Volume 21 Issue 65
Originally issued as A14

Global Journal of human-social science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 21 Issue 14 Version 1.0 Year 2021
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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Abstract- The modern-day Nigerian society is well known for diverse of crises mainly among the major religious groups within the society. Such conflicts are usually orchestrated either by religious sects or ethnic activists who claimed that the government has not been fair to them for whatever reasons. The present day Nigeria is convulsing in disorders and violent religious crises. Wars and violent deaths are most daily occurrences in every nook and cranny of the nation. There have been reported loss of lives and wanton destruction of properties. Schools and businesses are being shot down, foreign investors no longer see Nigeria as a place to invest peacefully. Socially, politically and morally, the nation is in turmoil. Hardly can one speak of progress when the systems failed to maintain at least a minimum level of social decorum. The fact that Nigerians can no longer live together in peace is obvious. Religious and political conflicts have blinded us. Christians in particular are becoming desperate and angry, as there is no abating of these conflicts, and as the stark reality is dawning on those who live on the frontlines of the conflict that it is just a matter of when and where the next religious conflict will occur.

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GJHSS-A Classification: *FOR Code: 220499*

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Roles of Church Leaders in Peace-Keeping and Conflict Transformation in Nigeria

Jegede Oyebode Paul

Abstract- The modern-day Nigerian society is well known for diverse of crises mainly among the major religious groups within the society. Such conflicts are usually orchestrated either by religious sects or ethnic activists who claimed that the government has not been fair to them for whatever reasons. The present day Nigeria is convulsing in disorders and violent religious crises. Wars and violent deaths are most daily occurrences in every nook and cranny of the nation. There have been reported loss of lives and wanton destruction of properties. Schools and businesses are being shot down, foreign investors no longer see Nigeria as a place to invest peacefully. Socially, politically and morally, the nation is in turmoil. Hardly can one speak of progress when the systems failed to maintain at least a minimum level of social decorum. The fact that Nigerians can no longer live together in peace is obvious. Religious and political conflicts have blinded us. Christians in particular are becoming desperate and angry, as there is no abating of these conflicts, and as the stark reality is dawning on those who live on the frontlines of the conflict that it is just a matter of when and where the next religious conflict will occur. We now live with a new, revitalized and increasingly radicalized Islam, a being demonstrated by Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen that have brought their battles to various homes and churches. These conflicts have succeeded in redirecting our course from the fundamental teaching of Christ that lays emphasis on "love for enemies and not resisting an evil person but to always turn the other cheek." Rather, the conventional way of resisting is to replicate it, "eye for eye," and "tooth for tooth." At this juncture, one wonders what is the role of religious dialogue in peace-keeping? What are the Nigerian church leaders doing in peace-making and peace-keeping? The paper employed historical method of research so as to trace the genesis of conflict in Nigeria, causes, and solutions. The paper concluded that for peace to reign in Nigeria, religious dialogue is *sine qua non* so as to ease the process of integration, toleration and accommodation of others in the Nigerian society. The paper recommended that church leaders must preach the basic tenets of Christianity anchor on love for others irrespective of religious affiliations.

Keywords: church, religion, leadership, conflict, religious conflict, church leadership.

I. Introduction

The paper attempts to examine the roles of church leaders in peace-keeping and conflict transformation in Nigeria. This became germane because no nation can survive and progress without peace. Nigeria is bedeviled with one form of conflict or the other. In fact, peace and unity have eluded the nation. Therefore, conflicts have impeded the speedy development of a country once regarded as "giant of Africa," in terms of both capital and human resources, both of which are meaningful and necessary for human welfare. In the opinion of Hackett (246), he submitted that Nigeria has become transformed from a model of relative religious tolerance to a country with a reputation for repeated outbreaks of religious crises owing to manipulative tendencies of religion by politicians and religious leaders for selfish purposes. An example of this was an attempt to infuse Federal Sharia Court of Appeal in the 1979 Constitution and the unannounced attempted enlistment of Nigeria into Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986. This ignited conspiracy theories of Muslim domination for the Christian segment of the Nigerian society (Ige 133). When this type of situation arises, the more powerful group would attempt to strangulate the need of the weaker group. This explains why we often have escalated conflict at all levels of government in Nigeria.

