

APOSTOLIC CONFLICT RESOLUTION MODEL (ACT 15: 1-29) AND ITS RELEVANCE TO AFRICAN CHURCH LEADERS

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Abstract

This piece of study on Apostolic Leadership Strategy in the Light of Acts 15:1-29: Conflict Resolution for the African Church and Society contended that Africa, the Church inclusive, is infected and inflicted by numerous and various conflicts in the 21st century. The problem is that in many cases, in the African context and church space, the church and society have not always applied biblical apostolic conflict resolution strategies as a means of bringing solutions to tensions and disputes. As a way of garnering data for the study, hermeneutical principles were adopted as methodology. In this way, the context of the text and important words in the text were given attention in order to glean the import of the teaching of Acts 15:1-29. The study is hinged on cooperative conflict behaviours by Roger Fisher and William Ury and conflict transformation proposed by Bush, Folgers, and Lederach. The findings of the present literary endeavour include: Apostles identified the cause of conflict in Acts 15:1-29. The apostles set up a committee for mediation and discussion on the conflict. Apostles issued a communiqué on resolution, which rests on accommodationism. The research concludes by recommending that African Church leaders should emulate the three Cs strategy found in Acts 15:1-29 for dispute resolution in Africa, especially within the church space.

Keywords: Apostolic, Leadership, Conflict, Resolution, Model, Africa, Church, Society

Introduction

Conflict has existed since the inception of humanity. Conflict is ubiquitous, extending to every corner of the globe where humanity resides. Conflict is pervasive across nations, organisations, both secular and sacred, and even between families. Conflict is inherent in all races of human beings. Nevertheless, Africa is said to experience conflicts of diverse types, intensities, and origins. According to Lowery (2022), there are currently approximately 27 ongoing conflicts worldwide, classified into three categories: deteriorating, stagnant, and

improving. Among the 27 global hostilities, 15 of them are armed conflicts taking place in Africa. These include conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Mali, Burkina Faso, Southern Sudan, Boko Haram in North East Nigeria, and others. Certain confrontations entail the participation of government forces and rebel organisations, depending on the circumstances.

The aforementioned number of conflicts solely pertains to instances of armed, violent conflicts, or wars. These many forms of violence have diverse impacts on the lives of the inhabitants residing in these nations, regions, and countries. The disputes have an impact on the psychological well-being, material well-being, physical well-being, religious well-being, and spirituality of the inhabitants. Frequently, hostilities in nations lead to conflicts in churches, as the individuals engaged in warfare outside the churches are the same individuals who worship within them. Given that churches are integral components of both society and the environment, any conflicts arising in the environment have an impact on the churches.

Boundary and land resource conflicts, which often go unaddressed in the media and public spheres, are additional types of conflict that deserve attention. According to a report by Adepegba (2022), a total of 676 individuals lost their lives in various communal and boundary conflicts between January 2018 and August 2022. Additionally, 444 dwellings were demolished during this period. In Nigeria, border conflicts arise from a range of circumstances, including colonial-era government influences, geographical disparities, socio-political dynamics, and economic disparities. Due to their predominantly arbitrary nature and the lack of consideration for indigenous history and cultural dynamics during colonial government administration, boundary markings frequently give rise to conflicts.

The predicament lies in the fact that these conflicts permeate the churches due to the overlap between the individuals involved in community disputes and their membership in different church denominations. Intercommunity conflicts frequently arise inside the many congregations, resulting in disagreements among their members. Frequently, the ministers exhaust their techniques in managing these conflicting members within their own congregations. If these disagreements, occurring inside both communities and churches, are not promptly resolved, they have the potential to escalate into strife and fragmentation within the church. The debate in Acts 15 primarily revolved around doctrinal matters. However, the

apostles' approach to resolving this conflict can be relevant and adaptable to addressing modern issues within the church and society.

