

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

It is true now that man lives in a world of conflict. Conflict is an ever-present process in human relations. Conflict situations indeed appear frequently in daily, public and private life. Conflict may occur within and among families, groups, communities or nations; and they may be fuelled by ethnic, racial, religious, or economic differences, or may arise from differences in ideologies, values and beliefs. Conflict may be on a small or large scale. Conflict charge the people with tensions, threats, fears, anxieties and uncertainties. What makes a society ideal is the extent to which the conflicting interests and needs in a society are constructively managed so that violence does not threaten its continued existence. Since it is obvious that conflicts in any given society is inevitable, management and resolution of conflict is the very essence of talking about conflict. This is what this work is set to achieve and to offer suggestions on how to manage and resolve conflict thereby reducing its negative and destructive effects. This work showed the church has the potential to contribute to the management and resolution of conflicts in Nigeria.

THE CONCEPT OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Management here means an act or a skill of planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling the administration of a peace process. Administration, in this study, refers to all the activities that are involved in managing a given conflict (Dzurgba 133). In the same vein, Best posits that, conflict management is the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict. It covers the entire area of handling conflict positively at

different stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict, by being proactive. It encompasses conflict limitation, containment and litigation (95). In the words of John Burton in Best, this may include “conflict prevention”, a term he uses to connote containment of conflict through steps involved steps introduced to promote conditions in which collaborative and valued relationships control the behavior of conflict parties (95). The term “conflict management” is perhaps an admission of the reality that conflict is inevitable, but that not all conflicts can always be resolved, therefore what practitioners can do is to manage and regulate them.

Lending credence to Best, Francis observes that the term conflict management “includes the efforts and interventions to limit, contain or regulate conflict” (21). Spangler in corroboration sees conflict management as involving the control, but not resolution, of a long-term or deep-rooted conflict. This is the approach taken when complete resolution seems to be impossible, yet something needs to be done. In cases of resolution-resistant or even intractable conflict, it is possible to manage the situation in ways that make it more constructive and less destructive. According to him, the goal of conflict management is to intervene in ways that make the ongoing conflict more beneficial and less damaging to all sides. Spangler gives example of sending peacekeeping forces into a region enmeshed in strife, and says this may help calm the situation and limit casualties, though it will however, not resolve conflict. He maintains that in some cases, where non-negotiable human needs are at stake, management is the most feasible step (4).

Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Researchers reached a consensus that conflict management is a “measure taken in an open conflict with the aim of hindering escalation”. Conflict management was perceived to entail an aspect of “learning to live with” a conflict. It was seen as a way of reducing the incentive to escalate the conflict as well as a way of handling an already open conflict. In referring to conflict management and the practical measures of the concept, they said it is important to be aware of whom the actor is using and/ or engaging in these measures. This is because the effectiveness, if not success, of certain measures of conflict prevention and management may vary depending on the kind of actor that implements them. The type of actor involved in conflict management is important since it can influence the effectiveness of the measures (Okai 52-53).

Kellet opines that conflict management refers to the long-term management of intractable conflicts. It is the label for the variety of ways by which people handle grievances—standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong. Those ways according to him include such diverse phenomena as gossip, ridicule, lynching, terrorism, warfare, feuding, genocide, law, mediation and avoidance (1).

Okai rightly observes that a key question in managing a conflict will be what issues to deal with first: the issues where the parties are more likely to agree or those where the parties are furthest removed from each other's position (53). It is our candid belief that if positive result or peace is to be obtained, then, the conflict manager or people must learn to manage conflicts effectively and productively, otherwise its risks to society and its development will be overwhelming. Which forms of conflict management will be used in any conflict situation can be somewhat predicted and explained by the social structure – or social geometry of the case. With regard to the choice of approach, the level of trust between the conflicting parties is deemed essential.

We need to be able to manage conflict when it arises so that it becomes a positive force, rather than a negative force threatening to disrupt the group or community. As rightly observed by Parker:

Conflict not managed will bring about delays, disinterest, lack of action and, in extreme cases, a complete breakdown of the group. Unmanaged conflict may result in withdrawal of individuals and unwillingness on their part to participate in other groups or assist with various group action programs (8).

