

**INTRA-CHURCH DIALOGUE AND ETHNIC CONFLICT
RESOLUTION: AN EVALUATION OF ACTS 6:1-7 TOWARDS PEACE-
BUILDING IN AFRICA**

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Abstract

The conflicts in Africa have triggered the worst humanitarian crisis since after the independence, and if not checked, will continue to rise. Population and values displacements are increasing and an entire generation of children has and is being exposed to war and violence, increasingly deprived of basic services, education and protection. The study is premised on the assumption that the body of Christ is today plagued by numerous intra church conflicts resulting in breakaways or divisions because the appropriate church conflict resolution and management mechanisms are not used to manage and resolve them when they do occur. Hence peace search based solely on secular values will probably not be sustainable. The objective of this study is to expose these frictions and to ask how we can deal with this intra church conflict and how we can think with a text such as Acts 6:1-7 in addressing the conflict of ethnic discrimination and leadership crisis. The paper adopted the critical historical exegetical method and Biblical passage of Acts 6:1-7 and theories. The major findings of the research indicate that the early Christians in Jerusalem witnessed a case of ethnic or cultural discrimination that nearly rocked the unity of the church and the Jerusalem church at this point numbered in the thousands and likely worshipped in home gathering in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), the Widows' needs taxed the distribution network beyond the capacity of the apostles to oversee it directly. It was also confirmed that the major causes of conflicts in the church (Acts 6:1-7) include discrimination, negligence of the ministry of the word and prayer, poor communication skills, poor administrative structures. The paper aims at recommending intra-church dialogue as expressed in the Acts 6:1-7. The paper concludes that the disciples thus demonstrated the willingness to take a deliberate and decisive decision on certain issues in order to maintain peace and unity of the church.

Keywords: Church, Intra-Church Dialogue, Ethnicity, Conflict Resolution, Peace-Building

Introduction

Acts 6:1-7 marks the first intra-group conflict in the Christian community. In this passage, two different groups (Hebraic Jews and Hellenistic Jews) were trying to live together as one Christian community in spite of their cultural differences. This cultural divide marginalised the Hellenistic Jews. Commenting on this, Witherington (1998) avers that a community that regarded itself as the fulfilment of Israel's covenant with God, members who are more prototypically Israelite are receiving more of the group's resources than the others. This marginalised group, however, aptly complained to the Apostles and their complaint led to the restructuring of the community that would better serve the community's needs.

In the world today, most inter/intra ethnic conflicts occur as a result of marginalisation of certain group(s). The word 'marginalises' according to Okaneme (2014) means 'to treat someone or something as if they are not important.' It entails putting people in a position in which they lack power and cannot influence a decision. According to Mully (2007, p.252) 'marginalisation has the potential to result in severe material deprivation, and in its most extreme form can exterminate groups'. People who are marginalised often have little or no control over their lives, and the resources available to them. In line with this assertion, Young (2000) opines that marginalised individuals are materially deprived and as well excluded from services, programmes and policies of the society. This according to Saksena (2014) cripples the affected in making any positive contribution to the growth of the society. From the biblical creation story, we are made to understand that God created everyone equally for co-existence. However, in most culture of the world, especially the Jews and the Africans, the notion of equal co-existence is a mere daydreaming phenomenon, (Ugwu & Okoli, 2012). The Jews according to Ituma (2016) believed that God is their monopoly; hence non-Jews have no place in the divine economy.

In Nigeria, it is glaring that some ethnic groups claim dominance over others and this poses a serious challenge to the country's unity. No wonder Osudibia (2001) while commenting on this ugly situation postulates that marginalisation remains the major obstacle on our way to nationhood. Nigeria as a multi-lingual entity is made up of ethnic or tribal groups with a population that ranges between five thousand to five million for each group, (Uzuegbunam, 2013). The Hausa, the

