

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES: A STUDY OF SELECTED PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN IBADAN

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Abstract

Conflict is endemic in religious institutions and the Pentecostal churches; a component is not left out. Conflict is a situation of disagreements, arguments, clash of interests, loyalties and emotions. It is evident where there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings, wishes, and beliefs. It is a situation of incompatible goals. Interaction is the bane of conflict. Pentecostal churches involve social human beings and as such not free from conflict. This is an ethnographic study which employed qualitative approach of data collection such as key informant interviews and participant observation complimented with secondary data, anchored on Victor Turner's theory of social drama. The study combines emic (insider's) and etic (outsider's) perspectives in data collection. Method of analysis is purely descriptive. Some anthropological extrapolations were made thereby unraveling causes, incidences of conflicts and the techniques of conflict resolution employed by selected Pentecostal churches studied.

Key words: Conflict, Conflict resolution, Pentecostal churches, Social relations, Social drama.

Introduction

Conflict has been endemic in Christian religious institutions and the Pentecostal churches which is a component is not left out. According to Martins (1986), in some communities, the Pentecostal churches have a bad reputation due to incessant intra-church conflicts. Oyewo (2002) defines conflict a state of opposition, antagonism, discord, clash and collision. Oyewo further posits that conflict arises when forces relevant to two or more goals were of equal strength. Controversies, hostilities,

resentments, hatred, aggressiveness, rancor and bickering are originally tied to conflict situations. Oyewo (2002) also opines that conflict is not new; it is as old as the world. According to him, the first conflict occurred in heaven when Lucifer rebelled against God. This rebellion has continued in various socio-religious institutions. It is glaring that, one of the myriad of intractable problems facing Nigeria today is religious conflicts. Every leader once in a while finds one's self directly or indirectly in some form of conflict. Most social theorists believe that conflict plays certain positive

functions (Ralf and Crosser 1998 cited by Otite, 1999) and as such not always dangerous as often assumed.

Critically however, conflict is known to be potentially dangerous. Thus, improper handling of conflict destroys institutions, communities, marriages, and corporations. Poor handling may also cause the downfall of great leaders as well as fragmentation of their churches. The ability to tame hostilities depends on the type of conflict resolution technique employed. Conflict resolution is therefore, the systematic techniques, procedures, and strategies employed by skilled mediators/interventionist, in the quest to ameliorate, reduce, or eliminate conflicts in all human relationships/interactions (Onyima, 2006). Particular conflict management strategies have their advantages and disadvantages and are more or less effective depending on the type of conflict and the situation or context in which the conflict occurs (Lewicki et al. 2003; Sandy et al. 2006 cited by Brockman et al. 2010: 279). Thus, if conflicts are not resolved promptly in marriages, churches, communities and nations, informal groups may develop to handle the situation, which may escalate the crises to the extent that the institution may be adversely affected. Hence, in the interest of social harmony, there is need to suppress conflict (Adebayo, 2000).

Church Conflict as a Social Problem

Church conflict is an area that has not caught much interest in academic discourses. There are lots of literature on inter-tribal, inter-ethnic, inter-communal conflicts like the Ife-Modakeke crises, scramble for scarce resources in the Niger Delta, boundary/lands feuds in Abakaliki Ebonyi state and their Cross River state neighbors and marginalization agitations from both the minority and majority groups in Nigeria among others. As noted by Otite, (1999) whether conflict is viewed as normal or abnormal, it is reoccurring, natural or even a pathological fact, it is inherent in all kinds of social relationships/institutions, be it economic, political, or religious. It is therefore pertinent to state categorically that religious conflict is becoming more threatening to societal unity and human peaceful co-existence in Nigeria than any other form of conflict. That of the Pentecostal churches is evident in the proliferation and duplication of churches. at the slightest disagreement and all kinds of social drama ensue between General Overseers (G.O) and their subordinate pastors, a section of the congregation and deacons/deaconesses/elders against the pastors/members on the other side (Onyima, 2007). Despite these problems, investigation of conflict in Pentecostal churches as a socio-cultural system lost out in ethnographic details. Hence this study employed both theoretical and

empirical evidences to analyze the incidences, causes and trends of church conflicts beyond the general perspectives, rather specific cases and individual driven data related to conflict were examined in the following selected Pentecostal churches in Ibadan namely:

- World Communication Ministries (WOCOM), located at GRA Dugbe/Onireke roads near the railway crossing Ibadan, Nigeria.
- The Assemblies of God Churches, in Mokola and Salvation Army branches, Ibadan.
- Gospel Faith Mission International (GOFAMINT) located at Ojo, Ibadan.