Hence, conflict managers must be skillful to overcome the generally chaotic and disorderly scenes associated with the behavior of parties in conflict. Emotions or sentiments and irrationality must be controlled. From the above assertion, Otite agrees that: It promotes the success of conflict management if parties in conflict are portrayed as interdependent citizens, and if anger and strong emotions are minimized (12).

According to Otite, conflict management can also involve the mobilization of cultural expectations, if not imperatives, such as African hospitality, commensality, and reciprocity and belief system. Kola hospitality and commensality are cultural instruments in Nigeria and

elsewhere that can be utilized to settle at least intra-family and intra-ethnic conflicts in the open glare of an attractive audience in town or village squares, or at the shrines of common deities, ancestors and predecessors (12).

Boulding has posits methods of ending conflicts, which are (1) avoidance, (2) conquest, and (3) procedural resolution of some kind, including reconciliation and/or compromise and/or award (10). Okai has observed that avoidance of conflict often leads to intensified hostility and may later cause greater problems for the group (53). Conflict should not be ignored on the assumption that they will disappear on their own Boulding has equally observed that:

The biggest problem in developing the institutions of conflict control is that of catching conflicts young. Conflict situations are frequently allowed to develop to almost unmanageable proportions before anything is done about them, by which time it is often too late to resolve them by peaceable and procedural means (16).

Thus, conflict management is indispensable to mankind as it is the most critical element responsible for creation, growth and survival of any organization.

THE PROCESSES IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Our incomplete understanding of conflict behavior has serious consequences for our ability to manage conflicts constructively. Ross in his assertion posits that constructive conflict management is characterized by cooperative processes (not just attention to outcomes) that focus on the ability of different parties to define shared interests and to communicate openly in order to establish empathy between the disputants, and eventual legitimate of both sides' interests and a convergence of points of view results in what Deutsch calls "benevolent misperception" (193). Constructive conflict management, Deutsch asserts, is more likely in situation where the power of the parties is relatively equal, although he offers suggestions as to how weak parties can bolster their negotiating position. Deutsch suggests that third parties may be crucial in developing cooperative conflict procedures and in helping parties to reach constructive outcomes. He also claims that it is easier to go from cooperation to competition than the reverse (393-399).

Effective conflict management must address both interest and interpretations as significant sources of conflict. The most effective way to address interests and interpretations in order to make conflict management more constructive, of course, varies from context to context (Ross 196). Magagula in Okai posits that scholars, authors and researchers in their review of relevant literature review have revealed several approaches/strategies to manage or resolve conflict among and between aggrieved parties. These include arbitration, mediation, reconciliation, bargaining, problem solving, and peacekeeping through the use of force (55).

Demers posits three strategies of peaceful conflict resolution between and among warring parties. Mediation, arbitration and reconciliation, and each of these approaches can be used by universities to resolve conflict among and between aggrieved parties (53).

MEDIATION

Demers also postulates that the mediation strategy of conflict resolution basically seeks to provide voluntary warring parties in dispute with facilitator. The parties select a third party who acts as a facilitator or a mediator. The mediator has no power to decide the outcomes. The parties determine the results of the mediation process by mutual agreement. If the mediation process fails, the parties in dispute are free to withdraw from the process, launch legal proceedings at anytime, or turn to one or more arbitrators (53).

Mediation has been presented by the United Nations University for peace as: “the voluntary, informed, non-binding process undertaken by an external party that fosters the settlement of differences or demands between directly invested parties (Miler 23). Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse see mediation as the intervention of a third party; it is a voluntary process in which the parties retain control over the outcome (pure mediation), although it may include positive and negative inducements (mediation with muscle) (22). To Encica in Okai, mediation helps stakeholders discuss issues, repair past injuries, and develop the tools needed to face disagreements effectively. Mediators may help participants glimpse at their blind spots, broaden their perspectives, and even muddle through the problem-solving process. Yet, successful mediators remember that the challenges are owned by the stakeholders and so not attempt to short-circuit the process by solving challenges for them (56).

