

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION IN CHRIST APOSTOLIC CHURCH, WORLDWIDE: CAUSES, EFFECTS AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Management of conflict is a critical issue which many churches are battling with owing to the nature and the threat that conflict itself poses on churches. In fact, in all areas of human endeavor, conflict is bound to crop up because as humans we relate with one another. Conflict erupts especially when individuals or groups, societies, states and nations' interests are threatened. The body of Christ is not exempted from conflict related issues as observed in Christ Apostolic Church. Christ Apostolic Church started as a genuine mission with a clearly defined mission but derived and degenerated due to leadership crisis into a presently fractionalized and polarized church. This happened because the Church allows secularism, human sentiments, the excessive pursuit for, or worship of power or fame (that was supposed or originally meant to be exclusive spiritual in nature) from a mundane perspective. The purpose of this paper is to establish the fact that conflict can be managed and effectively resolved irrespective of its type. The method adopted was historical method. The work recommended among other things that leadership is service to God and humanity. As such, church leaders in position of responsibilities should focus on the reason for their calling rather than struggling for power and fame.

Keywords: Conflict, Management, Church, Conflict Management, Resolution.

Introduction

Conflict is a universal phenomenon that is inevitable in human interaction. Human beings by nature do not see things or issues from the same perspective. As people live, work, interact, and play together, they cannot escape the reality of individual differences especially in activities that concern them (Leas, 1982:94). Conflict has long been in existence. It is as old as the existent of mankind. Recall that before the advent of Christianity, Africans worshipped God in their traditional way through various deities and cult groups. With the introduction of education, foreign religions, more in particular, Christianity, Africans embraced church at the expense of Traditional Religion and started worshipping God in a foreign way. With the advent of church and conversion to Christianity of Africans came conflict which became part of the church and it cuts across the Orthodox, Pentecostal and Aladura (Spiritual) Churches of which C.A.C is one of them with several cases of schism, leadership tussle, immorality, mismanagement of Church fund and issues related to doctrine.

As such, the Church that is supposed to be an epitome and shining example to the society are battling with personality clashes and court cases among themselves. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, an account is given in the Bible of return of Moses from Mount Sinai only to discover that the Israelites were worshipping an idol (golden calf). The Levites (priests' tribe) ordered 3000 people to be killed. At the same time, immediately after the conversion of Emperor Constantine (324-336AD) to Christianity and the consequent adoption of Christianity as the state religion in Rome, unprecedented blood-shedding and head-rolling occurred (Barclay, 1955:34). Swaim J. Carter submitted that:

Apart from displaying intolerance to those who did not agree with them, Christians sometimes were also very intolerance among themselves. Dispute and blood-shed occurred not only over points of doctrines but also the choice of leaders... (Swaim, 1982:56).

These are conflicts in the name of religion, and in the context, Christian Religion. Therefore , the thrust of this paper is to examine conflict management and resolution in Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C) World-wide, its causes and effects on the growth of the Church and steps being taking to resolve conflict related issues affecting its expansion nation-wide.

Definition of Terms

Conflict

Conflicts could be described as a situation or condition of disharmony in an interactional process. Conflicts also is when two or more values, perspectives and opinions are contradictory in nature and have not being aligned or agreed about yet (Jegade, 2018: 51). Oxford Advance Learners' Dictionary of Current English (Hornby,1988: 394) defined conflict as a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument; a violent situation or period of fighting between countries.

Conflict is also defined as a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinion, feelings or wishes (Mickey and Wilson, 1973: 13-4). The Latin word for conflicts is *confligere* which means to "strike together" (Pneuman and Brunei, 1982: 2-4). This gives a mental picture of a physical conflict escalating to the point where one person or a group angrily strikes out at another, which presents danger to the people involved and those around them. The Latin root word also conjures up traditional images of warring factions, antagonism and violence portraying an aggressive clash of interests⁸. Conflict is a hallmark of the church and it is its birthmark. It is inescapable. This assertion shows that conflict is inevitable and it is a trait in the church that we cannot do without because it is inborn (Afolabi, 2011: 34).