Following from the above, this paper is set to:

- Identify the origin of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.
- Examine the nature, incidence and prevalence of conflicts in three (3) randomly selected Pentecostal churches in Ibadan.
- Finally, to identify the strategies employed by these churches in resolving church conflicts, if any.

Method of Data Collection

This study employed the use of qualitative methods of data collection. The choice of this approach was guided by the need to ensure originality, accuracy, representativeness and relevance of data collected to the objectives of the study. The field investigation started

with a reconnaissance survey to the selected churches to ascertain the applicability of the chosen methods. The first consideration after this survey was to evaluate whether the key informant interview would be appropriate. This was taken care of by the proactive measure of first introducing the researcher's intension to the General Overseers/pastors, who granted the permission to carry out the study and even introduced the researcher to church members and appropriate key informants. This survey visits were also necessary to book appointments on designated days, before the actual fieldwork commenced. Other methods applied were observational method (participatory and non-participatory) and unstructured interview method.

Method of Data Analysis

The nature of data collection influenced data analysis, which was purely qualitative and descriptive. The study generated a large data. Analysis began with editing, sorting out similarities and dissimilarities of individual perspectives on church conflict and categorization of respondent information. Most data were collected in an informal setting which accommodated the use of vernacular and Nigerian Pidgin English languages. This encouraged elaborate description and interpretation of data, ensuring that reported statements reflected the informant's emic (insider's) perspective of church

conflict, for the purpose of arriving at a holistic and qualitative analysis.

Research Findings

Origin of Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria

The Pentecostal churches are nicknamed after the biblical event of the day of Pentecost and they are relatively new developments in the history of the church in Nigeria. Marshall, (2009:11) opines that “an examination of the historical effects means telling the story of the complex changes within the movement, for there is no one Nigerian Pentecostalism, but many.” Their impact was gradually felt a few decades ago, until the middle of the 1980s, when Pentecostal churches shot into prominence attracting not only the young, but also the adults (Oniya, 2002). Oniya further asserts that the establishment of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria multiplies faster than the reproductive process of mosquitoes. Many of these churches are “mushroom churches” and founded on selfish motives of material gains, and self-aggrandizement. The above lends credence to the assertion by Marshall (2009:1) “since, the early 1970s Pentecostal Christianity has become a growing force across the world, especially in Latin America and in Africa. Nigeria has been the site of Pentecostalism’s greatest explosion on the African continent, and the movement’s extraordinary growth

shows no signs of slowing”. They are most of the time established as a result of conflict and disagreements on vital issues anchored on doctrines, financial mismanagement/misappropriation, disciplinary actions, conflicting individual perceptions and convictions. The Pentecostal church movements in Nigeria can be grouped into two (2) groups for the purpose of this study namely:

- (a) Old Pentecostal churches
- (b) Recent/new Pentecostal churches

The old ones began in the colonial era, while the new ones sprung up from the earlier ones and the trend continues in a vicious circle as almost every unemployed youth/graduate claims to have a call from God to open a church. Both groups formed an umbrella body popularly known as the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN). According to Gbolahan (2002), the PFN was inaugurated on the 14th of November 1986 in Lagos. The founding member churches include:

- The Assemblies of God Church
- The Foursquare Gospel Church
- The Redeemed Christian Church of God
- Deeper Christian Life Bible Church
- Church of God Mission
- Gospel Faith Mission International and six other national organizations

However, historical development of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria can be phased into four epochs namely: The first epoch is tied to 1910-1920s, the second epoch is 1930s-1940s, and the third epoch is 1960s-1970s, while the fourth is between the 1980s-date (Onyima, 2007). A key informant (a popular clergy in Ibadan in a personal communication. 6/12/2006) maintained that Pentecostal church movement can be traced to the revolution that took place in the Anglican church in Nigeria between 1910-1920s, when an Anglican Deacon in western Nigeria launched an indigenous prophetic movement that later became Christ Army Church. The Anglican Church saw this as a breach of their tenets of faith. It was from this group that another group known by the Yoruba word "Aladura" (praying people) sprung up. This early Aladura churches include the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Society founded in 1925 and the Church of the Lord founded in 1930. Meyer (2004) observed that these churches became known as 'African Independent Churches' and became a central research focus for anthropologists in the 1960s. Also a prayer group known as the precious stone (diamond) society left the Anglican Church branches in Nigeria at this period. They all left and affiliated with Faith Tabernacle, a church whose headquarters is in Philadelphia.