This study employed intercultural hermeneutics as a way to interpret the text of Acts 15, which serves as the central topic and location of the investigation. Intercultural hermeneutics is a method of interpreting text that aims to overcome cultural barriers that hinder the comprehension of scriptural text and events when they are transferred from one culture to another. It is a constructor of bridges in an interconnected global society. According to Udeani (2009), intercultural hermeneutics refers to the practice of engaging in hermeneutics across different cultures, philosophical traditions, and texts. This involves engaging in dialogue with these cultures, traditions, and texts, allowing them to pose questions to the interpreter, who then seeks to find solutions to those questions. Intercultural hermeneutics enables us to understand and appreciate different cultures, making historical events and narratives more relatable and allowing us to engage with intercultural dynamics on an equitable basis. Intercultural hermeneutics is a pertinent approach in this study since it aims to establish a connection between the cultural environment of the Mediterranean world in the 1st century and present-day African civilization.

Conceptual Clarifications

The explanation of some key words helps to clarify and elucidate this literary framework. Let's begin by defining apostolics. The name "apostolic" is derived from the French word "apostolique," which means "apostolic" in English. It may be traced back to the Latin word "apostolicus," which means "to be an apostle," and the Greek word "apostolikos," which means "apostolos" or "apostle." The text "Online Etymology Dictionary (2023)" states that "apostolocus" in Latin and "apostolos" in Greek both refer to a messenger, envoy, or someone sent forth. Additionally, it delineates the role of a missionary who introduces the teachings of Christianity to a previously unexposed location or community.

The apostolic era spans from the Great Commission given by Jesus Christ to his apostles around 33 AD until the demise of the final apostle in Anatolia around 100 CE. According to belief, the apostles dispersed from Jerusalem following the demise of Stephen, as documented in Acts 8. In the past, they identified themselves as followers of the Lord and adherents of the teachings, as depicted in Acts 9. The persecution of Paul by the early church resulted in the

scattering of the disciples who had assembled in Jerusalem. The disciples who became apostles were the foundational figures of the early church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The apostles who oversaw the Jerusalem Church were the same individuals responsible for the tension and strife addressed in this book.

The subsequent crucial concept that necessitates elucidation in the study is conflict. Conflict, as defined by the American Heritage College Dictionary (2004), is a condition characterised by overt and protracted combat, a military engagement, or a state of warfare. It can also be described as a condition of discord or conflict between individuals, concepts, or interests that are irreconcilable or contradictory. In the context of this research, conflict refers to a state of discord arising from opposing doctrines, ideas, and interests between the Gentiles and Hebrews, who were members of the early Christian group known as the Church. Meanwhile, conflict is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as a state of active disagreement between individuals who hold opposing viewpoints or ideals. This term is applicable to the research as it accurately depicted the events and dynamics among the apostles and members of the early church.

It is crucial to acknowledge that conflict can arise not only between individuals or organisations, but also in other contexts. Conflict may arise within the religious or institutional setting due to divergent views, attitudes, teachings, or concepts. In this scenario, clashes of views, opinions, or ideas have the potential to incite confrontations among individuals and collectives. According to the Document Management Study Guide (2022), conflict is a disagreement between people that results from differences in cognitive processes, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirements, and occasionally perceptions. The dispute shown in the discussed text from the Acts of the Apostles originated from contrasting interpretations of law and grace between the Hebrews and the Gentile Christians. The debate arose from the question of how to properly allocate, value, and implement the concepts of law and grace.

As a result, the Hebrews possessed distinct interests and prerequisites for being part of the community of God's chosen people. Conversely, the Gentile believers possessed distinct interests and prerequisites for joining God's family by embracing Jesus Christ, thereby accessing divine favour for admission. The doctrinal struggle in Acts 15 arose due to the divergent goals and requirements of several factions. The apostles, on the other hand, implemented a distinctive approach to resolve and reconcile conflicting people and divergent interests and demands. This study also utilises the term "model" as a fundamental component.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2023), a model is a highly exemplary representation that serves as a basis for creating copies. It signifies that a model can be replicated due to its distinctive attributes and its exemplary character. The authors contend that church leaders in Africa have the capacity to imitate and replicate the strategy for resolving disputes used by the apostles in Acts 15.

The term "African" is an adjective derived from the noun "Africa." The term "Africa" originated from the Latin words *Africus* or *Africanus* in the 1850s. The term was initially employed to denote the African land, specifically referring to Libya and the Carthaginian dominion. Subsequently, its usage was broadened to encompass the entire continent of Africa (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2023). During this period, it was used to refer to the Caucasian inhabitants of Africa. Subsequently, it connoted African American individuals who were either native to the United States of America or forcibly transported from Africa during the 18th century.

