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Leadership Conflict: an Impetus for Church Growth in Nigeria

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Abstract

Conflict always has negative connotation. Humans have made concerted efforts to prevent conflict in their day to day relationship; however, conflicts are inevitable in any human relationship. Leadership conflict is very common in the church from the New Testament time till today. Previous studies on leadership conflicts in the Church have always centered on the evils of conflicts with little or no attention paid to the role in Church growth. The aim of this paper is to examine leadership conflict as an impetus for church growth in Nigeria. The method used was historical. It was discovered that leadership conflicts have been used by God for the growth of the Church in Nigeria. Christianity has the record of expansion by reason of conflicts. From the era of Apostles in the Acts of the Apostles through the reformation period to the time of the 21st century, the church grew rapidly in conflict times. In Nigeria, the mission church had their own share of leadership conflict. The *Aladura* and the Pentecostals that are spreading like wild fire today is mostly product of conflicts. Conflict could be a divine instrument for church growth. It is therefore hoped that Nigerian Christian Leaders in our Churches today will use conflict to achieve Church growth.

Key words: Leadership, Conflict, Church Growth, *Aladura*, Pentecostals, Mission churches

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Introduction

Leadership is crucial to the survival of any organization because it can either make or mar the organization. It is viewed in many quarters that good leadership is key to sound organizational practice. The Christian Church as an organization cannot fulfill divine mandate without good and competent leaders. The primary responsibility of church leaders is to care for and nurture Christian faithful. Church leaders are expected to use wisdom and maturity to guard and guide the congregation and individual members into growing ways of life in Christ so that the Church can be healthy, responsive and mature (Awojobi, 2020: 37)

One of the main challenges in Church leadership is Conflict. Sometimes, conflict manifest in every facet of Church's life. It could be Leaders versus members or leaders versus leaders. The one we are considering in this paper is leadership conflict in the church. Conflict always has negative connotation, however it is not every time that conflict is negative. For instance, a fight against ungodly practices in the Church or society is a just one. Apostle Paul enjoined Timothy to fight the good fight of faith (1Tim. 6: 12). This means that there are good conflicts. The type of Conflict under discussion in this piece is the one between Christian faithful such as in fighting, personality clash, misunderstanding and so on that resulted in the migration of Christians from one church or denomination to another (Awojobi, 2002: 96-97).

This study therefore examines leadership Conflict as an Impetus to Church Growth in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict remains an integral reality of human existence. Down through the centuries, one conflict or the other has engendered wars and other debilitating conditions. Conflict in this work is understood as a phenomenal struggle produced by a clash of values, interests, or opinions between two or more parties. In other words, conflict is said to have occurred when one party perceives the action of another party as blocking the opportunity for the attainment of a goal (Ezeodun, 2007: 277). This definition suggests that conflict is between two or more parties that are at loggerheads with each other. However, one of the main challenges in conflict is that it has negative connotations. Many people see conflict as evil. However, leadership conflict is very common in the church and any human organization. Some churchmen and women see leadership conflict as a sign of carnality but recent studies have revealed that some leadership conflicts are impetus to Church growth in Nigeria.

This study explored the positive aspects of Leadership conflict with reference to Church growth. The questions to which answer were sought are: What is Conflict? What is the role of Conflict in the Church? How can leadership Conflict be an impetus to Church growth?

Objective of Study

The objective of this study is to examine the place of Leadership Conflict in Church growth in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Leadership

One of the issues that have received the attention of Scholars in the 21st century is Leadership. There is no doubt; leadership is a critical issue in any endeavour (Cousins, 2008: 32). Leadership is a very significant concept. Leadership makes a great difference in every organization of group. It can be affirmed that the success and achievements of a group to a large extent will be proportional to the quality of its leadership (Kolawole, 2005: 1). This is because everything rest and falls on Leadership in any organization.

People see Leadership from different perspectives but all agreed that leadership connotes the ability to get things done with the assistance and cooperation of other. Leadership is concerned with the direction of the actions of the members of a group and motivates the efforts of people in specific contexts. Thus a leader is the person who gets things done by involving others to achieve the goal of the organization. In other words, leadership is the art of motivating group of people to act towards achieving the set goals of an organization. Leadership is the ability to lead, show the way, conduct, guide and direct the course of others by going before or along with them (Webster, 1986: 116). It is the process of influencing the activities of an organized group and its efforts towards goal setting and achievement (Enoch, 1987: 149). Therefore, a leader is a person who has the capacity to influence others to do something they could not have done without being influenced. Leadership is the process of guiding, directing and guarding others to achieve a desired goal (Awojobi, 2020: 36).