The Nigerian state has hosted series of negative conflicts with many of them developing into full-blown crises situation. While conflict may be inevitable in human relations, crisis is not. Crisis is an abnormal situation encapsulating uncertainties and dangers to all the parties involved (150). In most cases, crisis represents a degenerate conflict. Conflict, like peace, is dynamic and assumes various forms and shapes depending on the attitude of parties. It grows and reduces; changes in form and shapes, actors and other important variables. However, when people are not willing or not open and ready to deal with a conflict situation, it progressively evolves into crisis usually characterized by breakdown of law and order.

In recent times, Nigeria has repeatedly experienced local disputes and conflicts. Many of them assume national dimension owing to poor management. A good number of them were characterized by intense violence leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Some violent religious conflicts originating from one part of the country has generated to violent reprisal, sometimes with greater intensity (Nwankwo 155). Examples of such can be seen in ethno-religious conflict which began in the North and spread to the South in form of reprisals. Suffice it to say that the roles of religion and church leaders in particular in the process of conflict transformation, peace-making and building cannot be watered down. They have often

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acted as agents of social transformation over the years. Through their sermons, the Christian ethical values on love and unity are being emphasized. Therefore, it is the intension of this paper to put into proper perspective the indispensable roles of the church leaders are playing in peace and nation building without which the desire peaceful coexistence will be a mirage.

II. Conceptual Clarifications

a) Church

The term "church" could be applied either to all believers in the world or to any local group of them. It meant the total presence of God's people (Christians) in a given location. In other words, the word "church" refers to the community of believers-either all believers or a local group (e.sword.www.e.sword.net 2021). Sometimes, the word *ecclesia* designates the actual meeting together of Christians, but it is mostly used to describe the believers who make up a local congregation (2021). In a nutshell, the word *ecclesia* can be used in various ways. First, it is any gathering of believers. Second, it is an organized local body-made up of all believers in any given locality. Third, it is the universal church. This means all the believers who have ever been, and presently existing and will ever be (Okunoye 405).

b) Religion

There is no single or a generally acceptable definition of religion. As such, religion is often defined from different perspectives and as it fits one's world-view. However, from anthropological and sociological points of view, religion is defined as man's response to the exigency of the human condition, in which he is driven to seek security, status, and permanence by identifying himself with a reality greater, more worthy and more durable than himself (Richardson 289). In the view of Marx (52), he sees religion as an illusion which eases the pain produced by exploitation and oppression. Thus, he submits that "religion is the opium of the people." This implies that;

> Religion acts as an opiate to dull the pain produced by oppression and injustice. It is a series of myths that justify and legitimize the subordination of the subject class. It is a distortion of reality which provides many of the deception that forms the basis of ruling class ideology and false class consciousness (Marx 52).

Despite conflicting prejudices, reservation, and sentiments against religion, it has remained a realistic phenomenon in human existence without which peaceful co-existence, national integration and reconciliation may not be possible.

c) Leadership

To a layman, the term simply means the act of leading, but it goes beyond that. Leadership is both people and programmes. It is the relationship in which one person influences others to work together willingly in related tasks to attain that which the leader desires (D'Souza 56). Ukeje (192) defines leadership as a means to influence a group toward the achievement of a group's goals by planning, organizing, directing and integrating the institutional demands and the needs of members in a way that it will be productive and gratifying to the individual members.

d) Church Leadership

Church leadership refers to all those who exercise influence, guidance and direction to those in the church toward fulfilling the church's goals. Therefore, in order to be an effective church leader, he/she needs to be; a person of vision, action, steadfastness, servanthood, and dependence. Church leadership effectiveness requires that these God-given characteristics be developed to the honour and glory of God. Aside the above, the leader must have the spirit of unity and eschew parochialism.