Thus, mediation is assistance by a third party where the parties to a conflict admit that they have a problem which they are both committed to solving, but in which the mediator manages a negotiation process, but does not impose a solution on the parties. It is a voluntary process. According to Best, when two friends have a disagreement, for instance, and the line of communication is broken, a common friend could be a mediator in the relationship. This can move on to higher levels of relationship at the group, community and international levels. The objective of mediation is to help parties top a conflict, within an environment of controlled communication, to reach solutions to their problem (107-108). Mediation involves dialogue, but is different because of the presence of a third party. At the stage of dialogue, parties may still be in a position to maintain communication on their own, by themselves.

The mediator offers mediating services with the ultimate aim of bringing the contending parties together and to suggest modalities for peaceful resolution of dispute. The submissions of the mediator are of no binding substances on the disputants. Commenting on the role of the mediator, Best writes that it is to create the enabling environment for the parties to carryout dialogue sessions leading to the resolution of a pending conflict. Generally, the mediator works on communication between parties, pollinates by working on common themes and drawing attention to neglected points and is a confidant to the parties, as well as a reconciler (108). He added that, the mediator helps parties to identify and arrive at common grounds with a view to overcoming their fears and satisfying their real needs in addition, there is need to be objective, neutral balanced, supportive, non-judgemental and astute in questioning; and try to drive the parties towards win-win as opposed to win-lose outcomes. Really, Encica in Okai sees a good mediator as heaving the ability to:

- (a) Treat Issues with confidentiality, exceptions being such instances as where illegal activities have taken place (e.g., sexual harassment).
- (b) Inform all parties of exceptions to the confidentiality rule ahead of time any sharing of information based on a need-to-know basis to minimize giving out information that could hurt one or both of the parties. Also employees may be less hesitant to speak out when assured of confidentiality. Sometimes conflicts involve personal issues.

(c) Change roles, supposing mediation fails; he should have ability to become an arbiter. According to Encica in Okai, on the plus side, stakeholders may put their best foot forward and try hard to resolve issues. Unfortunately, while some mediators may be able to play both roles of being neutral and impartial without manipulating the situation, the road is left wide open for abuse of power. Furthermore, individuals may feel coerced and not trust a mediator when what is said in confidence now may be taken against them later (Okai 56-57).

Furthermore, Encica posits that the mediator should facilitate the mediation process by:

(a) Understanding each participant's perspective through a pre-caucus. The pre-caucus is a separate meeting between the mediator and each stakeholder before the stakeholders are brought together in a joint session. During the pre-caucus the mediator explains briefly the issue of confidentiality and the mechanics of the mediation process so that stakeholders will not be surprised or have a sense of being lost. The mediator also should offer stakeholders the opportunity for regular caucusing (a meeting away from the other stakeholder) anytime they feel a need for it. The pre-caucus provides each stakeholder an opportunity to be heard and understood.

(b) Increasing and evaluating participant interest in solving the challenge through mediation. Part of the role of the mediator in meeting individually with each stakeholder is to help individuals visualize a life without the stress that comes with the conflict.

In the process of meeting with the stakeholders, the mediator can make a more informed determination as to whether to proceed with mediation or recommend arbitration or another approach. As effective as mediation can be under certain circumstances more harm than good can result from bringing parties together. The purpose of mediation is not to simply provide a safe place for stakeholders to exchange insults and rain abuses on one another but to look for transformative opportunities, look for the positive, and repair injuries.

(c) Setting ground rules for improved communication. The objectives are for stakeholders to increase their understanding of effective interpersonal relations. Before conflicting parties meet, it helps to set ground rules that will help parties avoid hurtful comments, and even increase positive validating ones. Ground rules will help the conflict from escalating and save

time once mediation is under way. In the pre-caucus, the stakeholder should be asked to avoid the use of sweeping statements by being more specific (56-58).