Church leadership is all those who exercise influence, guidance, and direction to those in the church toward fulfilling the church's goals. In order to practice an effective church leadership, each leader needs to be a person of vision, action, steadfastness, servant hood and dependence effective church leaders are not born – they are developed. Though the potential for leadership appears to be inherited, to be an effective leader requires that those God-given leadership characteristics be developed.

There are various leadership styles in the world today but the most acceptable one in Church leadership is the servant leadership style (Janvier & Thaba 1997: 115-117; Ayandokun, 2009: 7-26). A servant leader is one who responds to opportunities to lead to glorify God, to develop people and to serve the purpose of the kingdom of God in an organization. The servant leader is godly, Christ-like and has a large heart (Mark 10: 45; Luke 22: 27). The servant leader is God-centered leadership.

Conflict

Ezeodun (2007:277) defined conflict as a phenomenal struggle produced by a clash of values, interests, or opinions between two or more parties. He argued that conflict management is the positive and constructive handling of differences and divergences. To him conflicts can be resolved or managed. He stressed that what is important is the ability to effectively manage conflicts so that it does not lead to the breakdown of law and order. He believed that if conflict is properly managed it can lead to growth. To D. J. Francis, Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. Conflict is defined as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups (Francis, 2009:20). It has been observed that because of the protean nature of conflict, it is difficult to find a single meaning to it. Psychologically speaking, conflict is the arousal of two or more strong motives that cannot be solved together. From the psychological perspective, two levels of conflict have been identified (Daysilva, 2005: 29). They are approach – approach conflict and avoidance –

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avoidance conflict. The approach – approach conflict involves a conflict that exists between two desired gratifications.

Furthermore, the world is experiencing difficult kinds of conflicts. For instance, conflict of interests, personal, group, ethnic, regional, political, economic, religious, and so forth are the order of the day (Daysylva, 2005: 29). It appears that every region of the world, every human society has its fair share of the conflicts.

To sociologists, conflict is a state of disharmony or discord with oneself, between a person and another or a person and a group or a group within itself or with another group or a community within itself or with another community, or a nation within itself, with another nation or conflict among nations, all arising from a misunderstanding, or misinterpretation or misrepresentation of an intention or an action, occasioned either by genuine error of commission or omission or by a deliberate mischief and, or aggression, usually motivated by selfish reasons (Daysylva, 2005).

From the above, conflicts are inevitable in human relationship. Sometimes conflicts bring growth in an organization. It may also bring wars, destruction of life and property and or displacement of people resulting in citizens becoming refugees in their own countries (IDPs) or across international borders.

Furthermore, conflict is believed to be the product of self-will. Biblical records show that man was created to do the will of God. Whenever man disobeys his creator, there will be conflict (Al-Assal, 2001: 203). He opined that the solution to conflict is obedience to the commandments of God.

Etymologically, conflict is derived from the Latin verb, *confligere* (Schmid, 1998: 12). It means confrontation between individuals or groups resulting from opposite or incompatible end or means. Conflict is one of the energies of life that seems common, natural and unavoidable. Socio-economic differences are one of the factors that make conflict inevitable. Therefore, conflict remains a permanent feature of human life and as such has been defined in various ways. This includes escalated competition between two or more parties; expression of hostile attitude over incompatible values, or pursuance of divergent interests over resources, power, identity and status, and expression of animosity, arguments, disputes, confrontations, unrests, wars, chaos or venting of other forms of hostilities over irreconcilable differences (Laure, 1997: 4; Lund, 1999: 2).

Causes of conflict are diverse and can be summarized as the struggle for power, clashes over values, or claims to status and scarce resources, clashes of interests, contests, competitions, disputes and clashes between social forces (Coser, 1956: 8). It has been observed that conflict is two faced: destructive and constructive. Scholars are agreed that in some societies, conflict has engendered the decimation and disintegration of human lives and forcing victims to migrate to places where there is relative peace. Other forms of conflict have led to emancipation and creativity in some societies.

