

The Implications of Acts 6:1-7 for Ethnic Relations and Conflict Resolution in Wusasa Church, Kaduna State.

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Abstract

The biblical account in Acts 6:1–7 presents a model of conflict resolution and social integration within the early Church. Which holds practical relevance for contemporary multi-ethnic communities. Plurality of ethnic groups in the church is always challenged by a lack of peaceful coexistence because of various ethnic perceptions. In Wusasa, this similar scenario of discrimination and segregation of ethnic groups is playing out among brethren and it is unhealthy for church growth and Christian witnessing and relationship. This paper seeks to evaluate the passage's principles in the light of inter-ethnic relations and conflict resolution and how it will help in resolving the current feud in Wusasa community. The study employed primordialist account of the theories of causes as propounded by Clifford Geertz as its basis for analysis. Secondary sources were used for this research. The research adopts descriptive analysis as its framework. The research revealed that peaceful co-existence mechanisms are needed in the church in Wusasa for a peaceful coexistence in the church as a necessary virtue for development and progress. The research concludes by calling on the present church leadership to emulate the method used by the early apostles in settling such conflicts to foster united community in a cultural diversified society like Wusasa. The study recommends power sharing mechanism to avert future occurrence of this ugly trend.

Keywords: Wusasa, Ethnic Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Church, Diversity

Introduction

Conflict among diverse groups is a recurring theme in both biblical and contemporary history. In a multi-ethnic communities conflict is a reoccurring phenomenon. Many communities are often get involved in conflict over different issues that torch their values. Like in Wusasa in Kaduna State, tensions has arisen due to inter-ethnic differences in the church. Many ethnic groups are agitating for justice in the distributions of church positions that they felt it was not equitably distributed. The early Church's handling of a similar ethnic grievance in Acts 6:1–7 offers a valuable case study in leadership, inclusion, and peace-building. The Church at birth was a multi-ethnic organic structure (Acts 6:1). The Greeks and Hebrews co-existed in the Church. Still, the Greeks were neglected based on partiality and tribalism, which subsequently brought about

complaints and murmuring. This led the apostles to put in place an administrative structure to douse tension and ensure equity, fairness and justice in the daily distribution of food to the widows in the church (Acts 6:5). This misunderstanding dovetailed into the appointment of seven (7) deacons for this purpose. It has been the wish of Jesus Christ that we all may be one (John 17:11). Therefore, God's intention for the Church is that we should see ourselves as one irrespective of ethnic or cultural background.

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interactions, often arising due to differences in culture, traditions, ethnicity, and religious beliefs (Lebaron and Bruce, 1993). The early church also experienced challenges related to diversity, as seen in Acts 6:1-7, where tensions emerged between Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews regarding the daily distribution of food (Jatau, 2023). This passage serves as a foundational for understanding inter-ethnic relations and conflict resolution within Christian communities. In Wusasa, Kaduna State, inter-ethnic conflicts have affected the church, necessitating a biblical approach to fostering unity and peace (Jatau, P.D 2023). This paper evaluates this passage and draws implications for modern inter-ethnic conflict resolution in Christian communities in Wusasa.

Theories of Cause

Theory of causes is a conceptual framework that explains how and why events occur, identifying the relationship between a cause and an effect (Cambridge Dictionary, June 30, October 2024). Different disciplines have developed various theories of causation to understand phenomena in philosophy, science, psychology, and business (Thomton, 2006).

Some argued that rebel movements are more likely to organize around ethnicity because ethnic groups are more apt to be aggrieved, better able to mobilize, and more likely to face difficult bargaining challenges compared to other groups (Denny, 2014). The causes of ethnic/inter-tribal conflict are debated by political scientists and sociologists. Official academic explanations generally fall into one of three schools of thought: primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist (Kaufman, 2001). More recent scholarship draws on all three schools.

Primordialist View: Geertz (1963), a founding scholar of primordialism, posits that tribal groups and nationalities exist because they are rooted in traditions of belief and action centered on primordial objects, such as biological features and, especially, territorial location. This account relies strongly on ties of kinship among members of ethnic groups. Donald L. Horowitz argues that this kinship makes it possible for tribal groups to think in terms of family resemblances.

Geertz C (1963 asserts that each person has a natural connection to perceived kinsmen. In time and through repeated conflict, essential ties to one's ethnicity will coalesce and will interfere with ties to civil society. Tribal groups will consequently always threaten the survival of civil governments, but not the existence of nations formed by one ethnic group. Thus, when considered through a primordial lens, tribal conflict in a multi-ethnic society is inevitable. Several political scientists argue that the root causes of ethnic conflict do not involve ethnicity per se but rather institutional, political, and economic factors. These scholars argue that the concept of ethnic war is misleading because it leads to an essentialist conclusion that certain groups are doomed to fight each other when, the wars between them that occur are often the result of political decisions (Lebaron and Bruce 1993). This research use this view in its analysis as it best suit the research.