The second wave of Pentecostalism started in the 1930s when Joseph Babalola of the Faith Tabernacle led a revival that converted thousands of people across Nigerian cities. In 1932, his movement initiated ties with the Pentecostal Apostolic Church of Great Britain after it came into conflict with colonial authorities, this association also dissolved over issues on use of modern medicine by members. In 1941 Babalola founded the Independent Christ Apostolic Church estimated to have over a million members by the 1990s. Also at this epoch, foreign Pentecostal denominations such as the Welsh Apostolic Church (1931), The Assemblies of God Church (1939) Ugwuzor, (1998) and The Foursquare Gospel Church (1954) were also established during this period. In the 1950s, the Celestial Church of Christ spread to Nigeria from the Republic of Benin. The church rapidly became one of Africa's largest Aladura churches. In 1952, a former member of the cherubim and seraphim society, Pa Josiah Akindayomi, founded the Redeemed Christian Church of God. However, a key informant who is a theologian and a lecturer at Immanuel College, Samonda Ibadan, remarked that "The Redeemed Christian Church of God took a new phase of development under the leadership of Enoch Adejare Adebayo" (pers. Com. 11/11/2006). This is because the church became increasingly Pentecostal in theology and practice and grew from an estimated 42

congregations in 1980 to around 7000 in 2004, with worshippers in more than 90 countries, including the United States of America.

During the 1960s-1970s, Pentecostalism in this era originated from Evangelical Students Revivals or in words of Marshall (2009) 'moment of revival in the 1970s', a wave of Pentecostal expansion spawn through new churches in the 1960s-1970s. The arc leader of this expansion was Benson Idahosa, one of the most influential Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria at this period. Idahosa established the Church of God Mission in 1972. In 1974, a Pentecostal church sprung up from this organization known as Grace of God Mission in eastern Nigeria. Subsequently the Deeper Life Bible Church was also founded in 1975 and soon became one of Nigeria's largest Pentecostal churches with an estimated 350,000 members in 1993. At this point, we would join Marshall (2009) to ask "is this religious revival a response to some material crises- poverty, social exclusion, failure of modernization and development, demise of forms of sociability and itineraries of social mobility, 'confusion' engendered by process of globalization, neo-liberal capitalist relations? This may explain the rise of Pentecostalism if we want to view it in terms of functionality.

From the 1980s to present, was an emergence of new charismatic churches which sprung up and grew throughout the country without

restriction. Though, Marshall, (2009:11) branded the era between 1980s and 1990s as the 'rise of the 'prosperity' doctrine, but, we opine that this doctrine still persist to present 2013. These prosperity messages may be a response to material crises of poor governance in Nigeria. In 1986, David Oyedepo founded Living Faith Outreach Worldwide, popularly known as Winner's Chapel. It opened a "Faith Tabernacle" in the suburb of Lagos in 1999, with membership estimate of about 50,000 people. This era saw the multiplication of churches more than recorded in the history of Nigeria. They come up with all sorts of names, identities and particulars each with its unique doctrine and emblems to differentiate it from other churches. Marshall, (2009) observed that 'while various forms of institutionalized accreditation exist, pastoral authority is represented as in hearing a personal call from God; any person with a vision can start a church, a fellowship, or a mission, and they do.' Some, in a bid to attract members and adherents encouraged the "come as you are" slogan. Others encouraged the wearing of trousers by the female folks, ornamentals/jewelries and also encouraged the freedom of coming to church or praying without head ties, which is against the hallmark of older Pentecostals churches in Nigeria. This led to the gradual loss of numerical and financial strengths by the older Pentecostal churches even till date. Hence, the 'Forum's Magazine' in its 2006 Pentecostal survey suggests that

“revivalists including charismatic and Pentecostals account for approximately three in ten Nigerians.” The survey also suggested that “roughly six in ten Protestants in Nigeria are either Pentecostals or charismatic and three in ten Nigerian Catholics can become charismatic.”

This study also discovered that the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) belong to a larger body known as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Thus, a key informant who is a clergy stressed that “CAN is a political body which tries to protect the interest of Christians in Nigeria whether they are Pentecostals(‘Congregationists’ according to this respondent), charismatic, protestants or orthodox. CAN was founded in 1976, the association initially included Catholics and mainline protestants (Anglicans, Methodist, Baptists), but by 1988, it incorporated churches associated with Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (Pers. Com. 29/11/2006).” However, it should be noted that a single church cannot be a member of CAN as they are expected to belong to a body like PFN.

Ethnographic findings from the three selected churches in Ibadan reveal that inter-church conflicts are rare but intra-church conflicts are prevalent and quite endemic in the studied churches. As a key informant observed during the fieldwork on this study, “the people in the church in our neighborhood are always quarrelling about something. They can’t even

agree on an issue. I will never go there.” Emphasizing on the veracity of conflict in Pentecostal churches, another key informant expresses:

About 3 years ago the church in our area had a big blow up. The pastor and half of the church were one side and the rest on the other. I don’t even remember what the issue was, something about the constitution, but it ended up in a split. Some people left and started their own church on the other side of the town (Personal Interview, 4/12/2006).

