ethnic and religious crisis are alarming (see attached for some of these attacks on Christians). The data show us the extent to which Christians and indeed Nigerians have been affected. The picture of physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual pains inflicted no doubt show how they are hurt and demand urgent need for care, healing, consolation and material support. From the economic point of view, many of them have lost almost all they have to survive in life. Their properties were destroyed and some lost their life and lives of their loved ones. Socially, many have been displaced as a result of bodily injuries sustained either from bombs, gun shots and psychological tremor caused by fear of death in the face of danger. Spiritually, some must have engaged themselves in reprisal attacks or engaged in planning for the death of their enemies and as such are suffering from guilt. Such persons need spiritual healing. Priests must attend to such parishioners urgently and with love.

Implications of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts on Pastoral Care

Conflicts denote the absence of peace. According to Pope John Paul II, as cited in Obasi (2009) peace is a fundamental good which involves respecting and promoting essentials of human values; the right to life at every stage of its development; the right to be respected, regardless of race, sex, or religious convictions, the right to material goods necessary for life, the right to work and to a fair distribution of its fruits for a well ordered and harmonious coexistence. As pastors of souls, we must first seek for peace of the people we serve. This we do by defending the dignity of the person, commitment to fair distribution of resources, harmonious and united promotion of a society in which everyone feels welcomed and loved, these are the indispensable premises for building true peace.

Religion contributes to peace building by empowering the weak, by influencing the moral-political climate, by developing cooperation and providing humanitarian aid. As pastors, we must ensure peace building by making sure we reach the weak through entrepreneurial education, retreats, workshops and symposia. We can help them acquire some skills that will assist them live a minimally comfortable life. Religious actors have been a major force for social justice. The pastor can empower the poor of the parish to form Peace Movement that can challenge bad policies by providing them with theological support against injustice. In the third world, many varieties of theology have been developed which are critical of structural violence.

The best known are the liberation theology of Latin America and the black theology in South Africa. Some groups like peace workers can be formed in parishes to assist people in conflict areas by seeking for help from parishioners of used clothing, food and shelter especially for refugees. A group like peace movement can also hold press conference whenever there are indicators of conflict (Synod of Bishops General Assembly, 2011). The pastor can also help build peace by influencing the moral-political climate within his

environment. Traditionally, Catholics have not been so kind in joining politics. A group like peace movement with the assistance of Justice and Peace Commission can go a long way in information seeking and disseminating such information to people (Xavier, 1995). Yet another implication for pastoral care is the preaching of faith to the faithful. This faith preaching is in two forms. First, we must preach faith to ourselves the shepherds of the flock before we can preach it to others. In the Synod of Bishops XII Ordinary General Assembly, The New Era Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, the synod fathers emphasize on the need for priests to have faith in Christ by alluding to Luke 17:5 “Increase our Faith” which is the apostles prayer to the Lord Jesus when they realized that faith which is a gift from God is the only way of having a personal relationship with him (Christ) and fulfilling their vocations as disciples. According to the Synod Fathers, the plea of the disciples arose when there is awareness that their limitations kept them from forgiving others. Again, faith is also needed in performing signs which illustrate the presence of God in the world. To encourage the disciples, Jesus used the fig tree, withered to its roots to empower them and spur them to action.

Have faith in God. Truly I say to you whoever says to this mountain “Be taken up and cast into the sea and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer believe that you will receive it and it will be yours (Mark 11: 22-24).

With lots of emphasis on triumphal gospels and fake healings going on in some Pentecostal churches, priests may be stymied and tend to withdraw from performing healing and all that is related to life. Many priests sometimes lack faith. This is not a surprise for even the apostles’ exhibited lack of faith. That explains why Jesus on various occasions cautioned the twelve for their lack of faith. To the question of why they were unable to cast out demons, the master responds- Because of your little faith. The emphases on the need of the disciples to have faith in Him are many – Matthew 17:20, Matthew 8:26, Luke 12:28, Matthew 16:809, Matthew 14:28, Matthew 14: 30-31, Matthew 14:33. The Lord prayed for us that our faith may not fail (Luke 22:32). Therefore, followers of Jesus Christ should open the door of their faith and attend to the spiritual and psychological needs of people around them.