Igbo and the Yoruba are the three main ethnic groups in Nigeria. Others are the Tiv, the Efik, the Urhobo, the Kanuri and so on. According to Okaneme (2014), the Igbo are the third largest ethnic nationality in Nigeria after Hausa and Yoruba. He (Okaneme) observes that there is no other ethnic nationality in the country that has suffered tremendous and orchestrated marginalisation like the Igbo people. In concordance with the above Nwankwo (2000) avers marginalisation has become the Igbo's bedmate. From the optic of Okaneme (2014), the program of 1966 meted against the Igbo in the northern part of the country, following their quest to secede from Nigeria, a move that was necessitated by endless acts of wickedness and man's inhumanity to man, claimed up to one million lives. It is not unsurprising that even up till today no successive governments have successfully addressed the issue of marginalisation of the Igbo. Probably that is the reason why most scholars, commentators and opinion leaders in the Eastern region of the country who do not understand why the Igbo are so neglected in a system that claims to accommodate them, questions the place of Igbo in Nigeria. Thus this gave birth to the Igbo question: *Who are the Igbo? And are they really part of Nigeria?* If the Igbo are truly part of Nigeria, then the recent call for the restructuring of the country's federal structure should urgently be addressed. Okonkwo (2018) while stressing the need for restructuring of the country's present structure succinctly defines restructuring as 'altering the way something is structured in order to make it more functional or effective.' In the context of this paper, the above definition implies that restructuring entail reworking or reorganizing the political structure of Nigeria in a way that will be generally acceptable by its citizenry, the Igbo inclusive. Understood from the above background, this research pegs its fulcrum within the pericope of Acts 6:1-7 which upholds to a reasonable extent restructuring as the best solution to the problem of marginalisation. Hence, if Nigerian leaders can restructure the country's political structure, then the complaint of marginalisation and constant secession threats by some ethnic groups in the country, particularly the Igbo will undoubtedly die off.

Clarifications Of Terms

Church

For a proper understanding, there is the need to make a distinction between two senses in which the term 'Church' is used in this paper. In one sense, the Church is used as an institution while another sense it is used as an organism. The Church as an institution is defined by Van Reken as the "formal organization that sets out to accomplish a specific purpose (2020, p.198). According to Van it is an

agent which can do things; and can say things because it has its own voice. The Church as an institution has its own purposes and plans, its own structure and officers, and its own mission. It has its own proper sphere. In many ways it parallels other institutions, like governments or schools (2020, pp.198-202). And the Church as an organism refers to "the church as the body of believers, the communion of believers. Caleb D. Dami, understands the term 'Church' to mean an organized people of God, a spiritual and moral force to be reckoned with (2019, p.5);

The distinction between the two concepts of the Church is that while the institutional church refers to a unified organization. The Church as an organism refers to an aggregate of individual believers in which each Christian acts as a personal agent with a purpose and a call in God's plan. This twofold meaning of church reverberates in Jim Harris' view when he says: "By "church" I mean both the individual believer and the institutional entity (Dajwan 2020, p.3). It therefore means that in discussing the role of the church in the pursuit of intra church conflict resolution and peace of a given country, we are invariably dealing with the part that both individuals and the corporate body have to play in the society.

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 (1990, pp.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 (1951, pp.31-34). According to Turner cited in (1969, p.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 organisations, communities, families:

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

Dajwan (2020, pp.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 (Dajwan, 2022, p.6).

Ethnicity

According to *African Bible Commentary*, ethnicity is conceptualized as “an attempt to prove that one’s own group is superior to any other group” (6). Ethnicity involves one group of people discriminating against another group, primarily on the basis of ethnic differences. Turaki Yusuf in his book “Ethnicity, Racism, Tribalism and the Gospel of Christ” wondered about the strong force of the bond of ethnic affiliation above and over that of Christianity saying:

Can the “water” of baptism of Christianity be thicker than the “blood” of ethnicity, racism, tribalism? How deeply rooted are biblical Christianity in the hearts of Africans? Are people in church representing their ethnic/tribal groups or the new Messianic community? To what extent have Christian and biblical values and principles transformed the hearts of Africans, then their expressions of Christianity would reflect the dominating influence of African world view especially of ethnocentrism and tribalism (1997, p.53).

The implication of the above statements is that the idea of ethnicity, racism, and tribalism superiority is and originated from man’s pride.

Conflict

“Conflict” is term used to mean a variety of things, in an assortment of contexts under the mantle of conflict are words such as, serious disagreement, incompatibilities, fight, argue, contest, debate, combat, clash and war etc. These are the equally evocate terms to understand the term conflict or to know which description of behaviour fit under the title of conflict. According to Dajwan quoted Bercovitch, a situationalist thinker defines conflict as a “situation which generates incompatible goals or values among different parties” (2022, p.3). According to Lewis Coser an American sociologist defines conflict as the “Clash of values and interests, the tension between what is and what some groups feel ought to be” (Avorgah, 2010, p.9).