To this end, scholars have made efforts to articulate the direct consequences of conflict in Africa, such as the killing and displacement of people, degradation of environment, destruction of land, agricultural systems and resources, collapse of economics and the threat to the health of people and communities (Dahrendorf, 1959: 135). Also attention has been given by scholars to demographic and economic consequences of conflict on the vulnerable and the challenged in a conflict situation. The nature of the vulnerability includes diseases, poverty, starvation, rape and sexual violence.

Conflict is said to have occurred when one party perceives the action of another party as blocking the opportunity for the attainment of a goal. For conflict to occur, two pre-requisites must be met, namely: perceived goal incompatibility and perceived opportunity for

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interference or blocking. Goal incompatibility refers to a zero-sum relationship between the goals of the parties involved. Interference or blocking refers to an intended activity that is perceived as detrimental to the attainment of a goal. By perception we mean the way people interpret the work around them (Schmidt & Koham, 1972: 359-370).

To the functionalists, conflict is considered in terms of power and economy. They base their view on Max Weber's and Karl Marx's theory. They opine that abuse of power and economy will always bring conflict in the society. They maintain that order and stability are essential requirements for a virile society. To them, consensus is the basis for social unity (Dzurgba, 2006: 1).

In the same vein, conflict theorists focus their attention on society. They study its institutions and structural arrangements. Unlike the functionalists, conflict theorists depict society as the processes of change that continually transform social life, thus they stress disorder and instability. As far as they are concerned, disorder, instability and conflict should be seen as normal aspects of social life. These are considered as necessary pre-requisites for social change, transformation and development of any human society (Dzurgba, 2006: 2).

Conflict as a concept can help explain many aspects of social life such as social disagreement, conflicts of interests, and fights between individuals and groups or organizations. In political terms, conflicts can refer to wars, revolutions or other struggles which may involve the use of force as in the term armed conflict.

Ezeodum (2007: 277-294) in his contribution, defined conflict as a phenomenal struggle produced by a clash of values, interests or opinions between two or more parties. He went further to describe conflict as a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings is engaged in conscious opposition to another group because these groups are pursuing what appears to be incompatible goals. He argued that conflict management is the positive and constructive handling of differences and divergences. To him conflicts can be resolved or managed. He stressed that what is important is the ability to effectively manage conflict so that it does not lead to breakdown of law and order. He believes that if conflict is properly managed it can lead to growth.

According to Onyeonoru (2007: 217) conflict, whether political, ethnic, industrial or environmental, has global attraction. Conflict is associated with phrases like "sharp disagreement, clash of persons or groups with opposing values, beliefs or expectations." Conflict can be said to occur when there is /are deviations from expectations relating to general or specific interests of participants in the organization. In other words, conflict is said to have occurred whenever there are oppositions or obstacles to achieving a desired goal. Besides, conflict is defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceived a threat to their needs, interests or concerns. Conflict occurs when people perceive that as a consequence of a disagreement there is a threat to their needs, interests or concerns.

In Literary studies, conflict is the inherent incompatibility between the objectives of two or more characters or forces. It is between a protagonist and an antagonist. A character versus character conflict can be described as a conflict arising between two or more characters of the same kind. For instance, a fist fights between two people or group. A good example is the conflict between Old Testament prophets. It is character or one group versus another.

Conflict should not be regarded as an isolated event that can be resolved or managed, but as an integral part of society. It should not be understood as an inherently negative and destructive occurrence but rather as a potentially positive and productive force for change if harnessed constructively. Conflict is therefore a necessary part of daily life and we all have to deal with it.

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Furthermore, conflict has been described as a state of collision, fight, contention or battle, a state of open, often prolonged fighting or war.

In the LXX, the Greek word *agon* is used for conflict. It also means place of contest. It is often applied figuratively to life as a struggle with a prize. Also the Greek word *agonizomai* meaning “to carry on a conflict,” ‘contest,’ ‘debate,’ or ‘legal suit’ was used in the LXX. The word *agonia* means “conflict,” “tension” “focusing of powers.” In Luke 22:14, it denotes concern for victory before the decisive struggle (cf. Lk 12:49-50). It should be understood that *agon* and *agonizomai* as used in the New Testament suggests striving for goals. This calls for self-denial (Bromiley, 1985: 20-21).