Conflict has been so entrenched that some people even imputed ethnic dimensions to it as expressed by a Yoruba key informant. He said: “that church is a split down the middle. The Yorubas won’t talk to the Igbos and vice versa. You have to be careful, whom you are seen with, because the other side will snub you” (pers. Com. 6/12/ 2006). Though, Arild Schou (2012:2) had observed that “in heterogeneous units, groups often have conflicting interests”. The above responses present the church with a bad reputation which often degenerates into increasing endemic and protracted conflicts particularly in Pentecostal churches. The resultant effect is the proliferation of churches. This has gradually degenerated into a societal nuisance as churches are sited or located in residential areas, stores, warehouses, mountains/hills, markets, filling stations (this was observed in January 2013 and the church in question was using a generator, what if

there was a spark of fire from the generator, what becomes of the worshippers?), even on streets, major roads, uncompleted buildings, shanties, and canopies. It is observed from this study that apart from the quest for evangelization, conflict has been one of the factors leading to unbridled proliferation of Pentecostal churches.

Factors Responsible For Pentecostal Church Proliferation

This study unraveled certain covert/hidden forces responsible for church proliferation, These hidden forces are economic decline, low standard of living, unemployment, high rate of migration abroad and democratization. The rate of economic decline in Nigeria triggers young unemployed graduates to embark on establishing churches. Most of this young people hide under the guise that they have the 'calling of God'; thereby filling their pockets with offerings and tithes collected from members. Hence, the prevalence of prosperity messages, benefits of giving (tithes and offerings) and lots of miracle messages/sermons among others. The second factor is that, these Pentecostals endeavor to be affiliated abroad and in most cases General Overseers migrate abroad to re-establishing more churches, thereby raising money in hard currencies which when shifted back home, translates into wealth. Hence, they parade themselves in jeeps and live in well furnished buildings relative to that of their members. Thirdly the practice

of democracy is also a contributory factor to the proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria as the Nigerian constitution permits freedom of worship and speech. Thus, anybody could rise up any day and open/establish a church without being accosted. Marshall (2009) however observed that the religious sphere is not interrogated as such for its political significance. The above arguments lend credence and gave room for pastors like Rev. King whose original name is Emeka Ezekwu to establish 'Christian Train Assembly' where he was committing the atrocities that attracted public condemnation and final incarceration by government (Onyima, 2007:70-72). Corroborating this view, one of the respondents at WOCOM, observed that:

The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria is not doing its work properly citing the case of pastor king who exacted undue mal-treatments on his members and was sued to court for an attempted murder of four of his members and was finally sentenced to death by hanging for the death of a female member of his church (Pers. Interview 29/11/2006).

To this respondent, this is a typical issue which has negatively branded the activities of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria". This is an evidence of internal or intra-church conflicts incidences in most Pentecostal churches.

Social Drama and Incidences of Conflicts in the Selected Pentecostal Churches

A scholar Edokpolo (2003) posits that conflict in church organizations ranges from leadership, spiritual, marital, economic and monetary conflicts. It is said that "two cannot work together except they agree". Thus, the outcome of these disagreements is conflicts. Hence, Achebe (1985) asserts that "when things fall apart, the center can no longer hold." When Pentecostal churches engage in antagonism, rancor and bickering, the resultant effect authenticates the theory of "social drama" as postulated by Victor Turner (1980: 149), "social dramas occur within a group that has a shared value, interest, and common history." Turner disclosed that social drama can be broken into four acts graphically illustrated in this form: Breach----- Crisis----- Redress/Resolution----- -- Re-integration or Schism. The first act is a rupture of social relations or breach. The second act is a period of crisis and chaos that cannot be handled by normal resolution strategies. The third act is all attempts to remedy the initial breach and the re-establishment of peaceful social relations. The final act can occur in two ways which could

be re-integration that is, the return to the normal status quo or the official recognition of schism, an alteration in the social arrangements (Turner, 1980: 149). Church conflicts take the path of social drama; they begin with a breach in the tenets of faith, doctrine, and policy issues among others. It is therefore pertinent to point out that some of the greatest moments in the history of Christianity have grown out of conflict situations. The most universally known is the activities of the world famous reformer Martin Luther who conflicted with the papal church on doctrinal issues that shook the whole of Germany and the world of Christianity in general (Robert, 1974). Doctrinal conflicts and other forms of church conflicts must be properly handled to prevent its degeneration to various types of chaos/crisis.