Management

Management means different things to different people. Some see management as academic discipline and as an organized body of knowledge which can be taught in the school as an act of managing. It can also be seen as a team or a group of people working together in an organization assigned or in charge of enterprises or that runs the affairs of an organization (Oluwasegun, 2003: 40). In a broad sense, management connotes getting things done through others with sole aim of attaining optimum result with organizational resources (2003). It is also defined as the process of planning, organizing, and controlling the effort of other

members and of using all organization resources to achieve stated organization goals (Olagboye, 2004: 4).

Church

The word “church” conveys various meanings and is subject to many usages. The word refers to the term used in describing all Christian denominations. It does not simply refer to a building for Christian worship in the Lord’s house (Afolabi, 2013: 473-4). Rather it connotes an assembly or a universal community of the body of Jesus Christ (Dairo, 2009: 89-90). This definition is derived from the Greek word *ekklesia* which means “a duly constituted gathering of citizen in a self-governing city” (2009).

Conflict Management

This is the attempt at bringing tense and conflicting situation under control. Conflict management performs a healing function in society (Awojobi, 2003: 4). It restores normalcy in society by facilitating discussions that can resolve differences. Therefore, the goal of conflict management then is to increase the positive result while reducing the negative ones.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution implies approaching the conflict in a problem-solving, constructive and non-violent way, recognizing the values of the identities of parties in the relationship, their human needs and interest, rather than a violent, destructive solution or a mere sentiment that “freezes” the current power distribution between opponents (Akpuru-Aja, 2009:22). It refers to efforts, processes and approaches aim at ending or resolving a conflict. It involves recognition by the conflicting partner of one another’s interest, needs, perspective and continues their existence in a peaceful and mutually respecting atmosphere.

Conflict Management in Christ Apostolic Church

The Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C) is distinctly an indigenous African church. The history of the Church is traceable to Oba Isaac Babalola Akinleye, David Ogunleye Odubanjo, Joseph Sadare, Miss Sophia Odulami and Joseph Ayodele Babalola who was called to the ministry on 11th October, 1928 (www.christapostolicchurchworldwide, 2019). Apostle Babalola’s call subsequently led to the great revival of 1930. Before then, there was the 1918-1928 Faith Tabernacle era characterized by the formulating of praying groups such as the “Precious Stone” or “Diamond Society” founded in small pockets all over Nigeria. Majority of the members of the first group of Diamond Society were worshippers at St. Saviour’s Anglican Church, Ijebu-Ode, where they began meeting regularly for prayers and spiritual guidance in 1918 (Ajagbe, 2009). In less than a decade, branches of the group had been established in Lagos, Ibadan, Ilewsa, Oyan, Ile-Ife, Minna, Jos and Zaria (Coggin, 2019).

Over time, God revealed to Apostle Ayo Babalola to name the revival group “Apostolic Church”. About 1939, the Church changed its name to “Nigerian Apostolic Church”. This name was again changed to “United Apostolic Church” until 1942 when God specially revealed that the name of the Church should be “Christ Apostolic Church”. It was thereafter that the name was registered as No. 147 of May 4, 1943, under the Lands Perpetual Succession Ordinance (2019).

However, according to Olaleye Abraham, the District Superintendent of Aramo District, Christ Apostolic Church became synonymous with conflict in September, 1990 at Ikeja Arakeji, OsunState. What led to the conflict was a factional group in the denomination called "forum", which approached the then President J.B. Orangun for an unresolved matter. The issue involved WOSEM, a mission founded by the then General Evangelist, T.O. Obadare. J.B. Orangun summoned Prophet T.O. Obadare to hand over the administration of WOSEM to the main body of C.A.C which he objected and he was subsequently suspended. The conflict fully blown out after the Pastors' Conference of C.A.C held at Ikeja Arakeji (Afolabi, 2013).