Mediation is quite effective, productive and even helpful in settling conflicts that would have otherwise escalated to something else. This is why it is gaining increasing significance in Nigeria as a result of the pollination of other western NGOS by western donor funds and other western NGOS.

ARBITRATION

The second strategy of conflict management/resolution is arbitration, which is another type of third party intervention that is step higher than mediation in conflict management sequence. The parties to a conflict, who select to use arbitration, choose a neutral third party to be an arbitrator to solve the dispute. Corroborating with the above statement of the researcher, Demers sees arbitration as a private process between the aggrieved parties in dispute (20). In the same vein, Best defines arbitration as the use and assistance of a neutral third party in conflict, who hears the evidence from both parties, and thereafter renders a decision, usually called an award, which is expected to be binding on the parties (108). In arbitration the parties lose more control over the situation than those who choose mediation and/or other lower level of intervention. Arbitration, which is a step higher than mediation is almost similar to mediation and adjudication, but it is different from both. It is different from mediation because the submissions of the arbitration are binding on the parties while that of mediator is not binding on the parties no matter the weight of the evidence that might have been gathered in the mediation process. Also, it is different from adjudication (litigation) because it is done outside the court and its mechanisms for enforcement, distinguishable from those of court judgments.

Best carefully observed that those who favour arbitration above litigation argue that it permits the parties in dispute to select the arbiter they would wish to sit over their case, something not enjoyed by litigation. However, its critics point to the cost involved, arguing that in the end analysis, it may not be cheaper than going to court (109). Arbitrators fulfill this role by virtue of the positions of authority they occupy in the society. They could be traditional leaders in the family, clan, village, community, or ethnic group. Arbitration may

be done in the context of the wider community, or with just the parties involved in a situation. The parties and witnesses may be listened to and then a decision is made about who is right and who is wrong followed by what is to be done. There is a desire to ensure that the outcome in any arbitration process is a fair one (Best 109).

The place of arbitration, the language to be used, application of rules and laws during arbitration process, and ethnic group of the arbitrators must be agreed on by the parties in dispute. The arbitrator(s) must be knowledgeable and neutral and keep to the guidelines rules, procedures defined and accepted upon by the disputants.

CONCILIATION

Conciliation is somehow close to mediation in the sense that it is a third party activity, and its formulated proposals of settlement after an investigation of facts are not binding on the disputants. Conciliation is therefore intermediary efforts which is aimed at persuading the parties to a conflict to work towards a peaceful solution. It is quite obvious that conciliation involves facilitation.

Miller sees conciliation as:

The voluntary referral of a conflict to a neutral external party (in the form of an unofficial commission) which either suggests a non-binding settlement or conducts explorations to facilitate more structures or techniques of conflict resolution, the latter can include confidential discussions with the disputants or assistance during a pre-negotiation phase (6-7)

Unlike arbitrator and mediator, a conciliator frequently works in pre-negotiation situations to establish and maintain communication among disputants and, can move them into formal bargaining formats of agreement is reached. Conciliator may employ fact-finding and observation techniques, and help disputants to be resolved informally.

Best maintains that conciliator communicates separately with parties and provides the assistance needed for a neutral third party. The key aim of conciliation is to reduce tensions between parties in a conflict situation. Conciliation provides the vital background through

several complex activities, which in turn support higher profile events like mediation (107). In addition, conciliators play critical roles in helping agreements to be kept, in reconciliation efforts that prevent future conflicts after agreements are reached.

NEGOTIATION

Fisher et al define negotiation as "... a structured process of dialogue between conflicting parties about issues in which their opinions differ" (115). Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse define negotiation as "the process whereby the parties within the conflict seek to settle or resolve their conflicts" (21). Negotiation is a direct talk among the parties about a conflict, conducted with the goal of achieving a resolution. The distinguishing characteristic is that the talk involves the parties themselves without the direct assistance of a third party (Fernandez 4). Miller in his assertion sees negotiation as "communication, usually governed by pre-established procedure, between representatives of parties involved in a conflict or dispute" (25).