Theoretical Review

The research on the Apostolic Conflict Resolution Model (ACTS 15:1-29) and its applicability to African church leaders utilised two theoretical frameworks as the foundation of the study. Howard Giles, a sociolinguist, proposed the accommodation theory as the first theory of conflict resolution in 1971. The accommodation conflict resolution technique posits that the nature and progression of conflict within a social, religious, or cultural context is shaped by the communicative behaviours and strategies employed by individuals within the group throughout their interactions. Ensuring the tranquilly and concord of individuals and organisations is of utmost importance in the process of resolving conflicts. This idea is pertinent to the current study as it highlights the apostles' prioritisation of the unity of the body of Christ over ethnic religious persuasion, personal interests, and ideologies. The apostles modified their manner of speaking and engaging in conversation to suit the Gentile followers of Christ.

The study is based on the second theory, which is the technique of resolving conflicts through non-violence. The concept of non-violence as a tactic for resolving conflicts was pioneered by Mahatma K. Gandhi, an Indian politician associated with the Indian National Congress. The notion posits that parties engaged in conflict should actively pursue amicable relations and strive to comprehend the perspective of their adversary. Non-violence aims to combat

wicked systems, oppressive practices, ideologies, and doctrines rather than individuals or groups. Gandhi referred to non-violence as the formidable tool of the powerful, whereas violence was regarded as the feeble weapon of the vulnerable (Marquette University, 2023). The non-violent approach of conflict resolution technique utilises effective communication skills such as empathy, conversation, negotiation, and mediation. The objective is to restore peace and harmony (Okonkwo, 2006).

This strategy for resolving conflicts without violence is in line with the study, as it shows that the apostles in Acts 15 employed mediation, dialogue, and non-violent communication techniques infused with empathy to address the doctrinal debate that emerged. This technique effectively addressed the doctrinal conflict and fostered harmonious coexistence between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the early Church.

Interpretation of the text of Acts 15:1-29

Literary Context of Acts 15

Acts 15 is positioned chronologically between Acts 14 and 16. Acts 15 recounts the journey of Paul and Barnabas as they relocated from Pamphylia to Iconium and ultimately to Lystra. In Lystra, they performed a miraculous healing on a man who had been crippled since birth and was unable to walk. The divine being demonstrated his magnificence as the originator of everything. Barnabas and Paul, the apostles, declined to take credit for the miraculous cure of the paralysed man. As a result, the crowd pelted Paul with stones and forcibly removed him from the city, presuming him to be deceased (14:19). However, Paul and Barnabas revisited Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, where they provided support and encouragement to the followers, urging them to persevere in their belief (14:21).

Subsequently, Paul arrived in Derbe and Lystra, where a man named Timothy became a member of Paul and Silas' company. Paul's missionary endeavours experienced continuous expansion, resulting in the conversion and baptism of individuals like Lydia. Paul performed another extraordinary act of exorcism in 16:16–22, which generated a significant disturbance in the city and ultimately led to the incarceration of both Paul and Silas. Chapter 15:1-29 serves as the central and primary subject of the study that the writers are doing, occurring between these incidents. According to the opening verse of Acts 15 (1), Judeans

advocate circumcision as a requirement for salvation, which is the main topic of discussion.

To enhance readability and comprehension, the text of Acts 15 is provided in both Greek and transliterated English.