Types of Conflicts in the Selected Churches in Ibadan

This study discovered/unraveled four types of conflicts in church organizations:

- (1) Doctrinal disputes
- (2) Personality conflicts
- (3) Policy differences
- (4) Disciplinary problems

Types of conflict	GOFAMINT	AG	WOCOM	Percentage
Doctrinal conflicts	0	2	0	12.5%
Personality conflicts	1	4	3	50%

Disciplinary problems	0	2	0	12.5%
Policy conflicts	1	2	1	25%
Total	2	10	4	100%

Tale 1: Prevalence of conflicts in selected Pentecostal churches in Ibadan between 1997 and 2006 represented in simple percentages.

The table above shows the prevalence of church conflicts in the selected Pentecostal churches between 1997 and 2006. It shows that a total of 16 conflicts were studied, 12.5% of the total conflicts identified were doctrinal which was prevalent only in AG while GOFAMINT and WOCOM had no records of such conflicts. Personality conflicts were prevalent in the three selected churches with 50% of the total conflicts arising from personality conflicts. 12.5% of the total conflicts studied resulted from disciplinary problems and it is most prevalent in AG, while WOCOM and GOFAMINT had no such records. From the table above, it is pertinent for Pentecostal churches to tread carefully when dealing with personalities in their churches; since, this study has revealed that personality oriented conflicts were most prevalent.

Strategies for Conflict Resolution in the Selected Pentecostal Churches in Ibadan

It was observed that the studied selected churches in Ibadan have well articulated conflict resolution

strategies. Hence, some authors point to the importance of a wide range of conflict-management mechanisms and that they are introduced at various levels of leadership (Arild Schou 2012:3 citing Wolf, 2009). All the selected churches studied (Assemblies of God Church (AG), Gospel Faith Mission International (GOFAMINT) and World Communication Ministries (WOCOM) have bodies or committees set up to resolve conflicts. Except the World Communication Ministries where a respondent disclosed that they don't have a standby committee as such but as cases/conflicts arise, a committee is set up to take care of it. However, Issues that prove very difficult to be resolved by the resident pastor and local church elders are referred to the Headquarters for final arbitration. At the Headquarters, there is a body of seven (7) church elders who sits over cases and their decision most times is final and they also have the power to excommunicate any recalcitrant member or pastor from WOCOM.

The fact that these churches have conflict resolution bodies shows that conflicts exist in Pentecostal

churches. This study also revealed that Pentecostal churches have organized institutional means for conflict resolution like the church boards, deacons, elders, councils, presbyteries and disciplinary committees.

In the **Assemblies of God Churches (AG)** studied (a branch located at Salvation Army road and at Mokola which is the sectional headquarters), the conflict resolution body is known as 'church board' and it is made up of the local church Pastor and Deacons. The number of Deacons depends on the size of the congregation. In conflicts like doctrinal conflicts, the constitution of the church, the tenets of faith ('what we believe') and the Bible are utilized in resolving conflicts.

For domestic and personality conflicts reported to the church for their intervention, the parties involved are invited to present their grievances against one another. The parties to a conflict are met individually but not in their houses, Biblical injunctions are used to caution, reprimand and appeal to them to go and apologize to each other, but where this fails, the church board falls back to the Biblical injunction that says "the fellow should be handed over to Satan and other members should consider such a fellow as a stranger in the household of God" and this is what is commonly known by members of AG as "Back-sit" (a disciplinary measure). Effective interpersonal problem-solving skills contribute to violence prevention and encourage acceptance of difference

and resiliency (Benard, 2004 cited by Pamela et. al., 2012:211). But how effective is this strategy of interpersonal conflict management? Where there is a conglomeration of serious church conflicts, the church pastor often utilizes the bible generally while preaching on Sundays and during mid-week services to conscientize and appeal to the conflicting parties to let go the feuds for peace sake. All these efforts are made by the members of the 'church board' to reconcile the parties and they are warned to desist from conflicts and where it warrants discipline it would be exerted on the defaulting member. But if after this efforts to reconcile the conflict continues after several warnings, the defaulter would be suspended while total excommunication from the church is seen as the last resort; especially where every conflict resolution strategy available to the church has been applied.

However, according to the Sectional Leader at the Assemblies of God Church Mokola, "there is an avenue for a suspended member in a local church branch to make appeal to the Sectional and District Headquarters. There, the presbyters (not the church board) revisit the matter and if peradventure they could not resolve the conflict at this level. Then, the Executive Committee situated at the 'General Council' Headquarters Enugu State Nigeria, (the highest level of arbitration) can also be

appealed to and if the suspended member is not found guilty there, the suspension would be lifted. It is worthy to note that the decision of 'General Council' on any matter is final. Members are not permitted to go to court although, the church has records of individuals who had at one time or the other taken the church to court and in that case, the church has no option than to appear before the court".