New Era of Evangelization

To assist the faithful, the priest must devote lots of his energy to the word of God, and celebration of the sacraments especially the Eucharist. The priest accomplishes this task by proclaiming and bearing witness to the Christian life through the *catechumen ate catechesis* and works of charity. Using the words of the synod fathers, ordinary evangelical activities can be done with a renewed vigor. New methods and new forms of expressions are needed to convey to the people of today the perennial truth of Jesus Christ forever new and the source of all newness.

Only a sound and robust faith, witnessed in a poignant manner in the lives of the martyrs, can give impetus to many short term and long ranged pastoral projects, breathe new life into existing structures and

spur a pastoral creativity to meet the needs of the people of today and the expectation of present day society (Synod of Bishop General Assembly, 2011 pp 48-49).

The new evangelization is very necessary realizing that the number of people embracing the faith are enormous and noteworthy and demands that greater number of people enter the ministry of transmitting the faith to them. The parish community becomes the center of these communities, point of reference and coordination for a wide range of church realities and pastoral initiatives. The new evangelization calls for a greater involvement of catechists and likewise a greater commitment by the church on their behalf. Catechists are immediate witness and irreplaceable evangelizers who represent the basic strengths of the Christian communities (Synod of Bishop General Assembly, 2011). To indicate their importance, the synod fathers advocated the need to reflect more deeply on the task and provide them with more stable living conditions and greater training and visibility in their services. Enough attention has not been given to this group of Christians, noted the Synod Fathers. The conditions of service and training are not meeting up with the demands of the time. Therefore, this study is in support of the idea the Synod Fathers raise - the possibility of giving the catechist as instituted, stable ministry within the church. Alongside, there should be a new zeal to send priests on further studies. The seminary training alone will never be sufficient for the demands of the new era of evangelization. In fact priests should be allowed to take courses in Departments of Humanities and Sciences. This goes in line with the synod fathers' wishes that the consecrated life will make an essential contribution to the new evangelization, especially in education, health care and pastoral activity, primarily among the poor and those in need of spiritual and material assistance. These sets of people include the refugees, the psychologically hurt, the displaced, destitute, and much more. To reach this group, each parish must evolve powerful groups such as 'peace workers' and youth ministry. The renewed dynamism in the Christian community will lead to renewed missionary activity (*mission and gentes*) which is now more urgent than ever, given the large number of the people who do not know Jesus Christ.

By allowing them to be animated by the Holy Spirit, Christians will then be more attuned to their brothers and sisters who despite being baptized have drifted from the church and Christian practice. Many Catholics have left the church for Pentecostal. Some managed to come back while others never did. The renewed evangelization must also be directed at these people so that they can rediscover the beauty of their Christian faith and the joy of personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in the church and the community of the faithful.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data showing the effects of ethnic and religious conflicts on Christians indicate the urgency of the need to assist Christians and other religious to have peace and security. The church must as usual come to the aid of those affected through material help and spiritual programmes. The priests must be sensitive to conflict indicators. There are always signs of

conflict before it starts. So everyone must be observant and take appropriate actions before it happens. The priests must educate the people on the importance of peace. Peace education is the process of proactive enlightenment on the knowledge and skill of observing and responding to early warning indicators. It is to help parties appreciate the losses and pains. The priest must open communication channels as a guide to control misconception and misinterpretation of intention of either party. Conflict should be suppressed before it explodes by usually employing free flow of communication and information making dialogue the supreme value and strategy of conflict prevention. A new vigour on the sacraments. High attention should be paid to the preparation for sacraments of baptism of adults RCIA. The priest must pay particular attention to the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Adequate time should be given for its preparation and conduct. Homilies should be well prepared and delivered with new forms of expressions. The study of psychology and counseling should be made compulsory in the major seminaries. Above all, to meet the needs of parishioners, the priests and catechists must be properly trained. Capacity building by way of training and retraining of the clergy should be encouraged.

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