Church and Inter-Ethnic Conflict

The church, as both physical and spiritual entity, is expected to be a place of unity, however historical and contemporary realities show that ethnic divisions often infiltrate Christian communities (Gibaut 2014). Wusasa, a historically significant Christian settlement in northern Nigeria, has experienced inter-ethnic tensions among different ethnic groups, particularly between indigenous groups and settlers (Okpanachi, 2012). These tensions often stem from historical grievances, socio-political dynamics, and economic disparities (Okpanachi, 2012). The church, like

that of Acts 6:1-7, is called to address such disputes in a manner that upholds justice and promotes peace.

Boubakar (2015) avers that ethnic and racial identities are challenges not only to society in general, but the Christian Church in particular. As Omosor and Omosomuofa (2020) noted, the essence of religion is not just to relate with God but to promote harmonious human relations, for religion without humanity is a disaster. He opines that as bearers of cultural differences, ethnic and racial differences are often seen as a difficulty to overcome rather than a gift from God to be treasured. Barreto (2011) notes that ethnic and racial differences are not the problem, prejudice and racism inject differences within the sinful notion that our difference leads to superiority and inferiority complex. This distorted belief that our differences are merely cultural cues for determining who is in and who is out, rather than emblems of God's gift of diversity.

The Nigerian Nation as constituted today has never been a homogeneous country. It is made up of different ethnic groups the major tribes being Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. All these ethnic groups are yet to find any genuine platform for true unity. It has always been cat and rat game, one tribe trying to outwit the other in sharing the national cake and patrimony. This worldly scenario has crept into the Church such that insistence upon relating with other tribes within the Church is largely resisted by some people. It is important to note that society demands associations, whether in the church or the society. It is against this background that Omosor (2020) pointed out that the erosion of African values, including the core principle of brotherhood, is one of the factors militating against social stability and development in Nigeria.

Exposition of Acts 6:1–7

Acts 6:1–7 describes a moment of tension in the early Church, where Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews complained that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food, in contrast to the Hebraic (Aramaic-speaking) Jews. The apostles responded by appointing seven men full of the Spirit and wisdom to oversee the equitable distribution of the food (Acts 6:3, NIV). This administrative solution not only resolved the ethnic tension but also led to greater growth and unity in the Church (v.7).

This passage demonstrates several principles: Recognition of grievances without denial or deflection. Inclusive leadership, as they appointed leaders all had Greek names—likely from the aggrieved group (Keener, 2012). Delegated authority, where spiritual and practical responsibilities were shared (Marshall, 2007). Peace through justice, resulting in restored trust and communal growth.

Inter-Ethnic Relations in Wusasa, Kaduna State

Wusasa is a historically Christian enclave in Kaduna State, known for its early missionary activities and the establishment of churches and mission schools (Gaiya, 2004). However, the broader region has been affected by inter-ethnic tensions, particularly between indigenous groups such as the Hausa, Fulani, Gwari, and Southern Kaduna tribes. These tensions manifest in disputes over land, political representation, religious differences, and socio-economic inequalities.

Within this church, tribalism had hindered unity. Lack of equal representation in leadership, appointments, marriage, and fellowship dynamics had reflected in the ethnic biases, leading to exclusion or silent conflict (Adeniyi, 2015). Thus, a biblical model like that of Acts 6:1-7 is relevant for preventing and addressing inter-ethnic grievances.

Implications of Acts 6:1–7 for Wusasa Christian community

There are several implication of this text for the church in Wusasa which includes:

i). Recognition of Group specific needs

The apostles' willingness to listen to the complaints of the Hellenists suggests that contemporary churches in Wusasa should be intentional about acknowledging the unique concerns of different ethnic groups. Ignoring or spiritualizing grievances without engagement them may lead to deeper discontent and may affect the overall interest of the community.

ii). Inclusive Leadership Appointments: The selection of leaders from among the marginalized group in Acts 6 implies that representation matters. Churches in Wusasa should strive for ethnic balance in leadership to reflect the diversity of the body of Christ and ensure that no group feels sidelined or cheated.

iii). Delegation of responsibility and shared power: The apostles modeled servant leadership by empowering others to solve practical problems is worthy of emulation. Similarly, churches and community groups should delegate authority to trusted members across ethnic lines to foster ownership and shared responsibility. iv). Conflict as a Catalyst for Growth: The passage ends with the Church growing in number and strength (Acts 6:7), showing that effective conflict resolution can lead to deeper unity. This suggests that the crises in Wusasa can be opportunities for reconciliation and spiritual revival if handled wisely.