At Gospel Faith Mission International (GOFAMINT), the conflict resolution body is known as the 'Executive Committee' while at the branches the 'Intercessor Unit' which is duplicated in all branches of the church takes care of local church conflicts. Their first strategy for conflict resolution is to pray concerning the conflicts. According to the Pastor in charge of the Headquarter Church, "after applying all God given strategies/experiences and the parties to a conflict refuses to be reconciled, they impose discipline, and the last resort in case of a difficult person, he or she is relieved/disengaged of his or her posts. Although, the church does not chase people away from the church, the best method of resolving conflict in GOFAMINT is to call the conflicting members attention to Biblical injunctions and requirements; and if really the fellow is a child of God, he/she would abide by the decision of the body, but if someone goes beyond what can be condoned, they apply the constitution of the

church. Thus, GOFAMINT uses her constitutional provisions only when conflicts get out of hand/unmanageable.

At World Communication Ministries (WOCOM), the conflict resolution body is the 'Church Elders' and according to an Assistant Pastor at the Headquarter Church, the first procedure to resolving church conflict is to identify the problem, discover the source through careful investigation; invite the individuals involved one after the other. The body ensures that the aggrieved/complainant is first invited and then others, but they don't pass judgment yet until there is a meeting with both parties. The elders refer to Biblical counsels on offences and forgiveness. They ensure that the conflict is completely resolved and if there is need for restitution, the offender would be counseled to do so (Pers. Interview 29/11/2006).

Following from the above the strategies employed in conflict resolution by the Pentecostal churches in Ibadan; which have been thoroughly presented as collected from the field, the study revealed that they apply these conflict resolution strategies in order to combat/avert the disintegrative nature of church conflicts. The existence of these conflict resolution bodies and strategies shows that these churches perceive conflict from a negative perspective although a few respondents think conflict also performs some positive functions in

social relations, social institutions and organizations. Having outlined the conflict resolution strategies employed by the selected churches, it is glaring that those charged with this responsibility did not undergo any form of training before occupying this all important position. Pamela et al. (2012:213) reasoned that "It appears that when 'conflict resolution education' training is implemented, conflict strategy choice is more likely to move in productive directions. Without training, the outcome is indeed less favorable". Thus, we recommend conflict resolution training/education for all members of church committees/boards responsible for conflict resolution in Pentecostal churches in order to produce more positive results.

Discussion

A critical analysis of the data collected reflects that, human beings cannot evade conflicts (Otitte (1999), even in religious institutions as people found there are also social beings. Interaction is seen as the bane of conflicts. According to Pat (2009:107), "Conflict arises from group living but individuals need to reduce its cost by mitigating competition and by developing strategies to resolve conflicts of interest". Thus, Komolafe (2004) asserts that, where two or more persons interact for a period of time, conflict becomes inevitable. This was evident in the selected Pentecostal

churches studied in Ibadan. On the other hand, it was observed that, conflict resolution is an important and common feature of these Pentecostal churches. The administration of Pentecostal churches rests on pastors (General Overseers) and the church Elders or Deacons, who in most cases doubles as the conflict resolution body in these churches, this body serves as a form of social control, which is a mechanism designed to ensure that socially and spiritually acceptable behaviors are enforced on members as well as on leaders of these churches. This confirms the anthropological insights by scholars like Fortes and Evans Pritchard 1940 as cited by Otitte and Isaac (1999:9) that "conflict resolution in non-western societies is not necessarily identified with specialized political offices, rather agents of resolving or regulating conflicts in indigenous societies are diviners, shaman as well as the roles of chief priest and headmen."

From the research findings, it is obvious that various types of conflicts prevail in Pentecostal churches. Such common conflicts agree with earlier studies that church conflicts are majorly doctrinal, personality, and disciplinary and policy conflicts (Martins, 1986). Also, monetary, ethnic or tribalistic conflicts and even leadership tussles, (Edokpolo, 2003) permeate most Pentecostal churches. Most of these conflicts take their roots in poor managerial and administrative skills of

church leaders. Many do not see the need for proper training in managerial skills before recruiting a person as a pastor and that is why Adetunji, (2000) asserts that "managing is getting things done through other people". With this lay man definition, they claim that its application in church would give room for some people to boss others around, while the bossed are said to be like labourers who do not need to know about events going on in the church since, they do not belong to the inner caucus. It is pertinent to state that if the cadres of leadership is not well structured and organized with portfolios/functions of all stakeholders defined, then such organization whether secular or religious would end up in chaos, crisis and conflicts. It should also be noted that the Pentecostal churches do not need prayers; holiness and integrity alone but also a disciplined life through effective management that would lead to excellence in attaining the goals and purpose of the church (Adetunji, 2000). God is not the author of confusion and as such, the most organized, disciplined and conflict-free people should be Christians.