Conflict Resolution

The word “resolution” means, The quality of being resolute, A firm decision, An expression of opinion or intensions agreed on by a legislative body, The action of solving a problem or dispute, The process of reducing or separating something into components. Thus, we can preliminary define conflict resolution as a situation: “Where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their

central incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as parties and cease all violent action against each other." Conflict resolution refers to a range of process aimed at alleviating or eliminating sources of conflict. Conflict resolution is an umbrella term for a whole range of methods and approaches for dealing with conflict: from negotiation to diplomacy, from mediation to arbitration, from facilitation to adjudication, from conciliation to conflict prevention, from conflict management to conflict transformation, from restorative justice to peacekeeping (Avorgah, 2010, p.10).

Intra-Church Conflict/Congregational Conflict

This is the difference in opinion or purpose that may frustrate an individual's goals or desires when religious and spiritual beliefs are unaligned (Sande, 2004, p.12). Intrapersonal conflict is a struggle a person has within oneself. It becomes an internal battle between what they want and yet not wanting to compromise what others want. The contest one has when different parts of the self-compete with one another. I want to beloved Pastor, but I also want to be preacher who speaks the truth (Dajwan, 2022, p.8).

The Exegesis Of Acts 6:1-7

Translation of the Text

Greek	English (WEB)
Acts 6:1 ἄν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις πληθύνοντων τῶν μαθητῶν ἐγένετο γογγυσμὸς τῶν ἑλληνιστῶν πρὸς τοὺς ἰβραίους, ὅτι παρεθεωροῦντο ἅν τῆ διακονίᾳ τῆ καθημερινῆ ἀφ' ἧραι ἀτῶν	Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, a complaint arose from the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily service.
Acts 6:2 προσκαλεσάμενοι δὲ οἱ δώδεκα τῶ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν ἔειπαν Ὁκ ῥεστόν ἔστιν ἡμῶς καταλείψαντας τῶν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ διακονεῖν τραπέζαις.	The twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not appropriate for us to forsake the word of God and serve tables.
Acts 6:3 ἐπιπέψασθε δὲ, ἄδελφοί, ἄνδρας ἑξ ἡμῶν μαρτυρουμένους	Therefore select from among you, brothers, seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, whom we

□πτ□ πλήρεις Πνεύματος κα□ σοφίας, ο□ς καταστήσομεν □πτ□ τ□ς χρείας ταύτης·	may appoint over this business.
Acts 6:4 □με□ς δ□ τ□ προσευχ□ κα□ τ□ διακονί□ το□ λόγου προσκαρτερήσομεν.	But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.
Acts 6:5 κα□ □ρεσεν □ λόγος □νώπιον παντ□ς το□ πλήθους, κα□ □ξελέξαντο Στέφανον, □νδρα πλήρη πίστεως κα□ Πνεύματος □γίου, κα□ Φίλιππον κα□ Πρόχορον κα□ Νικάνορα κα□ Τιμόνα κα□ Παρμεν□ν κα□ Νικόλαον προσήλυτον □ντιοχέα,	These words pleased the whole multitude. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch;
Acts 6:6 ο□ς □στησαν □νώπιον τ□ν □ποστόλων, κα□ προσευξάμενοι □πέθηκαν α□το□ς τ□ς χε□ρας.	Whom they set before the apostles. When they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.
Acts 6:7 Κα□ □ λόγος το□ Θεο□ η□ξανεν, κα□ □πληθύνετο □ □ριθμ□ς τ□ν μαθητ□ν □ν □ερουσαλ□μ σφόδρα, πολὺς τε □χλος τ□ν □ερέων □πήκουον τ□ πίστει.	The word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly. A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Extract from Bruce cited by Clement; (Clement, 2021, pp.3-5).