The Effects of Inter-Ethnic Conflict on the Church in Wusasa

Inter-Ethnic conflicts in Wusasa have had profound effects on the church, manifesting in various ways. The unity of the body of Christ is threatened as ethnic identities have taken over spiritual fellowship. The Church that should serve as beacons of hope and reconciliation has now become arenas of division. Congregations have aligned with their ethnic groups, which is leading to factionalism and is weakening the collective mission of the church.

These crises have created unhealthy competition among members, which sometimes snowballs into physical combat in the case where the unflavored is not a mature Christian. These crises are arisen by giving preferential treatments to others based on ethnic affiliation. This situation has pushed victims to leave the Church and find succor elsewhere, where he/she could find acceptance and be accommodated. The occurrence of ethnicity in the Church is hinged essentially on the lack of Christ-kind of love that bears all things and forgives all things.

Practical Steps for Conflict Resolution in Wusasa

In order to handle the crises in the Wusasa church, we suggest the following steps: There should be ethnic dialogue forums: Churches can host regular inter-ethnic fellowship to promote understanding and address grievances in safe spaces.

There should be leadership rotations: We encourage structures where leadership rotates or includes representation from major ethnic groups in the church.

Biblical Education on Unity: The church should organize sermons and bible studies focusing on scriptures that emphasize unity in diversity in Christ over ethnic identity that emphasizes disunity (Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:14-18).

Community-Based Peace-building: the church should partner with local organizations that are involved in conflict management to resolve inter communal conflicts and promote social justice beyond church walls in Wusasa.

There should be support systems for minorities: The church should create welfare programmes targeted at underrepresented and economically disadvantaged tribal groups within the church community.

Inclusiveness in decision making process: quite apt is the recommendation of Omosor and Erutere (2025) that communities, organisations and groups should avert crisis by adopting an inclusive approach to administration and management of the affairs of the people. This is especially in settings where there are minorities and the less privileged who might complain of marginalisation.

Socio-Cultural Effects of Inter-Ethnic Conflict on the Church

Individuals are cognizant of their cultural identity, aware of the groups to which they belong, their perceptions, inclinations, and behavior can change dramatically if they notice you are from the other ethnic group. They become more inclined to embrace the beliefs and demonstrate the values that characterize their group. They become more likely to perceive individuals who belong to other groups as demonstrating qualities that typify members of this collectivity. They perceive a collectivity as thrifty, for example, they become inclined to interpret the behavior of a specific

member as miserly rather than generous. Being a group member, his actions are both a reflection of his group membership actions. Therefore, Ellemers et al (2002) notes that an understanding of the individual's actions/behaviors demands a commensurate understanding of his group membership.

From the social identity theory viewpoint, the perceived individual's behavior is patterned by the group's behavior acting on the individual as a significant other. More so, this patterned behavior emanates as a result of the social bond between and among members of the group. This goes further to reinforce the social bond and solidarity amongst the members of the group. This reinforcement consequentially creates a “we-feeling” for the in-group and a “they-feeling” for the out-group members arising from self-categorization. This view has been corroborated by Brewer who in his study of the minimal and maximal group revealed that the only thing necessary to create prejudice and discrimination between groups is a relevant and salient self-categorization or social identity. To him therefore, it is the individual's identification with his in-group that significantly shapes his self-image and the associated behavior pattern which invariably determines his interaction and relationship with other members of the out-group.

Inter-tribal conflict affects the socio-cultural fabric of the church in Wusasa. Ethnic prejudices and stereotypes leads to distrust, making it difficult for members of different tribes to engage in meaningful fellowship. Cultural diversity, which should be an asset to the church, sometimes becomes a source of division. Traditional customs may be prioritized over biblical principles, leading to discrimination in leadership appointments and resource allocation within church structures.

Conclusion

Acts 6:1-7 provides a timeless framework for addressing ethnic grievances through spiritual discernment, inclusive leadership, and practical justice. Wusasa, as a microcosm of Nigeria's ethnic complexity, stands to benefit immensely from this model. The Church in Wusasa must rise as a reconciliatory force, building bridges across ethnic divides, modelling Christ-centered unity, and transforming conflict into opportunities for growth and witness.

Recommendations

The church should provide a biblical framework for conflict resolution that can help resolve this conflict. The apostles addressed the concerns of the Hellenistic Jews by appointing spiritually mature men to oversee the fairs of daily distribution of food. So a similar committee should be put in place to look into the grievances of the other ethnic groups in Wusasa Church as the apostle did. The approach that was used emphasizes fairness, inclusivity, and wisdom in addressing disputes. The church in Wusasa too can find men of integrity to look into this disputed areas and resolve them fairly. If the church in Wusasa can implement these similar strategies by ensuring that leadership is inclusive, fostering dialogue among ethnic groups, and emphasizing biblical principles of unity and love, we think it will bring in fairness and justice and this matter will be a thing of the past.

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