This study also revealed that there is a need for churches to strike a balance between meeting spiritual and physical needs of their members. Some churches over concentrate on spiritual needs with little or no interest on the physical need of members and this often leads to murmuring and discontentment. For instance, a

respondent at the Assemblies of God church said "when my father died, no support was given to me but now others are being supported, I wouldn't contribute." Thus, when pastors/leaders are partial or not caring when their members loose a loved relation, or have problems in their businesses and they are not visited, consoled and supported financially, then, disagreements and conflict are bound to arise. Hence, many Pentecostal churches are bedeviled with conflicts today because they do not take cognizance of the need for balanced treatment of their members, (Komolafe, 2004:60).

There is also need for a centralized authority to regulate the teachings and excesses of Pentecostal churches, PFN has been criticized for not being very effective as it needs to increase its power for regulating these churches and curb their excesses where necessary. It should also be proactive in providing relief materials for the poor, there is need for correspondence among churches, need for discipline to be instilled in all and sundry not minding their status, need for effective public relations in churches, need for seasoned leaders to define and uphold the doctrines and proper account and management of church properties and assets (Komolafe, 2004:35). This is because in all the three selected churches studied, (WOCOM, GOFAMINT, AG), they at one time or the other have been dragged to court by people for crisis on landed

properties and assets even WOCOM is still having a land case in court as at the time of writing this report. Thus, there is need for Pentecostal churches to secure the services of legal advisers to proffer meanings and interpretations to statements and documents having legal implications. This is because all Pentecostal churches in Ibadan have assets both tangible and intangible like church buildings, vehicles, chairs, lectern, power generating sets among others. All these are meant to be properly managed and accounted for to avoid conflicts. A case at hand in AG, thieves came and stole their new generating set bought after tasking members heavily due to poor security. The pastor in charge of the local church again mandated members to purchase another one. This led to serious murmurings, blames, confusion and conflicts especially whenever the person whose responsibility it was to collect the money approaches them, arguments often ensue; even as at the time of writing this report, some members refused to pay the amount allotted to them. Thus, there is the need to properly secure/protect and ensure adequate management of church properties (Adetunji, 2000). Pentecostal churches should endeavor to also acquire money yielding resources/investments rather than over-tasking her members. Otherwise, some members would run away from these churches to less burdensome ones, while those who decide to remain would continue to antagonize themselves. Thus, one with an eagle

eye would easily perceive that conflict is not far-fetched from such a congregation or church. The youths were discovered to be potential sources of church conflicts in the course of this study. The youth people say are the power of any organization (Edokpolo, 2003) as they have lots of potentials and thus, must not be side-lined as irrelevant; however caution should be applied while dealing with youths. For instance, most of the conflicts that arose as result of immoral acts (fornication) erupt majorly from the youth arms of the selected churches. Pentecostal churches should ensure that they engage the youths in activities as it is said that an idle man is the devils workshop. The youth are endowed with very good voices, oratory power, potentials to play musical instruments and lots more (Edokpolo, 2003).

Leadership tussles were preeminent in the selected churches, and this is tied to issues on poor communication. It is therefore suggested that, church leaders should adopt more intensive/effective channels of communication but note should be taken as observed by Eyre (1983) cited by Edokpolo (2003), "that communication is not just giving of information, but, it is giving of understandable information as well receiving of undistorted messages so as to be properly acted upon". In other words, the words, codes, or symbols must be mutually understandable. Thus, when this is done rather than

causing conflict, it brings progress. Communication plays a vital role in church administration. It is the link/chain between the church and the leaders, hence, an inefficient use of communication both in content and in context (that is the choice of words when addressing an issue) can result to church conflicts. The Pentecostal church leader should bear in mind that he is a curator of souls as Edokpolo (2003), puts it. They must also imbibe some essential leadership qualities like discipline. An undisciplined man cannot manage his home, and children, talk more of a church. To be discipline also entails self denial of bodily pleasures, he must be able to keep his body organs within bounds. A case which has one of the churches in Ibadan in confusion was that a General Overseer was caught having an affair with a popular deaconess, whereas he has a wife. Other qualities include imbibing holiness, vision, faith, patience (queen of all virtues as stated by Edokpolo, 2003:13), humility, intellectual capacity, mental sanity, courage, resourcefulness, compassion, sticking to physical and social cleanliness (Komolafe, 2003:46) and making his family epitome worthy of emulation. Leading humans is often **tasking**, thus, Adeloye (2000) asserts that **sharing/delegating the leadership of the church corporately may make the task of administering the church easier. It is also ideal and therefore recommended that a church leader be educated. Illiteracy was also discovered to be one the springboard**

for church conflicts. In some of the literacy-gap between the pastor and member was wide. Hence, there was always a clash of meanings and understanding.