It is also on record that J.O. Adegoroye called for an urgent meeting in Akure in 1991 without the consent or approval of the denomination's authority to protest against the suspension of Prophet T.O. Obadare. This later led to the suspension of J.O. Adegoroye. Hence, there exists two factors in C.A.C up-till date, the "interim" which protested against the suspension of T.O. Obadare and for which they dragged the C.A.C authority to court and the "forum" the larger body of the Church. This has been the problem on ground and it has led to countless of prominent leaders in C.A.C to either leave the Church or found a separate C.A.C mission. Since 1991 till date, the two factions have been at loggerhead and court cases have become prevalent between them.

Causes of Conflicts in Christ Apostolic Church, Nigeria Power Tussle

One of the reasons why church conflict is so difficult to avoid and manage is because church is very complex. In Nigerian Church today, people fight for position of authority and Christ Apostolic Church is not an exemption. It therefore appears every Christian wants to lead and nobody wants to be a servant. People in the church, especially leaders need power to do things for their selfish interests and get issues decided in their own way. Some Christians run-down a leader because they want to be appointed in his/her place. Thus, power tussle is one of the factors responsible for conflict in Christ Apostolic Church. In the view of G. A. Oluwaponmile, he submitted that:

Conflict is also a serious issue in the church, if not among the rank and title, then among the leaders and would-be-leaders. Very sad to write but very true that many of us have failed our master and Lord along this live with unnecessary envies, blackmailing and gossips, and many times, writing strongly worded letters against Christian brother to destroy him but God through Jesus Christ not destroying such individual...we see these happening everyday (2010: 2-3).

The above succinctly summarizes the situation of things in C.A.C worldwide. As Christians all over the world were celebrating Christmas at the end of 2012, worshippers at C.A.C in a branch in Lagos were waging war of supremacy and allegiance among themselves. The crisis which had been on ground for over 20years took a dangerous form when two factors of the Church clashed during a Sunday morning service (Okunoye, 2012: 404). It was gathered that the Lagos base faction which was busy with church activities was suddenly brought an end to her programme when the Ibadan based factor disrupted them (2019).

Doctrinal Issues

One of the causes of conflict in Nigerian churches today is doctrinal issues. This often-time leads to frictions and irreconcilable differences among prominent members of the church and church leaders. A good example is the Christ Apostolic Church's position on the practice of divine healing. This practice made it irreligious for any church member to study medicine, banking and law in the universities in the time past. Among the church members in those days, the white missionaries that were using anti-malaria medicines were portrayed as unbelievers (Alokan, 2019). This stand led to schism in the Church and her leadership in 1939.

Succession Problem

Lack of proper succession plan has often caused tension and avoidable conflict in the church today not only in Christ Apostolic Church. This usually happens when the founding fathers failed to lay down proper succession plan. As such, it is essential for every church to have comprehensive guideline on the qualifications and criteria of ascension to leadership of the church either through the dictate of the church constitution or by-laws on the choice of leadership. When adequate provision is made for succession plan, it becomes mandatory for every member of the church to respect whatever the constitution stipulates. In the case of Christ Apostolic Church, adequate and proper succession plan was not put in place (Onyekwere, 2019). As a result, succession issue posed a serious challenge on the choice of leadership in C.A.C more especially after the death of Joseph Ayoola Babalola.

Personality Clashes

It is obvious that most of the conflicts in the contemporary churches today are usually the result of personality rather than theological or doctrinal. They most times arise from struggle for power which resulted from basic dislike of one person for another member opposing the leadership when they are not the kind of persons they like or they are not acting according to their expectations (Shawchuch, 1983: 52). These trouble makers sometimes called dissidents, complainers and permission-withholders are everywhere in the church, thus, Christ Apostolic Church is not immune to them. They take delight in opposing and wrecking things. There are two categories of this personality; "the aggressive controllers", that is, those that are hostile. They like to dominate the congregation, form cliques and are non-communicationists. The second category is the "passive controllers". They are apathetic people, lovely and traditional. They resist change and any new discovery in the Church (Maslow, 1970:52).