Thus, negotiation is a direct process of dialogue and discussion taking place between two disputants where both parties come to the realization that they have a problem; and that by talking to each other, they can arrive at solution to their problem. The goal of negotiation, according to Jeong, is "... to reach agreement through joint decision making between parties" (168). We can comfortably lay assertion to the fact that communication is critical to the process of negotiation as it can be seen in all the definitions given above. Hence, this researcher asserts that negotiation can only take place in a conducive atmosphere or environment and when there is communication between parties in dispute. We also add that communication can enhance effective negotiation which results in resolution or in a mutually acceptable agreement by the parties in dispute.

Furthermore, we posit that negotiation becomes harder when communication between parties in dispute is threatened or has stopped to exist and this always occurs when conflict might have escalated at the later stages of the conflict. One of the underlying properties of negotiation is that it involves two or more parties, who are interested in preserving improving, building or remoulding relationships that conflict seemed to distort. Negotiation also involves any voluntary bargaining process in which the disputants articulate a shift from enmity to

friendship, discern the need, and facilitate an escape exit from the threshold of positional imperatives.

There are three basic strategies of negotiation process. These include:

COMPETITIVE NEGOTIATION (BARGAINING)

This is also known as hard bargaining, distribute, positional, zero sum, or win-lose-bargaining. Best postulates that competitive or positional negotiation is based on the aggressive pursuit of interest by parties and is typically adversarial and competitive. Parties make demands that are in consideration of the interests and needs of others, and this makes it difficult for these interests to be met. Parties also perceive themselves to be in competition (106). This means that the negotiation process tends to be conducted through a framework of competition. The bargainers here see the diplomatic process as competition, in which each strives to achieve victory. This process promotes victor, vanquished relationship, as immediate benefits not considering prominently the relevance of future relationship.

Thus, one party's demands can only be met to the complete detriment of the other. Competitive bargaining breaks down easily, this is because disputants tend to adhere strongly to their positions, and the stronger seems or tends to dominate the negotiation process and is ready to win at all costs.

COMPROMISING NEGOTIATION (BARGAINING)

This is also known as soft bargaining, win some – lose some or give and take bargaining. Here, a party wins something from what it wanted and gives-up something else, by dividing and sharing. In fact, the bargaining principle here is integrative and interest based, not minding to make concessions in order to hasten a mutual agreement with the other party. In this bargaining process, a party has a desire to preserve, improve, build and maintain a future relationship with the opponent.

COLLABORATIVE NEGOTIATION (BARGAINING)

This is also known as constructive negotiation, integrative or problems solving or interest or positive – sum-or-win bargaining. According to Best, collaborative negotiation is

a process where parties try to educate each other about their needs and concerns, and both search for the best ways to solve their problems in ways that the interests and fears of both or all parties are met. He also added that, the process is collaborative in principle and the emphasis is on mutual understanding and feeling, all aimed at building a sustainable relationship (106). It is worth noting here that both parties endeavor to create avenues to explore possibilities through their collaborative efforts to achieve a win-win situation where both parties agree to give premium on their respective interests without any unnecessary compromise.

We observed here that negotiation seems to have received universal acceptance because people in all ethnic groups, communities, culture and societies all over the world talk and negotiate their interests in everyday activities.

There are some factors that hinder negotiation process, which we identified as cultural values or cultural peculiarities in terms of the setting, preparatory stage and the follow up. Our opinion is that in the Nigerian context for example, there are cultural values that may hinder negotiation. These, he identifies to include factors such as Osu caste system in Igbo speaking area of Nigeria, age grade differences, the perceptions of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria, the psychological impact resulting from negotiation outcomes, relationships, the subject matter. Negotiation is a key approach to the peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts that may arise among parties. It is also within the reach and control of parties, like communication and collaboration, because there are no third parties involved (Best 106-107).

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR)

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) refers to various dispute management techniques, which allows for introduction of a neutral third party intervention. It denounces the gamut of traditional adversarial processes. Alternative Dispute Resolution is a “non-conventional” peaceful method of settling disputes and resolving conflict situations using the least expensive methods, and in ways that satisfy the parties, as well as ways that preserve relationships after a settlement might have been reached. ADR is specially meant to serve as an alternative to the official conventional means of settling disputes, mainly through litigation and the courts, but with preference for non-violence (Best 96).