Ethnic oriented church conflicts were paramount in the studied churches in Ibadan. Mostly in churches not owned by a single individual like Assemblies of God church, there is an institutionalized periodic transfer of local church pastors and elections for Deacons. There is evidence of ethnic/cultural consciousness and tension as members tend to elect leaders that are from their tribes and would want the district headquarters to send pastors who could speak and understand their language. This accounts for about 50% the conflicts recorded in this church so far. Thus, conflict resolution in a plural organization like the Pentecostal churches, can be quite complex due to the determinant effects of various cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, and language symbolism inherent in these churches. Hence, Avruch and Black (1993) cited by Otite (1999:7) observed that it is quite dangerous to relegate culture to the background during conflict resolution. Though culture according to Otite (1999) is a marker of social differences, it should not be regarded as an obstacle to conflict resolution in a multi-ethnic/cultural organization like the Pentecostal churches. Perceiving conflict through divergent cultural lenses is natural because people

interpret social actions/social drama and realities through their indigenous conceptions, worldviews and knowledge. Thus, the understanding of indigenous theories of conflicts is essential to its solution and this is what Avruch and Black (1993) cited by Otite (1999) termed "ethno-conflict theories."

It was observed that most "older Pentecostal churches" are gradually losing their members to the so called "new generation Pentecostal churches". The reason is that the older ones are not adaptive to change. Thus, Akin-john (1998:15) cautioned that "churches should avoid the danger of becoming outdated, obsolete and relic". Although it is not expected of them to imbibe every new thing hook, line and sinker but should endeavour to be flexible and adapt to changes as long as it does not contradict their tenets of faith. For instance, pastors should try and acquire higher education; this will enhance their understanding of the complexities of the modern world. Pastors should also be career professionals who can engage in other vocations and financially capable of catering for their families without placing all their burdens on members. Even Jesus had professionals like, lawyer, accountant, doctors, tax collectors, tent makers and himself a carpenter. While applying participant observation in one of the churches, it was observed that a pastor used half of the time allotted to him for sermon in complaining that the

member were not taking care of him and his family. This is no wise encouraging members not to care for their pastors but the emphasis is that pastors should combine their ministerial/priestly callings with other vocations or money yielding ventures. This will avert murmurings, complains and disputes arising when members are tasked to contribute for pastor's welfare (food, rent, building or buying land, car for a pastor).

Finally, the Pentecostal churches should note that the church is presumed to be the "house of God", and efforts should be made towards ensuring that it is so. Therefore, all shades and forms of rancor, bickering, fighting, quarrelling, complaints, bitterness, backbiting, altercations, misinterpretations, misunderstanding, mutual suspicion, tribalism, ethnic rivalry, hatred, transferred aggression, hot arguments, disagreements, chaos, crisis and conflicts which are characteristic of secular organizations should have no place in the house of God (Onyima, 2007:146).

Conclusion

This ethnographic study has critically described the incidences, social drama and types of conflicts in selected Pentecostal churches in Ibadan. It identified patterns/strategies utilized by these churches in resolving church conflicts in a bid to promote harmony, serenity, tranquility, peaceful social relations and

development in Pentecostal churches. The study emphasized on the integrative functions of church conflicts. Since, in spite of the observed incidences of conflicts, the selected churches has over the years remained intact and were not torn apart rather they gathered more experiences and momentum to forge ahead. "Altercations may have appeared to be 'causing problems' when in fact it was assisting bonding and negotiation and some joint participation in problem-solving" (Pat, 2009:114).

This goes to confirm Otite (1999) that "in spite of conflict, consensus appears to exist at least to prevent total breakdown". This study has gone a long way to confirm that conflict is not necessarily bad for

humans, since, the ideal life is not free from conflict. For instance, Pat (2009:108) asserts that "Conflicts are essential in initiating and maintaining friendships". Conflict and confrontation to some extent are essential for better understanding among social beings. Conflict can cause positive or negative change depending on the nature of management or conflict resolution pattern adopted. Church conflicts should hence, be seen as an opportunity for spiritual growth since; churches tend to pray more at these tension-filled periods. Thus, when there is disequilibrium in any social system, it usually leads to equilibrium, after the raging antagonism and conflict would have been resolved.

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