Greek Language Transliterated

1. Kai tines katelthontes apo tes loudais edidaskon tous adelophous hotic, Ean me perithmethete to ethei to mouseos, ou dynasthe sothenai. 2. genomenes de staseos kai zeteseos ouk oliges to Paulo kai to Barnaba pros autous, etaxan anabainein Paulon kai Barnabas kai tinas allous ex auton, pros tous apostolous kai presbyterous, eis Jerousalem, peri tou zetematos toutou. 3. Hoi men oun propemphthentes hypo tes ekklesias dierchonto ten te phoinken kai samareian, ekdiegoumenoi ten epistrophen tou ethnon, kai epoiun charan megalen pasin tois adelphois. 4. paragenomenoi de eis hierosolyma, paredechthesan apo tes ekklesias kai ton apostolon kai ton presbyteron. Amengeilan te hosa ho Theos epoiesen met auton. 5. Exanestesan de tines ton apo tes haireseos ton pharibaion pepisteukotes, legontes hoti, Dei peritemnein autous, parangellein te terein ton nomon Mouseos. 6. Synthechthesan te hoi apostoloi kai nol presbyteroi ideim peri tou logou touton. 7. Polles de zeteseos genomenes, anatas, petros eipen pros autous, Andres, adelphoi, lymeis epistasthe hoti aph hermeron archainon, en lymin exelexato ho Theos dia tou stomatos mou akousai ta ethne ton logon tou euganelion, kai pisteusai. 8. kai ho kardiognostes Theos emartyresen autois, dous to pneuma to Hagion, kathos kai hemin, 9. Kai outhen dickrinen metaxy hemon te kai auton, te pistei katharisas tas kardias auton. 10. Nyn oun, ti perirazete ton Theon, epitherinai zygon epi ton trachelon ton metheton hon oute hoi pasteres hemon, oute hemeis, ischysamen bastasai? 11. alla dia tes chariots tou kyriou Jesou, pisteuomen sothenai, kath hon tropon kakeiroi. 12. Esigesen de pan to plethos, kai ekouon Barnaba kai Paulou exegoumenon hosa epoiesen ho Theos, semeia kai terata, en tois ethnesian di auton. 13. Meta de to sigesai autous, apkirthe Iakobos, legon, Andres, adelphoi, akousate mou. 14. Symenon exegesato kathos proton ho Theos epeskepsato, labein ex ethnon laon to onomati auton. 15. kai tonto symphonousin hoi logoi ton propheton, kathos gegraptai: 16. Meta tauta anastrepsou ki anoikodomeso ten skenen avid ten peptokuian, kai ta katesmammena autes anoikodomeso, kai anorthoso auten, 17. hopos an ekzetesousin hoi kataloipoi ton anthropon ton kydrion, kai panta ta ethne, eph hous epikekletai to noma moue p autous, legei kyrios,. Poion tauta. 18. gnosta ap aionos. Estin to theo panta ta erga autou. 19. Dio ego krino me parenochlein tois, apo ton ethnon, epistrephousin epi ton Theon, 20. alla episteilai autois tou apechestai ton alisgematon ton eidolon, kai tes pornewas, kai tou pniktou, kai tou haiumatatos. 21. Mouses gar ek geneon archalon, kata polin tous keryssontas

auton echei, en tai synogogais kata pan sabbaton anaginoskomenons. 22. Tote edoxe tois apostolois kai tois presbyterois, syn hole te ekklesia, eklexamenous andras ex auton, pempasai eis Antiocheian syn to Paulo kai Barnaba: Ioudan ton kaloumenon Barsabban, kai silan, andras hegroumenous ento is adelphois, 23. grapsantes dia cheiros auton: Hoi apostoloi kai hoi prebyteroic, adelphoi, Tois kata ten Antiocheian kai Syrian kai kilikian, adelphois tois exethnon: chairein. 24. Epeide erousamen hoti tines ex hemon exethontes exaratan hymas logois, anaskeuazontes tas psychas hymon, legontes peritemnesthai kai terein ton nomon, hois ou diesteilametha, 25. edoxesn hemin genomenois homothymadon, eklexamenois Andres, pempasai pros hymas, syn tois agapetois hemon, Barnaba kai Paulo, 26. anthropois paradokodosi tas psychas auton hyper tou oromatos tou kyrion hemon, Iesou Christou. 27. apestalkamen oun Ioudan kai silan, kai autous dia logou apangellontas ta auta. 28. edoxen gar to pneumatic to Hagio kai hemin, meden pleon epitithesthai hymin baros, plen touton ton epanankes: 29. apechesthai eidolothyton, kai haimatos, kai pnikton, kai porneias. ex hon diaterountes heautous, eu praxete (Bible Hub, 2024).