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) involved only forms of conflict management mechanisms, which are not ad-judicial, and these include negotiation, mediation, and arbitration. ADR also create opportunities to promote creative joint problem solving culture as well as supervision and facilitation of mutual good agreements, which consider the needs of the parties rather than their position.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

In view of the fact that Christianity is made up of various denominations, it will be proper to consider the contributions of some of them. First, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church as it relates to managing the conflict in Niger Delta has contributed so much. This assertion was renowned in an interview granted to the Secretary General of Seven-Day Adventist Church in Eastern Nigeria, Bassey E. O. Udoh by radio Bayelsa on April 19th 2005. According to Udoh, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church through the Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) represents the church in governments, religious bodies and international organizations. The main duties of the Department are sustaining protecting and defending religious freedom and human rights for every one everywhere (cited in Okai 102).

For PARL to attain these objectives, it constantly conducts congresses, conferences, and other events worldwide to endorse religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, and human rights. PARL also helps to build up crucial understanding between government officials and religious leaders of all denominations. It is as well the duty of PARL to manage conflicts and bring peace to conflict areas. Therefore, it is based on this, according to Udoh that PARL held a variety of peace conferences in October 2005 in Bayelsa State and in March 2006 in Rivers State. Quite a lot of presentations were made by speakers who have been experts and are reached in the problems that have plagued the Niger Delta region. Papers were presented on issues relating to security, sustainable peace, community development, youths empowerment, human rights, government commitment and International Community contributions to the Niger Delta region (Okai 102-103).

Commenting on the purpose of the conference, Okai narrates that the major aim of the conference was to draw attention to the causes, effects and likely solutions to this youth

restiveness in the Niger Delta region. Participants established that the conference did attain the desired result. Feasible solutions were offered and participants agreed to take the solution to their various communities.

Participants requested more of such conference and further requested the conveners to extend it to all other religious persuasions. Participants requested the international community to build up pressure on the federal government of Nigeria to esteem the social-cultural, economic and environmental rights of the people of Nigeria's Niger Delta and that the international community should help the people of the region to manage their resources for their advantage and that of Nigeria and the world at large.

“Participants stated that sustainable development can only be achieved in a just, fair and peaceful setting where the present generation of mankind is able to meet their genuine needs without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their needs as well in the course of economic development efforts and the protection of the global environment. Participants urged the multi-national corporations domiciled in Nigeria's Niger Delta to provide employment and economic empowerment to the people of the region, especially for the youths and women in the rural areas, to douse not only the prevalent restiveness but rural-urban drift. Participants urged Nigeria's Niger Delta Youths to imbibe peaceful qualities such as tolerance, patience, forgiveness and self-control in all their endeavours and further condemned the use of violence by the people of the region, especially the youths, in agitating for their perceived rights.

Participants urged the elites of the region to desist from subverting and/or diverting social and economic amenities of the area, and assist the governments and people of the area in alleviating the plights of the region and its people, and further urged the governments to institute development programmes to cater for the grassroots people” (Okai 103-104).

Once more, the Seven-Day Adventist Church, through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), a humanitarian agency which, through its financial, material and technical resources, supports, rehabilitates and enhances the quality of life and well-being of communities and citizens in developing countries with particular attention to the extremely deprived, communities in the Niger Delta. For example, during the 1994 Ogoni versus Shell

crisis, ADRA supported the affected communities by providing food, clothing and shelter for the displaced people.

ADRA is also involved in the Niger Delta community development programmes such as education, health services, and social services. For instance, ADRA assisted in building and equipping a rehabilitation centre at Edoha Community in Ahoada East Local Government Area in River State. This centre has since been a source of blessing for both less privileged and the physically challenged people in that area of the state (Okai 105).