Leadership Conflict an Impetus for Church Growth in Nigeria

Christianity was first introduced in Nigeria in the 15th Century by the Portuguese missionaries and traders who preached the gospel of Christ in Benin and Warri but this did not stand the test of time because of their misplaced priority. They were more interested in commerce than evangelistic enterprise. Also, the climatic condition was unfavorable and this constituted hazard to their health. Besides, Nigerian traditional rulers were apathetic and hostile to the Christian faith. Christianity was re-planted in Nigeria in 1842 by the Methodist missionary mission (Okonkwo, 1989: 40). This time around, Christianity spread like wild fire in Nigeria. One of the factors responsible for this was the Fulani War of 1830 which led to the destruction of many towns in northern Nigeria. This pushed many refugees from the north to the south and they eventually settled in cities like Ibadan, Abeokuta, Oyo etc. The Methodist mission, the Church Missionary Society and the Southern Baptist Missionaries from America made efforts to plant their missions in the western part while the United Presbyterian Mission started their own missionary activities from Calabar in southern Nigeria (Okonkwo, 1989: 40).

After the establishment of the mission churches, the white missionaries started showing superiority complex over their native or black counterparts. This brought disaffection and conflicts in the rank and file of the leadership and membership of the Church. The white missionaries in CMS, Methodist and the Baptist began to see themselves as belonging to a special group of rulers (Owoeye, 2008: 86-89). These group of missionaries arrogated power to themselves because of the support and security they received from the colonial administration. They attack black church leaders like Bishop Ajayi Crowther and flouted his authority with impunity with the aim of ridiculing his administration because he is a black man (Omoyajowo, 1995: XV). They went all out to frustrate him until he finally resigned (Ayandele, 1966: 213). It was frustration that led to the death of Bishop Crowther in 1891. After his death he was replaced with Bishop Joseph Sydney Hill, a white man because there was no black man to fill the vacancy. When the appointment of white Bishop was made to replace Ajayi Crowther in 1893, the white man was given a rousing welcome in Lagos whereas Isaac Oluwole and Charles Philips who were made Assistant Bishops were not given any public welcome (Omoyajowo, 1995: 15). The black leaders and members in the CMS considered this action a racial discrimination.

Also, in the Baptist Church, Reverend W.J. David, a white missionary did a lot to frustrate the first native Pastor, Pastor Ladejo Stone. He disallowed him from going for higher education in America and he was grossly underpaid and later terminated his appointment. This action angered the natives as they considered it as an act of wickedness and this made them to clamour for African leadership in the church. As racial discrimination increased in the church there was more and more agitation for African leadership. This led to the formation of Societies or Groups that were to champion the liberation of the natives or

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blacks from the white domination. The first African Church, the Native Baptist Church was founded in April 1888 when a schism which started in the Lagos branch of the Southern American Baptist Mission about maltreatment of Ladejo Stone ended in the founding of the Native Baptist Church. African and especially Nigerian Christians continue to react to the negative approach of the missionaries towards their own societies; inhuman treatment of African and the relegation of the blacks to the background after Christianity had been planted in Nigeria. By 1901, the United African Methodist (Eleja) Church was born and it used the fish it symbol (Omoyajowo, 1995:16).

Apart from the churches that broke away from the mission churches, another era of Christian movement was the founding of Aladura churches with the emphasis on healing and efficacy of prayer. The Cherubim & Seraphim Church was founded by Moses Tunolase Orimolade and Christiana Abiodun Akinsowon in 1925. The Christ Apostolic Church was founded by Joseph Ayodele Babalola in 1930. The Church of the Lord (Aladura) was founded by Josiah Olunowo Oshitelu. In 1947, Samuel Bilewu Joseph Oshoffa founded the Celestial Church of Christ in Port Novo, Benin Republic (Olayiwola, 1995: 55). These Churches grew and expanded in Conflicts.

For instance, the Cherubim & Seraphim Society grew and expanded through Conflict. Early in the development of the church, conflicts were noticed among their rank and file. For instance, in less than four years after the inception of the Cherubim and Seraphim, there were symptoms of conflict between Prophet Moses Orimolade and Prophetess Captain Abiodun who co-founded the church. It was so serious that the two had to part ways. By 1929, two factions of Cherubim and Seraphim had emerged. They are the Cherubim and Seraphim Society by the Abiodun group and the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Society by Orimolade's group (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1997: 85).