The Historical Context of Acts 6:1-7

The authorship of the book of Acts like many other books in the bible has severally been questioned by biblical scholars; however, nobody has sufficiently provided an alternative. Although the book of Acts never mentioned its writer, from the earliest times Luke has been held to be its writer, (Barclays, 2009). The researcher agrees with this position on the authorship of Luke since there are no sufficient grounds for an opposing view. With a careful study of the Book of Acts, one would discover that it is rich in the history of the nascent church. Bruce (1962, p.15) sagely remarks: ‘of all the Evangelists, it is Luke who approaches most nearly the standards of the classical historians.’ As we all know, historians barely restrict themselves to a single document, hence, there is no iota of doubt that Luke must have presented excellent information in the Luke-Acts narratives.

However, carefully looking at our text of study (Acts 6: 1-7), one would observe that it marks the first cross-cultural conflict among the early church, (Kim, 2009). The church began to encounter some problems as it began to increase. Ituma (2003, p.121) meticulously avers that 'by effective biblical analysis one would expect the rate of numerical growth to indicate the rate of spiritual growth. But unfortunately, there are early indications that call for questions.' Commenting on the issue that led to the appointment of seven deacons, Ituma (2003) argues that the problem was not merely a matter of food and drink rather it is an exhumation of an age long acrimony and antagonism. This probably suggests that they have been disharmony between the Hebrews and the Hellenists prior to their coming together as one community of believers. The Hebrews here, were the Aramaic- speaking Jews who grew up in Palestine while the Hellenists refer to the Greek-speaking Jews who lived outside of Palestine but then moved to Jerusalem at some point in their adult lives (Pratt, 2017). Ituma (2003, p.122) observes that "for those Jews of the diaspora who have been highly influenced by the Greek culture, therefore, Hellenised, total commitment to Torah and the Tradition of the Elders is wanting. So, even though these believers were justified and regenerated it was still difficult for them to dwell together as a family. For Boice (1997, p.112) it was "a problem of administration" as a result of rapid growth of the Church. Barrett (1994, 303) on the other hand narrowed it to "a minor deficiency in administration." On this note, the issue of marginalisation of the Hellenists by the Hebrews in the daily distribution can, therefore, be said to be as a result of the unbalanced structure that was in place in the early church. That is why Ituma (2003) on realising why an issue as mean as the meal could generate such a threat to unity, unsurprisingly stated that the meal issue was only the last straw that broke the camel's back. It was until after the apostles restructured the unbalanced structure that marginalised the Hellenistic Jews that the institution experienced growth and development; "the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly..." (Acts 6:7).

Textual Analysis Of Acts 6: 1-7 As Describe By Clement u. Daniel

V. 1-2 The growth of the church and the beginning of complaints by the Hellenists

¶ν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις: En dé taís hēmérais taútai (Now during those days) according to Bruce, (1967), marks the beginning of a new division in the early church. πληθύνοντων (plēthynontōn) used in this verse which is a genitive form of the verb πληροῦν (*plēthō*) meaning 'to increase' is used to show the rapid

growth of the early church, (*Vincent's Word Studies, 2006*). The word 'μαθητῶν' (mathētōn) which is earlier used for the personal followers of Jesus before his Ascension, is used in Acts as a name for Christians in general, (Bruce, 1967). This according to UBS (1997) is the first time in the book of Acts where the term 'disciples' is used as a designation of the Christians. Altogether the corresponding Greek term is used more than twenty-five times in Acts; once with the addition "of the Lord" (Acts 9:1); and in 9:25 the reference may be limited to the followers of Paul, Saul's followers, (UBS, 1997). 'παρεθεωροῦντο' (paretheōrounto) which means 'being neglected' is the imperfect passive of the verb 'paretheōrou' meaning 'to overlook' or 'to neglect' (*Vincent's Word Studies, 2006*).

V. 2-5 The need to restructure the church organisation

The Apostles, upon seen the need to restructure the church organisation, asked the disciples to look among themselves and choose seven men 'μαρτυροῦμενους'; *marturoumenous* (of good report). 'marturoumenous' is the present passive participle of 'martureō' meaning 'to bear witness to' (*Vincent's Word Studies, 2006*). The motive behind the Apostles' directive is that they 'may appoint' them to oversee the material needs of the church. 'may appoint' in Greek καταστήσομεν: 'katakēsomen' is future active indicative of 'katakēsomi', "we shall appoint", as an action of the apostles following the choice by the church. It is promised as a certainty, not as a possibility, (Robertson, 2006). The apostles believe that restructuring the church organisation will enable them concentrate on τῆ διακονίῃ τοῦ λόγου: *tē diakonia tou logou* (the in ministry of the words). According to Robertson (2006) 'diakonia' (ministry) is the same word employed in Acts 6:1, but here it's about preaching as the special ministry with which the apostles were concerned.