e) Religious Conflict

Religious conflict is inevitable in any given society as long as humans interact with one another. Conflict situation occurs owing to different cultural backgrounds, different ideologies, different political and ethno-religious affiliations. To this extent, conflict can be defined as the struggle over values and claims to scarce resources, status and power in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize or eliminate their rivals (28). This definition mirrors the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, as the groups compete for political and economic powers, land and water resources. The consequences of religious conflicts are untold. They have undermined traditional leadership, threatened national security and causes huge economic hardship and loss to the individuals and the entire nation in generals (Ushe 117).

f) Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation focuses on inducing constructive change in the parties' relationship through imposing mutual understanding (Lederack 121). Therefore, conflict transformation is problem-solving in theory and practice as it is "oriented towards understanding dynamic and interaction of the disputants' relationship and the conflict… (121)." Schmid (32) examines conflict transformation within the frame work of its core values to include;

> A particular approach which aims to recognize the grievances, needs and issues of all the concerned parties involved. It focuses on the processes by which conflict develops into violence, rather than focusing exclusively on how to bring violent conflict quickly to a cease-fire or settlement. It addresses the structural reality of inequality, rights and injustices involved and offers alternative ways of addressing those realities. This approach aims to transform a conflict from violence and destruction into a constructive

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force which produces social change, progressively removing or at least, appreciably reducing the conditions from which the conflict and violence have arisen, with a view to ensuring well-founded, sustainable, and positive peace and social security.

g) Peaceful Co-existence in the Nigerian Society

Peace and peace-making *sine qua non* for any nation that desires growth at all levels. Peace is the total sum of all that man may desire. As such, it is a condition that is required for social, political as well as economic development and natural integration.

In this context, peace is a state of harmony characterized by lack of violent conflict and the freedom from fear of violence. Therefore, peace suggests the existence of healthy or newly healed interpersonal or inter-natural relationships, prosperity in terms of social or economic welfare. The English word "peace" evolved from the Latin word "pax" meaning "freedom from civil disorder." The Hebrew designates "shalom" meaning peace as 'not just the absence of conflict', but the presence and abundance of righteousness, wholeness, justice, libration and salvation. In summary, it denotes things as they should be and shall be in divine purpose for humanity (Kadala 20).

Aside Christianity, the concept of peace is well accentuated in other religious cultures. The word "Islam" meaning "submission" is claimed to be etymologically related to "Salaam." Thus, Islam teaches that submission to Allah is based on humility. An attitude of humility cannot be accomplished without total rejection of violence and a personal alignment toward peace (http://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk?news/cecil-rhodes-vision-of-peace 01-07-21). The Buddhists also believe that peace can be attained once all sufferings end. They regard all sufferings as stemming from cravings (in the extreme, greed), aversions (fears), or delusions.

It is disheartening to say the least that regardless of the facts that the main religions in Nigeria preach peace, what we see over the years from Muslims and Christians in Nigeria is far from peaceful co-existence. Owing to the daily occurrence of crises and conflicts in every nook and cranny of the nation makes one to feel that the word "peace" is a mirage. No doubt, all human beings want peace and mutual co-existence in their respective communities/societies but the means and steps to attaining if continues to be the problem. One may also say that religion and peace are two difficult entities, yet religion is inseparable from peace because peace is believed to be the product and fruit of religion.

The basic question at this point, however are why is there no religious peace and harmony in Nigeria? What can and must be done to engender unity, without which there cannot be peaceful co-existence and national development? We must start by examining the constitutional provisions for religious peace, harmony and co-existence. The Constitution stipulates that the country shall be a secular state. It shall not adopt any official religion. This means that religion should be a personal and private affair. Unfortunately, many Muslims and Christians in positions of leadership have consistently violated that constitutional stipulation by using religion as instrument to manipulate innocent citizens for their selfish interests resulting in social upheavals.