On the contribution of the Methodist Church on bringing peace to Nigeria's Niger Delta region, Ogbedu says that the previous prelate of the Methodist Church, Nigeria, Sunday Mbang, advised militants in the Niger Delta area to desist from violent activities to avoid god's wrath. Mbang who gave the advice in Ibeno, Akwa Ibom State, while inaugurating thirty-six community projects executed by Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited (MPN), said that "the activities of militants in the areas are evil and do not reflect current development efforts in the area" (Nigerian Tribune, February 28, 2007 3).

Noting that the area had suffered countless neglect by successive governments and some companies in the oil industry, Mbang however advised people in the region "to learn from the experiences of people in South Africa, whom, he said, suffered the worst crime of apartheid, but were able to reconcile later". As narrated by Ogbedu, Mbang contends that what militants are doing in this area will neither help us today nor tomorrow. Any innocent blood shed by them will cry out to God for justice and vengeance.

Ogbedu says, to Mbang, the first step towards the development of the region by either government or oil companies operating in the area is to allow peace to reign first. Quoting Mbang, he says; "sincere love must replace all hatred; youth's restiveness must be channeled to things productive for the good of the young people and all of us, all kidnappings, hostage-takings and all other forms of corruption and deviant behavior must disappear from all of us" (Nigeria Tribune February 28, 2007 p.3).

He concluded by saying that "unemployment and other community development problems facing people in the area would only be solved through massive collaborative development efforts of Nigerians, foreign nationals and their companies, and thanked the

MPN for its efforts exemplified by the commissioned projects” (Nigeria Tribune February 28, 2007).

The Catholic Church, on her part, has an agency called Catholic Relief Service (CRS) whose responsibilities include the following:

1. “Peace-building, which is a process that aims at changing unjust structures through right-relationships, transform the way people, communities and societies live, heal and structure their relationships to promote justice and peace.
2. Create a space in which mutual trust, respect, and interdependence is fostered.
3. Engage the local church, religious institutions, organizations and other parties in a mutual process of dialogue and transformation.
4. The church also provides guidance for changing unjust systems and practices through a broad conceptual understanding, as well as change attitudes and behaviours to promote peace, tolerance and reconciliation through specific activities.
5. Indeed, the CRS, through long-term commitment, responds to the root causes of violent conflict, including unjust relationships and structures, in addition to addressing its effects and symptoms”.

Furthermore, the CRS used a complete approach that focuses on the local community while strategically engaging the middle-range and top levels of leaderships (Okai 105-106).

According to the Vicar General of Catholic Church in Port Harcourt Diocese, Rev. Father Cyprian Onwuli, in an interview by treasure FM, a Federal Radio Corporation in Port Harcourt on April 12, 2007, the Catholic Church has made several efforts in managing the conflicts in Niger Delta. Rev. Onwuli therefore submits that: “The church, during the crisis at Odi, in Bayelsa State gave our relief materials to the people in order to alleviate the plight of the people.

Also, the church through its organ, has sent official delegations or envoys to crisis-torn areas like Bodo City in Gokana, Mogho, Kpor, Okrika and Andoni, all in Rivers State, in an effort to settle conflicts and restore peace in the area. The church has also been giving out relief materials to communities like Ogbakiri, Eleme, and Asa/Ndoki all in rivers state”

(cited in Okai 107/108). From the above we can say that the church has contributed a lot conflict management and resolution in Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the world at large.

CONCLUSION

This work has shown that conflicts are not the same, cannot be completely avoided or wiped away from human society but can be managed and resolved as persons, groups, and communities work out their differences in terms of ideologies, perceptions, cultural affinities and religious beliefs and practices. This work has identified some processes in conflict management and resolution to include the following strategies: mediation, arbitration, conciliation, negotiation, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), persuasion, dialogue, workshop and conference. This work has also explained that, the first step in managing conflict is to analyze the nature and type of conflict by asking helpful question, in order to get answers from the groups involved. This work has shown that the Christian Church always conducts congresses, conferences, and other events worldwide to promote religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, and human rights. The church through its organ has sent official delegations or envoys to crisis-torn areas in an effort to settle conflicts and restore peace in the area. The church has also been giving out relief materials to communities.

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