V. 5-7 Restructuring through the appointment of deacons

When the community of believers received the proposal presented to them by the Apostles they were 'ἠρέσαν: *ēresen* (pleased). 'ēresen' is the Aorist active indicative of 'areskō' (Robertson, 2006). So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch, (Acts 6:5 WEB). 'Chose' in Greek is 'ἠξελέξαντο'; *exelēxanto* which is the first aorist middle indicative of *eklegō*, meaning "to pick out from." (*Theological Dictionary of New Testament, 1978*). Each one of the seven has a Greek name, however, according to Vincent Word Studies, (2006), there is no reason to infer from this that they were all Hellenists because it was customary among the Jews to have two names, the one Hebrew

and the other Greek. They were probably partly Hebrews and partly Hellenists. They were then presented to the Apostles who in turn inaugurated them. The result of this restructuring as seen in verse 7 is remarkable. The number of the word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied.

Conclusion of the Exegesis

The exegesis and the textual analysis of Acts 6:1-7 reveals that two different groups (Hebraic Jews and Hellenistic Jews) were trying to live together as one Christian community in spite of their cultural differences. This cultural divide which favours the Hebrew-speaking Jews marginalised the Hellenistic Jews. This brought a very serious problem to the unity and growth of the early church. However, the Hellenist complained to the Apostles about the unbalanced structure that marginalised them the community that claimed to accommodate them. For the Apostles, who were unbiased and selfless, listened to the voice of the Hellenist and in response, proffered a lasting solution by restructuring the structure of the early church to accommodate the interest and wellbeing of the marginalised. The consequence of this was remarkable: 'the word of God spread so rapidly and the number of the disciples overwhelmingly multiplied' (Acts 6:7) (Clement, 2021, p.10).

Church As Instrument Against Herself (Intra-Church Conflict)

Unfortunately today, there is a lot of leadership tussles in the church giving way to Christian Politician dammed the consequences of their spiritual negligence over the church and often permits the Muslim counterparts to use them against the killings of their brethren. The rank of these Christian Politicians who permitted themselves to be used for the destruction of the church ranges from Pastor to Members of the church (Dajwan, 2022, pp.16-17).

Some denominations Overseers and Leaders pay allegiance of the same set of government who give no regard to the church destroyers. Many have no reasonable sense of humour as long as they receive financial support from the enemies of the Church. Sometimes you will hear such people saying "receive their money but don't vote them". Some campaign on the Pulpit as against the warning set out by Prophet Abraham and Amos. They Prophets openly cast their rebuke, but many church Leaders today hail and campaign for the enemies of the church on their Pulpits- what a pity? The gap of unity is missing in the church as good number of Christians condemns themselves of the evils that is happening against the church instead of condemning the Islamic Jihadists who are the perpetrators (Ogidiolu, 2019, p.19).

Dialogue in Management of Ethnic Conflicts in Africa

According to Dajwan Conflict managers use the term “dialogue” in a variety of ways. Most dialogue processes, however, involve people who are engaged in a long-lasting, deep-rooted conflict sitting down together with a facilitator who will help them explore their feelings about the conflict and each other, and develop an improved understanding of the concerns, fears and needs of the other side. Sometimes, the goal of such a process is to develop approaches to conflict resolution: sometimes the goal is simply improved interpersonal relationships, understanding and trust- at least between individuals, if not between the groups as a whole (2022, p.38).

Conflict theorist Jay Rothman in Dajwan (2022, p.38) describes four different kinds of dialogue as in conflict management. The first is positional or adversarial dialogue. In this situation, disputants, meet with a facilitator to talk, but the conversation continues in the same adversarial (I’m right and you are wrong) mode that conflicts typically take. In adversarial dialogue, disputants engage in positional bargaining (that is they focus on firm, usually mutually – incompatible, positions) and blame each other for the problem. The second is human relation dialogue. This approach has disputants meeting with a facilitator to explore their feelings about the conflict and each other. They break down negative stereotypes [Alhaji Sabo Mangu 2001 issue of arna].