Factionality

Factionality has been a major problem in Christ Apostolic Church. The protracted conflict being experienced in the Church since 1991 has an undertone of factionality. As such, it becomes an herculean task to discipline any erring member or leader. The fact that the authorities of the Church frowned against the sharp practice of Prophet Obadare, who was using his independent ministry, WOSEM, as a parasitic body against the Church led to his suspension. The issue of factionality arose when a few of his sympathizers among the leadership of the main Church opposed his suspension. Though, his sympathizers were also suspended with him. This act of indiscipline posed a serious threat to the unity of the Church. Thus, the Church became divided. Rather than repenting and seeking reinstatement through peaceful means, the dismissed/suspended officers formed a parallel administration (of government-in-exile) over a few Assemblies under their supervision while the majority of

CAC members remained loyal to the General Executive Council of the CAC (Afolabi, 2013:479). It is pertinent to say that there are other causes of conflicts in Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria and these include unregulated number of ministers, uncoordinated church planting and ministry establishment, low formal educational qualifications of the ministers, mismanagement of Church funds, polarized leadership as well as misinterpretation of the Church constitution (2013:478).

Effects of Conflicts on Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria

Suspicion and Prejudice

Suspicion and prejudice made Christ Apostolic Church susceptible to schism, establishment of another church by factional group, reduction of church members and the loss of faith in the Church. Often-time, suspicion arose when there is unreasonable dislike or preference for a person and unwillingness to trust another. A church being engrossed with conflict usually develops a mind of hatred, petty jealousy and this has led elders like N.E. Udofia, and J.O. Adegoroye who felt that prophet T.O. Obadare was unfairly treated to break away from C.A.C. Church leaders are expected to exhibit a high level of understanding and cordial relationship with their members with the aim of creating sense of belongingness for all members (Kadala, 2009: 112). It is rather unfortunate to note that suspicion not just from the leadership but from members to members is the order of the day in C.A.C. As such, its persistence has continued to affect the growth of the Church in all ramifications be it spiritually, physically and financially.

Loss of Focus

The fundamental focus of the church, not only Christ Apostolic Church is to preach the gospel, worship together as one body of Christ, and to bring men to the fullness of the saving knowledge of God. It is rather unfortunate that leadership conflict, tribalism, envy, and power tussle among the elders and dogmatic teachings have eroded the primary focus of C.A.C (Awojobi, 2003, 26-8). Disunity among the Church leaders has resulted to some of the members leaving the Church. Sanni Gbenga, a pastor of C.A.C, Agbala Itura, submitted concerning the issue of envy and jealousy, "being a large Church/congregation, once you are noticed to be gifted, there is envy, jealousy and grudging". People tend to forget that the focus of these gifts is for the upliftment and edification of the Church. This problem is due to human nature. This is, however, not implying that the church leaders or members are totally godless, but that they are just human despite their commitment to God (Randolph and Meyers, 2001: 26, 106).

It is expected of the church to be the assembly of peace-makers but the story has changed. C.A.C leaders, for example, litigate one another due to doctrinal differences and issues that could have been settled out of courts. By this, the focus of the Church is depleted to settling disputes because if the church is not at peace, the word of peace cannot be preached and properly conveyed. This fact is well buttressed by C.O. Oshun when he submitted that

Clearly, the national leadership of C.A.C whether in its forum or interim expression, has derailed from its main goal of soul winning to one of empire seeking and unless there is a timely curtailment of this development, the Church may take a turn for the worst. This happened because the national

Church has ignored its source, its faith, its vision, and its fervor. It has also ignored the means of grace in ensuring the nurture, extension, and survival of the kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth (1983:165).

Loss of Reputation

Character is what a person is but reputation is what other think of you. God is far more concerned and interested in what we are than what we do (Ballou, 2011:36). The church is the "Bible" the world is now watching and reading. They are no more interested in reading the Christian Holy book--the Bible because they are fed up with theory but need the practical of the theories that are written in the Bible. They need a person to motivate them. However, it is a great pity that the church that is being seen as a pathfinder and as an institution of reputation and thereby bringing reproach and shame to the holy name of God by what many churches are doing in managing their conflict. For example, in 2012, a branch of Christ Apostolic Church in Lagos and another branch in Ibadan clashed due to leadership tussle. The Sunday service of C.A.C, Lagos branch was disrupted by C.A.C, Ibadan branch due to irreconcilable differences. The electricity supply to the Church was disconnected as a retaliative measure (www.conflict.org.com, 2019).