Similarly, Christians and Muslims should live together peacefully. This is to engage intentionally and purposefully with people and groups whose religious practices are fundamentally different from one's own (Alamu 109). In the view of Wuthnew (292), the benefit of this is not only that it minimizes the livelihood of religious conflicts and violence that have been so much a part of human history but such reflective engagement also allows us to focus on the showed concerns for basic human dignity found in the teachings of many of the world's religions (293). What is crucial to note is that both Islam and Christianity preach emphasis various convictions to the extent that a lot of their adherents seem not to know the core teachings of their respective religions, one of which contains on love and peace. What is lacking is that Nigeria needs religious adherents to practice what their religions teach. According to Olaeye (189), there is the cultural instrument among the Yoruba people of western Nigeria which discourages conflict among her various communities. In the extent of war, it is customary for a belligerent community to challenge another community to a fight. This they do by sending an emissary with red cloth and / or war weapons to such a community. If the community that is being challenged desires peace, it would in turn send a white cloth back to indicate that it is not ready to fight. This, therefore, calls for offering an olive branch in order to pacify the bellicose community. Once the peace over-tune is embraced, peace will prevail among the two warring communities. A peace-making and building process inherent in Yoruba culture equally revolves around several traditional adages and wise sayings. These include but not limited to the following:

a. *Aja ma tan ko si*, literally means "Nobody fights till eternity."
b. *Ahon ati enu nja*, *won si npari ija*, meaning "both the tongue and the mouth do fight/quarrel and they eventually settle the quarrel."
c. *Ija o dola*, *oruko nii so'ni*, meaning "conflict does not bring wealth. Rather, it stigmatizes one."
d. *Ma roro*, *agba to roro kii ko eniyan jo*, meaning "do not be wicked, an elder that is wicked will have no followers."
e. *Alajobi kosi mo*, *alajogbe loku*, meaning "good neighbourliness is as desirable as family membership."

The above wise-sayings form the pillar of peace, harmony and peaceful co-existence in the

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Yoruba community. Although the adages unwritten, yet, they have become part and parcel of the peoples culture and a veritable templates for character formation for the purpose of peace and peace-making in the society.

h) Understanding Conflict Transformation in Nigerian Society

Nigeria is confronted by multiple security challenges, most especially the resilient Boko Haram Islamist insurgency in the North east, long-running discontent and militancy in the Niger Delta, increasing violence between herders and farming communities spreading from the Central Belt Southward and the Biafra agitation in the South East, and more recently Odua nation's call for independent in the Western Nigeria. Violent conflict, in particular by the Boko Haram insurgency, has displaced more than two million people, created a massive humanitarian problem and therefore prompted the need for civilian vigilante self-defense groups that pose new policy dilemmas and possible security risks.

Conflicts of whatever dimension, is capable of turning constructive or destructive depending on the approach employed by those involved. However, two broad approaches of managing conflicts are easily identified namely--coercive and non-coercive. The coercive approach is reactionary and dysfunctional in nature. It tends to promote negative peace. Non-coercive approach is responsive and productive in character. It promotes positive peace and ensures people-centered sense of security (Albert 17).

In addressing conflicts through the instrumentality of non-coercive approach, it is imperative to have a proper understanding of the concept of conflict transformation as a means of peace-making and harmony in Nigeria society. Conflict transformation is a concept that goes beyond conflict resolution, or conflict management. Though one can say they are mutually connected. It is a process in which a long-standing relationship is built through a process of change in perceptions and attitudes of parties. As such, the aim of conflict transformation is to change the parties, their relationship and the conditions as created conflict in first instance (Lederach 95). Owning to this, Jeong (45) submitted that conflict transformation entails the coming into beginning of new situations involving conflict issues, perceptions, relationships and communication patterns. In Nigeria, peace keeping and building and conflict transformation are often time post conflict reconciliatory strategies geared towards aiding the occurrence of conflict and find lasting solutions to such conflicting situations. Steps are usually taken to pursue peace through a number of programmes like peace education, provision of relieve materials to those who might have been displaced, physically challenged persons and indigents in various parts of the country. Not only that seminars, talk shows, community development programmes that will orientate, promote and encourage responsible national development were held from time to time foster need for peaceful co-existence (Amiara 57). More so, Schmid (32) opined that conflict transformation sets out to do the following;

> Focus on the developmental process of a conflict, rather than just on its end points, create awareness of how conflict transforms relationships, communications, perceptions, issues and social organization; intention to transform the conflict from violent expression to constructive and peaceful expression; concentrate on the structural transformation, usually necessary in or between societies in order for peace to be sustainable; and intervene in the resolution processes by combatants themselves, local, individuals and communities and external third parties in an integrated multi-track framework.