Text of Acts 15:1–29 Cited in English Language (New King James Version)

1. A group of individuals from Judea arrived and instructed the other believers that unless they undergo circumcision in accordance with the customary practice of Moses, their salvation would not be possible. 2. Consequently, due to a significant disagreement and conflict, Paul and Barnabas, together with a select group of individuals, decided to travel to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders regarding this matter. 3. Consequently, the church dismissed them, and as they journeyed through Phoenicia and Samaria, they enthusiastically shared the news of the Gentiles' conversion, bringing immense joy to all the other believers. Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, the church, the apostles, and the elders warmly welcomed them, and they proceeded to recount all the miraculous deeds that God had performed on their behalf. 5. However, certain members of the Pharisees who had embraced the faith objected, claiming that it was imperative to perform circumcision on these individuals and instruct them to adhere to the Law of Moses. 6. The apostles and elders convened to deliberate on this issue. 7. Following a lengthy debate, Peter stood up and addressed the assembly, saying, "Gentlemen, you are aware that some time ago, God selected me to be the instrument through which the Gentiles would receive the message of the gospel and come to believe." 8. God, who possesses understanding of the innermost thoughts and feelings, recognised them by bestowing on them the Holy Spirit, in the same manner as He did for us. 9. We did not differentiate between ourselves and them, but rather cleansed their hearts through faith. 10. Hence, why do you challenge the divine by burdening the

disciples with a load that neither our ancestors nor we could endure? 11. However, we are confident that, by the divine favour of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be redeemed in the same way as they will be. 12. The entire crowd fell silent and attentively listened to Barnabas and Paul as they recounted the numerous miracles and wonders that God had performed through them among the Gentiles. 13. Following their cessation of speech, James responded, stating, "Gentlemen and fellow brethren, lend me your ears." 14. Simon has proclaimed the initial visitation of God to the Gentiles, with the purpose of selecting a group of individuals to be identified with His name. 15. Furthermore, the statements spoken by the prophets are in complete accordance with this, exactly as they have been recorded. 16. Subsequently, I shall proceed to restore and reconstruct the dilapidated tabernacle of Daniel, reinstating its ruins and establishing it again. 17. The LORD declares that all Gentiles who bear His name may seek Him, enabling the rest of humanity to do the same. The Lord, who is responsible for all these actions, affirms this. All of God's works have been known to Him since eternity. Therefore, I conclude that it is unnecessary to burden the Gentiles who are converting to God. 20. However, we communicate with them, urging them to refrain from engaging in activities that are contaminated by idols, such as sexual immorality, consumption of strangled animals, and consumption of blood. 21. Moses has been preached by many generations in every city, and his teachings are read in the synagogues every Sabbath. 22. Subsequently, the apostles and elders, along with the entire congregation, made the decision to dispatch select individuals from their own group to Antioch, accompanying Paul and Barnabas. These individuals were Judas, also known as Barnabas, and Silas, esteemed leaders among the brethren. The number is 23. They corresponded with them by means of this letter:

Greetings to the brethren of the Gentiles residing in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, from the apostles, elders, and brethren.

24. It has come to our attention that certain individuals who were once part of our group have caused you distress by speaking in a manner that has disturbed your inner selves. They have insisted that you undergo circumcision and adhere to the laws, even though we did not issue any such directive.

25. We, in unanimous agreement, deemed it favourable to dispatch selected individuals, accompanied by our esteemed companions Barnabas and Paul, to your location.

26. Men who have endangered their lives in the pursuit of spreading the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27. Consequently, we have dispatched Judas and Silas, who will likewise provide the identical information orally.

28. *The Holy Spirit and we have deemed it appropriate to impose upon you only these essential matters, without any further weight.*

29. *You refrain from consuming anything presented to idols, blood, strangled animals, or engaging in sexual immorality. If you abstain from these, you will thrive. Goodbye.*

Exegesis of Acts 15:1-29

The authors have provided the text of Acts 15:1-29 in Greek, transliterated into English letters, and then translated into English. This allows for a thorough and accurate reading of the section. At the beginning of the section, the author, Luke, establishes the setting and situation of the literary composition and framework he was creating. He employed appropriate and vivid language to establish the literary scene.

Cause of the Conflict in Acts 15:1–5

The of the conflict in Acts 15:1–5 stems from certain men from Judea, *edidaskon tous adelphous hoti, Ean me peritmethete to ethei to Mouseos ou dynasthe sothenai* were teaching the brothers or brethren that if not or unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. Certain men from Judea indicate Judaizers who were teaching Gentile believers their ethnic religious dogma of circumcision. This dogmatic controversy caused the *Staseos* dissension, which is disagreement that led to discord, and *zeteseos* meaning argument and disagreement. In other words, Luke, the author of Acts 15, employed two related terms that suggested disagreement, argument, and discord or division. Adeyemo (2006) supports the claim that these men from Judea accepted the Pharisees' teaching on circumcision, which confirmed one as a Jewish proselyte, forgetting that only believing in the name of Jesus Christ made one a Christian. Circumcision was a covenant between God and Abraham on behalf of the Jews. Genesis 17:13-14. It was not necessary to make circumcision a universal requirement for salvation for all nations and peoples.