Rothman’s as in Dajwan (2022, p.39); third type of dialogue in management of conflict is activist dialogue. This form of dialogue provides a foundation for action. Disputants from opposite sides of a conflict get together to rebuild a war – torn city, form a bi-partisan school, or deliver health care to the sick and injured a practical example is [Stefanos Foundation in Jos South-Mark Lipdo]. The purpose of such dialogue is not just talk and understanding, but Mutual Corporation and assistance. (Mutual understanding and trust are often by-products, nevertheless). The fourth dialogue in conflict management is problem solving dialogue – referred to elsewhere in these notes as an analytical problem solving workshops. Such workshops bring disputants together to explore their feelings about the conflict and each other (as it is done in human relations dialogue), but special attention is focused on the parties’ fundamental needs, the absence of which is seen to be deep – rooted conflicts. An intense effort is made to jointly reframe the conflict in terms of needs and then engage in joint problem solving to develop ways to meet those needs and hence, resolve the conflicts.

Dialogue processes are becoming increasingly widely used. Some (especially human relations dialogues) are typically facilitated by therapists, religious leaders and mediators. Problem solving workshops are typically facilitated by mediators and/or conflict scholars. As originally conceived, these workshops were to be highly analytical. Thus, conflict scholars with an expertise in conflict theory as well as the particular conflict at hand were considered the best facilitators. Many problem solving workshops are still carried out by academicians, but others are facilitated by mediators and other practitioners with less of a scholarly background. Great challenge is the unresolved conflict in Assemblies of God Church because of leadership, all forms of dialogue is used but yielded no result- lets continue to pray (Case study is dialogue in Kwaghas Lahir Mangu Alhaji A Sabo initiative experienced of 2001).

Recommendations

This paper gives the following recommendations:

Since restructuring was a huge factor that the leaders of the early church used to put down the fire of marginalisation in Acts 6:1-7, it is recommended that Nigerian leaders should use restructuring to address the increasing problems facing the country today such as secession threats and so on.

All the regions of the country should have an equal number of states and local governments. The current economic disadvantages experienced by the Igbo in allocation distribution should be brought to an end. The Igbo should have an equal share in the national 'cake' with their counterparts. This will boost job creation, growth and development in the region.

The major reason why there's an increasing demand by the Igbo for secession from Nigeria is that the region is largely underdeveloped due to overdependence on the federal government. Hence, this paper recommends that the Igbo region should be given more autonomy to operate and control the internally generated revenues in the region.

Corruption begins with delegates. Money changing hands does not amount to credibility. It hides the real motives and ability of the bribe-giver. The givers and the receivers have no moral characters. It redefines democracy. It is no longer Government of the people by people for the people. It is Government of the rich corrupt by the corrupt and for the corrupt rich. Character is superior to Charisma. The Soul of the land is at stake. Lord, please forgive our land, rescue us from ourselves. Nigeria much change from money debate and ratings. This wrong investment process will kill the spirit of development and

nation building 26/05/2022 (Dashan). For the disciples they engaged in dialogue and all they parties were in agreement with the decision (Acts 6:5).

Conclusion

This paper was a focus on Acts 6:1–7 and intra-church and ethnic conflict resolution in Africa. There is a peace-making force in the Bible that can help us to mutual understanding, joint efforts as a church for peaceful coexistence and genuine humanity. The Gospel calls Christians as salt and light of the earth and to be witnesses for God. The Bible speaks of God who is merciful, just, sovereign and forgiving. If mission, is in God's name, it must be carried out in God's way. This means intra-church conflict resolution, dialogue, fairness, respect and the opportunity to respond freely. The issues involved were extensively discussed with open mind by listening to the widow's grievances and suggestions which was welcomed by all (Acts 6:5). It is found out in the course of exegesis of the pericope of Acts 6:1-7 that the problem of marginalisation can rightly be solved through restructuring. Hence, it is demanded that for any church organizations and heterogeneous society to live together in peace and unity, there must be proper restructuring to accommodate everyone's interest. In contrast to the above, it is pointed out in this paper that current structure in operation in the church example Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) in Nigeria poses a serious challenge to her unity and development. The restructuring of the early church by the Apostles in Acts 6:1-7 challenges Nigerian leaders of churches to do the needful to ensure that the church organization in the country is restructured.

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