In order for a conflict to transform, significant changes must take place across four levels namely-cultural, intrapersonal, structural and interpersonal and falling short in any of these areas might result in merely stabilizing the conflicts rather than eliminating all of the root causes of violent conflict. In Nigeria, it is interesting to say that the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme in Nigeria oil region brought forth changes for ex-insurgents and communities, members across all four levels to solve extent culturally, intra-personally, structurally and interpersonally. Yet, it is observed that the interpersonal change did not extend to all conflicts parties, hindering the conflicts, transformation potential of the programme. In a nut shell, the underlying argument in favour of conflicts transformation is that it aims at effecting a change in the conflicting scenario and ensuring that the status quo which breeds injustices and inequalities in the Nigeria society are tackled in the mutually benefitted interests of all parties involved.

i) Causes of Conflicts in Nigeria

Living together often presents people, religious believers and religions alike with tensions and conflicts. Difference in religion, race, mutuality, ethnicity, social class and gender, political or economy orientation while they can greatly enrich any human society also tend to exacerbate frictions and social fragmentation. Any of these factors can be used by individuals and groups to define themselves over and against other, and to identify those outside the group as the enemy, a threat to one's well-being and security (Nuzhat 85). The under-listed are some of the causes of conflicts in Nigeria.

j) Misconceptions of Religious Values and Extremists/ Ideologies Religious Campaigns

The wrong perception and presentation of religious ideologies have greatly imparted religio-political conflict in Nigeria. It has given birth to organization of agitation groups like Maitetsine sect led by Mohammed Marwa in the 1980, Darul Islam, Boko

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Haram and Kalakato sects. The Maitetsine sect had as its rallying point the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria. The Boko Haram, on her part, opposes western education and insists on upholding and imposing Shariah legal system without regard to Nigeria's Constitution (1979), section 38, sub-section 1-3 which states that;

> Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest or propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance (Bidmos 30-31).

k) Religious Intolerance

Religious intolerance has been identified as the major source of religious conflict in all societies not just in Nigeria. In fact, no system could be found to be impervious to it wherever ii existed, because deeper cleavages are often created in society by it more than any other factor. The three major religions in Nigeria, for instance, see themselves as the distinct entities that have nothing to share in common (Kadala 151). The dramas of intolerance with the arrival of modern religions (Christianity and Islam) in Nigeria led to successive conflicts occurring between them and these sometimes degenerating to violent wars. Religious intolerance also has its source in conversion campaigns adopted more especially by the western European missionaries upon arriving Nigeria. Since then, the target has been on how to get rid of each other (Rotgak 46).

l) High Rate of Unemployment

The high rate of unemployment is a cause for concern in Nigeria. Every year, the tertiary institutions keep churning out employable graduates, yet there are no visible provisions for them to be absorbed either at state or national levels. Unfortunately, socio-political unrest coupled with bad economic decision-making of the ruling authority has not been helpful. What more, the spate of religious crises in every nook and craning of the nation have equally promoted scarcity of employment to the deserving graduates. According to an editorial comment in Nigeria Tribune (2002), the situation is worsened by the ever-increasing number of unemployment Nigerians, some of whom are ready recruits for criminal activities.

m) Doctrinal Supremacy and Superiority Complex

Awoniyi (67) submitted that religious conflict can also be attributed to wrong doctrinal beliefs in the supremacy of one religion over the other. In his opinion, it is this feeling of superiority complex that one's own religion is a special, and in fact, the best and the only one that gives assurance of ultimate salvation to man. An example of this is manifested in Jesus' reply to a certain man Nicodemus, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God rests upon him" (Jn. 3:36). The Islam religion also posits something similar to the above remark, "surely, the true religion with God is Islam (Quran 3:19). Such utterance, has noted above have always discourage religious co-existence, mutual respect and co-operation in Nigeria. Not only that, each religious faith sees her religion as a force to be reckoned with. As such, it has manifested itself also in terms of staff recruitment, policy making, decision taking, admissions of students into educational institutions and the resultant effects and consequences always counter-productive. At this juncture, one begins to ask; to what extent can the church leaders in Nigeria act as catalysts of transformation in the society? Thus, the possible roles of church leaders in Nigeria call for attention.