Ethnocentrism in religious dogma was at the heart of the dissension and commotion. These men from Judea taught that God was their ethnic God, and His words and ways were in their ethnic customs and dictates. Ethnicity and ethnocentrism are also major causes of dissension and dispute in African communities and African church denominations. Equally, it is clear that African church leaders face complex challenges that are deeply ingrained in cultural, socio-political, and traditional dynamics. In many churches in Africa, from the

rural to the urban, leaders have challenges to deal with resulting from ethnic issues.

Committee for Mediation in Jerusalem

The mediation committee, consisting of the apostles and elders, convened in Jerusalem to deliberate on the issue of circumcision. Peter stood up among the recurring disagreements and addressed the council, proclaiming that he had been divinely selected to propagate the word of God to the Gentiles. Peter testified before the council of apostles and elders about how God demonstrated his acceptance of the Gentiles by bestowing upon them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. God made no distinction between us and them, and he purified their hearts through faith. In this passage from the book of Acts, Peter introduces two significant and crucial aspects to the conversation. Specifically, he highlights that both the Jews and the Gentiles were recipients of the Holy Spirit. Once more, God sanctified the hearts of the Gentiles through their unwavering belief in the divine message. Therefore, the possession of the Holy Spirit is an essential requirement for every individual who identifies as a child of God, regardless of their religious background. Another shared characteristic is the belief in the efficacy of Jesus Christ's work on the cross as a prerequisite for salvation. For you have received salvation through grace through faith, and this salvation is not a result of your own efforts; it is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). Peter persisted in questioning the rationale behind subjecting these Gentile Christians to the burden of a yoke, as it was inconsistent for Jewish individuals like themselves to carry such a weight. It's crucial to keep in mind that Jesus came to free people from the weight of the law by offering his own yoke of grace and faith, which he described as being light for Christians to carry (Matthew 11:29–30). Macdonald (1995) argued that if God accepted the Gentiles based on their faith rather than their adherence to the law, there was no reason for the apostles, elders, or Jews to impose the burden of the law on the Gentiles any longer.

Following Peter's testimony of how God had granted the Gentiles access to the kingdom via faith, Paul and Barnabas both shared their own accounts of how God had performed wonders among the Gentiles, indicating God's approval of them. James, the older individual, participated in the council by extensively citing passages from the Old Testament Scripture. In essence, he conveyed that God had a vested interest in ensuring that the nations (Gentiles) submit to His authority, as stated in Amos 9:12. Keener (1993) the apostles and elders who spoke at this

juncture in the discussion elucidated the cosmological essence and disposition of God. The essential characteristic of God is that he is universal rather than limited to a specific ethnic group, but rather encompasses all of humanity as Catholic. The men from Judea may have been preoccupied with a narrow-minded and ethnocentric perspective and comprehension of God. However, the apostles, namely Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and Elder James, clarified to them that God's divine plan and salvific economy were aligned with Catholicism. All people and nations worship Him, and He wants everyone to find salvation by placing their faith in His son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16). This is the reason why He purchased the redemption of all individuals and societies by sacrificing His Son's blood.

Communiqué for Gentile Believers at Antioch Church to Avoid Paganism and Pollution

After their deliberations, the council issued a directive that served as the official document, commonly referred to as a memorandum of understanding (MoU), which the parties, namely Jews and Gentiles, were expected to adhere to and comply with. Consequently, James, the older individual, addressed the assembly, expressing his opinion that it is unnecessary to cause distress to the Gentiles who are embracing faith in God. However, it is necessary to instruct them to abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, suffocation, and bloodshed (but to episteilai autois ton apechesthai ton alisgemation tou eidolon, kai tes porneis, kai tou pniklou, kai tou haimatos). The Gentile believers in Jesus Christ were instructed to abstain from these four practices, which likely originated from their former origins as idol worshippers.