Church loses reputation as a community of believers. Since Christians prove themselves unable to resolve conflict and turn to secular world to do that for them, and the ability to attract the world to Christ in anyway related to the reputation of the church but the reputation is badly tarnished and abused because of the inability to effectively manage crises (Maslow:1970).

Segregation

One of the effects of conflict in Nigerian churches like Christ Apostolic Church is segregation. Within the Church and more especially among the Church elders and leaders, there are rivalries, contentions, and strives leading to division and separation. Division and schism are as a result of selfishness of a few seeking positions of leadership and money. In the view of the writer, the issue of segregation is not limited to C.A.C; it cuts-across all churches in Nigeria and the world at large. Quite often, both the clergy and the laity in many Nigerian churches often bring in selfishness, greed and pride to the Church in a bid to cater for themselves. The Church that was founded by Christ as a single entity, that must remain in unity if the purpose for her establishment is to be achieved is now divided as a result of conflict caused by segregation.

Solutions to Conflict Resolution and Management in Christ Apostolic Church

Dialogue

Dialogue plays an important role in responding to conflict crises in the church today as the case is in Christ Apostolic Church. God says in Isaiah 1:18, "come let us reason together..." This is an indication that despite obvious differences among C.A.C leaders and prominent members, there is a provision for meeting points where issues can be ironed out amicably. At this point, dialogue is not meant for debate rather, it is a process of mutual empowerment between the aggrieved parties who have conflicting interests and claims. It is the opinion of the writer that lack of effective use of dialogue led to the division between the General Executive

Council of the Christ Apostolic Church (world-wide) and T.O. Obadare, J.O. Adegoroye and N.E. Udofia.

Through dialogue, warring parties are able to break-down the barriers of prejudice, suspicion, and misunderstanding (Kadala: 2009). During dialogue, the parties involved are expected to control their communication style and messages. This fact is well buttressed by the National Network of Women's Employment concerning communication style and messages, "bearing in mind, it is not just what you say that matters but also how you say it, how you act and your body language" (Morel: 2009). Therefore, a dispute within the church, in this case, Christ Apostolic Church, is expected to be settled within the Church and not calling the secular world for solution, just as factions led by E.H. Olusheye and Akintola in 2010 filed a law suit in the Federal High Court, Lagos on who to succeed E. O. Olusheye as the Head of CAC World-wide.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is loosely defined as "putting an end to a disagreement and starting a good relationship again. It is the process of making it possible for two different ideas, facts and opposing views to co-exist without being at loggerhead with each other (Tenney, 2009:382). Reconciliation takes place immediately after settling the disputes and quarrel. As such, it is more than agreement; it also means restoring the original understanding and relationship that existed before hostility. In Christ Apostolic Church, Nigeria, there are indications that the 28 years old crisis threatening the survival of the Christ Apostolic Church World-wide has almost ended as the two factions involve--Supreme Council and the General Executive Council, jointly organized Pastor's Conference for the first time since 1990 when the crisis started (Ajayi: 2018). This fact was disclosed by the present president of the Christ Apostolic Church World-wide, Pastor Gabriel Lagunju, at the annual Pastors' Conference held at Ile-Aanu Alasepe Prayer Ground, Ikire, Osun State (2018).

As part of the efforts of the factional leaders to ensure unity which had eluded them for 28 years, the leaders chose the same theme for Sunday School, Good Women Annual Conference and Joint National Youth Conference. The President of C.A.C World-wide spoke extensively on the reconciliatory moves by leaders of both factions through the General Secretary of the Church that:

Building on the peace process demonstrated at the 2017 Conference by the exchange of visits by representatives of the two governing councils of the Mission, the Lord again inspired one of our prophets to propose unity prayers which were agreed with and held in three venues between December 2017 and January 2018...(2018). Since the 28 years old crisis could not be hurriedly and genuinely resolved without some level of patience and consideration of the give and take principles, the entire Mission agreed on some joint programmes which were heartily welcomed by the entire members of the Mission (2018).