In 1930 there was disagreement between the members of Orimolade's group which led to the birth of a praying Band under the leadership of Ezekiel Davies. Orimolade sought redress in the court of law but all to no avail. Conflicts continue to be the order of the day in this church. B When Prophet Orimolade died in 1933, it was not easy to choose a successor for him. A faction in the church kicked against Onanuga the preferred and anointed candidate of Orimolade on the grounds that he was only a young but gifted prophet. This also led to the birth of a church called Eternal Sacred Order of the C & S (Mount Zion) (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1997: 86-87). This should be noted that conflicts or schisms that characterized the church in its formative years have continued. It should be noted however, that these conflicts have helped in the spread of the movement because each group continued on aggressive evangelism, converts were made and the church grew.

In the same vein, the Christ Apostolic Church had conflict within the rank and file of the church. Conflict was first noticed shortly of the leaders affiliated with the British Apostolic Church (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1997: 76). This made the movement to change her name from Faith Tabernacle to Nigerian Apostolic Church. In less than ten years of the affiliation, tension arose when it was discovered that the white missionaries from Britain were used to taking drugs especially quinine. When one of them was queried on this, he declared that there was nothing wrong with taking preventive and curative drugs. This position they considered was at variance with the doctrine of divine healing and as such broke the affiliation. By 1939 those against the stand of the white missionaries adopted the name Nigeria Apostolic Church that later came to be known as Christ Apostolic Church. Those who supported the white missionaries continued to fellowship with them under the name The Apostolic Church (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1997: 77).

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Besides the Pentecostal group came on board in the growth and expansion of the Church in Nigeria. While the charismatic movement in the Western World traces its roots to the Pentecostal movement that arose from the 1906 Azusa street revival in Los Angeles, the Nigeria movement has an indigenous origin. The pioneers and early leaders of Pentecostalism were Nigerians without any previous link with American Pentecostalism. This movement quickly gained ground among the Students in higher institutions in Nigeria especially those of the University of Ibadan and Ife (Ojo, 1995). They all started as interdenominational Fellowship but today they have become churches. Most of their leaders and members were members either from the mission or *Aladura* group of churches. The Pentecostals in Nigeria have many branches of churches across the country.

Today in Nigeria, the Cherubim & Seraphim Church, the Christ Apostolic Church, the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Celestial Church of Christ and the Pentecostals have Christian's faithful in millions. They have branches in Nigeria, Africa, Europe, USA, Germany and other places. The Conflicts at the birth of these churches became stepping stones for growth and expansion. Conflict should not always be seen as a sign of carnality. One of the reasons for conflict is individual differences. Our temperaments are not the same. People's reaction to issues differs. No matter how spiritual an organization is as much as it involves human beings, conflict are inevitable. Even Christians who had received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost had conflict among themselves (Acts 6: 1-3). This was the first serious conflict after the reception of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles used wisdom of God to settle it. In the same fashion, Paul and Barnabas who were commissioned by the Holy Spirit in Acts 13 had conflict with each other in the mission field (Acts 15: 36-41). The conflict was so much that the two of them parted ways. Why was this conflict not resolved? May be that was the way God wanted it for the gospel to spread. History tells us that Barnabas was greatly used of God to plant churches in Cyprus and its environment (Awojobi, 2002: 99). Paul went with Silas while Barnabas went with Mark. This conflict produced two missionary teams and as such the work grew.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that conflicts are inevitable in any human relationship. Man by nature is expected to experience conflict in one way or the other. God has continued to use conflicts as instrument for Church growth. Leadership conflict therefore is the strain relationship between persons in leadership. This could be as a result of personality clash or individual differences. It is a situation of in-fighting within the rank and file in leadership. If this is not properly managed, it can destroy the organization. It should however be noted that conflict could be an instrument of growth when properly managed. The most conflicts in the Nigerian Church have become avenues for the spread of the gospel. Aggrieved members in a church in the time of conflict will never go out of that church to join other religion but to start another church. In this manner the Church continues to grow as new members join the group. Church leaders are expected to do the needful to make conflict a blessing and not a curse.

Recommendations

In the light of the finding on Leadership Conflict in the Church, the researcher would like to recommend as follows:

1. Church leaders and members should be positive about Conflict.
2. Leadership Conflict must seen as an Instrument for Church Growth
3. Efforts should be made to resolve Conflict in the rank and file of the Church

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