n) Roles of Church Leaders in Peace-Keeping and Conflict Transformation in Nigeria

It is not an over-statement to say that Christianity is a social religion. This is because the activity of the church down through the centuries is a clear attestation to this. The church and her leadership, even in the New Testament church were able to some extent bring about some positive changes in the society it found herself. In Nigeria today, church leaders are seen to be performing such roles within their environment. Church leaders generally have the mandate to engage in conflict intervention activities at both interpersonal and intergroup levels in various conflict situations. Even in contemporary times where developments in technology, science and revolution in information management have compressed the world into a global village, the roles of the church leaders remain indispensable and these include the under-listed;

o) Propagation and Impartation of Christian Ethical Values

The basic doctrinal principles of Christianity anchor on unity of purpose, harmony, peaceful co-existence, tolerance across ideological boundary, love without discrimination, respect and religious understanding and loyalty to constituted authority. These ethical values have constituted the core of Christian teachings, which the church leaders have encouraged their followers to imbibe in practical terms. In Nigeria today, material acquisition has virtually become the ultimate goal and the society does not appear to care how one ''makes'' it. The high rate of banditry and kidnapping cases with the motive of making money from those kidnapped or their family members can attest to this. In fact, a lot of politicians today use religion to manipulate civilians to cause both religious and ethnic conflicts for their own selfish reasons. Therefore, for Nigeria to build a strong foundation for peace and development, it is essential for the church leaders to continue to promote ethical

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standards for Christian politicians and their followers at large. These will act as unifying factors among people of varied cultural enclave, political affiliations and ideological inclination across the country.

p) Promoting of Justice and Equity

It is not enough for the Nigerian churches and church leaders to encourage reconciliation and thereafter quote scriptures like ''everyone must submit to the governing authorities,'' ''turn the other cheek," "love your neighbour (enemies) as yourself,'' and ''all who draw the sword will perish by the sword," rather;

> When church leaders preach reconciliation without having unequivocally committed themselves to struggle on the side of the oppressed justice, they are caught straddling a pseudo-neutrality made of nothing but thin air. Neutrality in a situation of oppression always supports the status quo. Reduction of conflict by means of a phony ''peace'' is not a Christian appeal. Justice is the goal and that may require an acceleration of conflict as a necessary stage in forcing those in power to bring about genuine change (Wink 76).

To this extent, the church and church leaders must be seen to be involved in an active struggle against injustice and oppression that can easily lead to escalation of violent conflict be it religious or ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. Thus, promoting justice is one the greatest avenues the church leaders in Nigeria do contribute to peaceful co-existence and stem the tide of religious conflict across the country.

q) Seek Healing and Reconciliation

The church and her leadership have been called to a ministry of healing and reconciliation. When it is the victim of aggression, self-defense is permitted but is not required. Even when Jesus was unjustly arrested by armed enemies and Peter could legitimately have used his sword, Jesus told him "put your sword back into its place" (Matt. 26:52). Quoting Kadala, in an interview he conducted, he mentioned that a member of the Global Faith Assembly in Jalingo, Taraba State said that when attacked, Christians were taught not to retaliate but to turn the other cheek. According to him, this teaching contrasted well with the Islamic teaching (being a convert of Islam) and when Christians do not retaliate, Muslims feel ashamed of themselves after these attacks. In his words;

> Christians are not called to fight carnal warfare, but aspiritual warfare. Muslims are vessels in the hands of the enemy, the devil and Paul has given us the methodology on how to fight this type of war in Ephesians 6:16-18. The only way to survive is to put on the full armour of God and the devil will flee from us.