The phrase "abstain" governs this particular area of the information. Abstaining refers to the act of self-restraint from engaging in or deriving pleasure from something. In Greek, the term "abstain" denotes the act of refraining, foregoing, forgoing, or keeping off. Gentile Christians must effectively transition to their newfound belief in Jesus Christ by abstaining from and distancing themselves from idols and their depictions. They must adhere to Jesus, the Son of the Divine Being, and completely abstain from engaging with idols or their veneration henceforth. To refrain from engaging in sexual immorality *Porneias*, the Greek root word for pornography, refers to a sinful behaviour encompassing a wide range of unlawful sexual intercourse or sexual activity, such as fornication, prostitution, harlotry, incest, adultery, and more. Within the pagan cults that the Gentiles were part of prior to their conversion, there existed practices of

prostitution and individuals who engaged in such activities, which may have included their participation. In order to show their conversion and allegiance to Jesus, the Gentiles must abstain from any impure or contaminating actions, as they are considered the spiritual partners of Jesus Christ, who is the leader of the church.

The command to refrain from consuming animals that have been strangled is a divine decree that sprang from the covenant between God and Noah following the deluge. However, it is imperative that you abstain from consuming any food that still has its vital fluid (Genesis 9:4, New International Version, The Thompson Chain Reference Bible, 1990).

The practice of refraining from consuming blood can be traced back to Genesis 9:4,5, where it is said, "And for your lifeblood, I will certainly require an explanation." The Thompson Chain Reference Bible was published in 1990. The interpreters of the Bible in 1954 contended that these restrictions were related to Christian morals and chastity, as well as the rejection of all types of pagan worship and idolatry. These would facilitate and authorise social and religious exchanges between the Jewish and Christian communities in the Antioch districts.

The church was delighted with the decision and judgement of the apostles and elders, particularly James. A group of distinguished and trustworthy men, carefully selected, including Barnabas, Paul, Judas, and Silas, were dispatched to the Antioch Church to deliver a spoken message. The term "chosen men" has significance in this scripture and extends to the African church as well. We require individuals who have been carefully selected to manage the frequent disagreements that occur within our churches and communities.

Relevance to African Church Leaders

Lessons or models from the study that African church leaders could emulate include:

1. Prior to engaging in discussions, it is essential to identify the underlying causes of conflicts that arise within our churches and communities. African church leaders should exercise caution in regards to ethnic feelings and ethnocentrism when it comes to their dogmas, beliefs, and the way they treat their members.
2. Establish a committee to provide mediation for all types of conflicts within our churches and communities. The membership of such mediation

committees should consist of selected individuals, including ministers and elders.

3. The apostles and elders at the Jerusalem council extensively cited the law and the prophets of the Old Testament to demonstrate the validity of the irrationality of ethnicity in relation to church issues. The church should utilise both the church's constitution and the pertinent historical context of the community when resolving internal disputes.
4. Compose a communication to document the verdicts and resolutions made by the mediation committee. This will create reference materials and papers that will be utilised in the future by the church and communities.
5. The Jerusalem Council's verdict and communiqué shifted Pauline theology from an ethnic viewpoint to a global one, which is intriguing to notice. Pauline thinking underwent a transformation from a theology centred around the performance of righteous deeds, as seen in Judaism, to a theology centred around faith and grace. Hence, in resolving disputes inside the African church, the perpetrators had to be compelled to embrace Jesus Christ as their redeemer via unwavering belief. Grace should be applied universally in all instances of dispute between Christian believers in African churches.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the Apostolic conflict resolution model, as described in Acts 15:1-29, offers a valuable framework for African church leaders who are dealing with internal disputes and doctrinal discrepancies. When viewed in the context of their surroundings, it is clear that African church leaders face complex challenges that are deeply ingrained in cultural, socio-political, and traditional dynamics. This biblical passage exemplifies the significance of engaging in dialogue, making careful judgements through prayer and scripture, and striving for harmony in the midst of differences within the early Christian community. This model presents enduring principles that resonate with the current challenges encountered by African church leaders by highlighting collaboration, humility, and dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Adopting this method can promote reconciliation, enhance theological comprehension, and reinforce the unity of the Church, ultimately empowering African communities to skillfully manage conflicts while remaining devoted to their spiritual traditions.

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