Judging from this assertion, reconciliation is not only to resolve the crisis but also to restore the relationship of the people involved. Whenever the Church is going through tough times, room s should be given for dialogue and settling of disputes so as to ensure total reconciliation.

Establishing a Line of Communication

Communication is loosely linked to dialogue. Communication gap, in the opinion of the writer contributed to crisis situation in C.A.C worldwide, more especially between the two factions involved in the conflict. For instance, there was no established dialogue link between the Supreme Council and the General Executive Council when the crisis started as it is now. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus sets forth the four-step process of resolving church conflict which the C.A.C worldwide seems to have adopted. Step One (Matt. 18:15), the process of resolving church conflict begins on an individual level. Jesus said, "if another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault". Here, an individual believer is to go and discuss with the fellow believer in resolving the conflict between them through dialogue. In step two (18:16), if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you... "so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses". In other words, the witnesses are present not only to confirm that the issue of dispute between both parties but to also act as mediators in resolving the conflict. In step three (18:17), if the brother listens, or refuses to listen, take your case to the church. In step four (18:17b), if the church decides you are right, but the other person won't accept it, treat that person as a pagan (2018). It simply means that when a professing believer refuses to accept the decision of the church, he is to be treated as if he was an outsider, as in the case of T.O. Obadare and J.O. Adegoroye, both eminent leaders of C.A.C worldwide.

It should be noted that effective and respective communication with others enriches us by their insight, challenges us by their questions and deepens our knowledge of their grievances. What initially inhabits this respective communication between the two factions in C.A.C worldwide is that both the Supreme Council and General Executive Council consider themselves superior to all others, and feel that they have nothing to dialogue about not until they realized that true dialogue presupposes attitude of humility, openness and equality of persons involved. In the words of the Secretary General of the Church, "it involves sacrifice, some level of patience and consideration of some give and take principles without which the desired peaceful reconciliation will continue to elude us" (2018).

Conclusion

Conflict is inevitable in the society. As long as people interact in any society, there must be conflict. It is human nature. In Nigeria today, church conflict is prevalent. In fact, no church can claim immunity from it. The establishment of the church was pronounced by Jesus Christ himself when he said, "on this rock will I build my church". If, therefore, it was established by the pronouncement of an ordinary man, we would not be surprised to see it becoming an avenue of leadership tussle, rivalry, and selfishness as we have it today in Nigeria. The Christ Apostolic Church, the focus of this paper failed to make use of conflict resolution mechanism. As such, conflict lingered for over 28 years within the denomination. Therefore, as soon as traces of conflicts surface, its causes should be identified and appropriately dealt with. This becomes more imperative because the church of God should be seen as an epitome of peace, unity and manager and resolver of conflict. Without doubt, the inability of Christ Apostolic Church to manage conflict constituted a cog to the growth and further expansion of the Mission for almost three decades until effective communication channel was deployed leading to total reconciliation.

Recommendations

Having examined the causes and effects of conflicts in Christ Apostolic Church, the following were recommended for management and resolution.

1. Church leaders must see leadership as an opportunity to serve God and humanity. Therefore, they are expected to focus on the reasons for their calling rather than struggling for position of authority at the expense of the sheep they are expected to shepherd.
2. There is a need for effective communication channel among church leaders and members alike. It is imperative to learn about each other's fears, aspirations and misunderstanding. Through dialogue, we can build bridges of understanding and tear down walls that separate us.
3. Most of the church conflicts ravaging the church today can be attributed to lack of proper succession plan by the church leadership. Thus, to prevent this from happening again, as observed in C.A.C worldwide, the church must put in place a reliable succession arrangement as stipulated either in her constitution or bye-law.

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