Judging from the above, the Christian principle of non-violence being taught by the church leaders one way or the other goes a long way in ensuring good neighbourliness and fostering peaceful co-existence. Therefore, practicing non-violence enables Christians to keep the "door open to reconciliation, and to keep the issues in focus."

r) Advocacy for Social Inclusion and Agents of Social Transformation

Christian religion is a veritable instrument that binds Nigerians together as its values are commonly shared among people of diverse cultures and languages. Christianity through its teachings, actions and deeds of the church leaders has promoted the culture of peace in Nigeria, crossing the hurdles of discrimination on the basis of cultural differences, political affiliation and any other aspects of social stratification. The church leaders have always represented the voice of the voiceless who are deprived of certain rights or suffer the oppressive dispositions of government policies and programmes and having not the means of airing their ordeals (Jegede 153). The role of church leaders in promoting and advancing the cause of justice, peace and unity, assumes monumental dimensions with regard to propagating the social gospel, inspiring and fostering action for justice in the social, political, cultural and economic life of the country, in outright working towards the elimination of injustice both within and outside church circles, courageously denouncing oppressive and domineering of government that may lead to conflict and threaten peaceful co-existence in Nigeria (Oyemomi 273).

s) Agent of Influencing the Youths towards a Peaceful Society

In Nigeria today, at the fore-front of any conflict related issue and violent crises that keep engulfing the Nigerian state are the youths. Their active involvement could be to a number of factors and chiefly because of idleness and unemployment among the teeming youths. As such, they became willing tools in the hands of unscrupulous politicians who often use them to achieve selfish aims. For this reason, the church serves as the right agent through which the youths can be re-orientated on the need for peace and peace-making within their given environment.

t) Economic Empowerment

In a situation whereby the few well-to-do or influential people are the only ones benefitting from what should have been for the whole nation, the lucrative appointments are the reserved privileges of the sons of the high and mighty in the society, contracts can only be awarded to a common man provided he has a godfather without which no contract can be awarded. In this regard, the challenge the church faces is their social responsibility towards the poor, to succor their impoverishment, redeemed their degraded humanity, build up their self-confidence and reliance. This became imperative because "an idle hand is the devil's workshop." For this reason, the church embarks on

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community-based programmes like vocational, technical or micro-finance projects towards a sustainable development. Programmes like tailoring, carpentry, agriculture are often-time introduced to the youths and are encouraged to enroll. After training, soft loans are given to enhance their future development. By so doing, the church keeps them away from any activity that may truncate peaceful existence of their respective communities (Salami 273).

u) Social Critics against Corrupt Practices and Bad Governance

Church leaders in Nigeria have also contributed to the effort at ensuring social conflict transformation through their critique of indiscipline and lawlessness on the part of the political class in the country. As such, leading church leaders in the Mainline Churches and Pentecostal Churches have ensured conflict transformation through their objective criticism of unfair governance and irresponsible leadership. To say the least, church leaders have increasingly demonstrated zero tolerance for corrupt disposition, violence of human rights and bad governance on the parts of political leaders in Nigeria. For example, while commenting on Nigeria's political situation in its 100 years of existence as a political entity, Bishop Bolanle Gboniyi, a retired Anglican Bishop of Akure Diocese, identified corrupt practices in the legislative and executive arms of government as major impediments in our political life, socio-economic situations and security concerns (Sunday Punch 11). As a way forward, Bishop Gboniyi recommended true and genuine federalism as a political approach for tackling the scourge of systemic structural violence in the body polity.

III. Conclusion

The work has attempted to put into proper perspective that conflict is inevitable in any environment. Unfortunately, violent conflicts means have frequently been employed to try to solve incessant conflicts in Nigeria in particular. The work highlighted that violence produces more hatred but it has never in any situation ultimately resolves the conflict. The paper has succeeded in examining the roles of the church leaders in resolving conflict as agents of social transformation. Although it is claimed in some quarters that religion and religious leaders themselves have contributed more to the problems Nigerian state presently finds herself through their inciting preaching. In spite this, the positive contributions of the church leaders in nation building and peace-keeping cannot be watered down. Yet, more can still be done if Nigeria as a nation were to be conflict-free.

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