The Church's Mediatory Role in Conflict Resolution in Public Higher Education Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

Conflict has been regarded as one of the critical problems in educational institutions; it is also an essential tool in the development of institutions if well-managed. Despite different images of conflict in other minds, its management is becoming more complex. The current higher institution context is more challenging than the past, range of conflicts and the forums available for the administration is much more far-reaching than ever before; as society is changing so, the university with the crisis. However, the Church's mediatory role is aimed at restoring the dialogue between the parties involved in the institutional conflict, leading to reconciliation, eliminating communication blockage situations and changing the character of relationships emerging from the conflict. This study recommends that the Church become acquitted with the other crisis in the nation's institutions by creating and establishing a relationship with college authorities for intervention. Get authorized to investigate cases that need mediation, call preliminary mediation sessions, and present the rules and benefits of mediation and the Church's role as a mediator. Lastly, it sets up joint mediation sessions allowing representations from each party to express their perspective and feelings about the occurrence, enables the

Church to structure the process for the parties and employs problem-solving techniques to move the parties toward settlement. Encourage members to work out modalities to solve the dispute cooperatively and respectfully and provide opportunities for the parties to clarify their interests, goals and choices to understand the other's perspective better to resolve their conflict.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Higher Education Institution, Church, Mediatory Role.

Introduction

Traditional organizations have been in the front runner of major research on conflict, conflict resolution and management; but in recent times institutions of higher learning are now found in the heart of conflict (Hearn and Anderson, 2002). Differences in goals or plans for the allocation of resources, misinterpretation or inconsistent application of institutional regulations, breaches of formal or informal contracts, power struggles and personal antagonisms are all possible sources of conflict in higher institutions (Folger and Shubert, 1995). Conflict is inescapable due to encouragement of academic freedom and unbridled thinking. Conflict occurs among students, students in opposition to faculty, faculty against faculty, and faculty opposed to administrators; a concept that makes conflict a part of academic life (Holton, 1995). The academic environment consists of different client groups: the teaching faculty, students and administrators operating on a team-based approach to setting policies and executing program changes (Warters, 2000). Their operation makes the potential for conflict increases among these three groups having claims on the ownership of the institutions (Oster, 1995; Berryman-Fink, 1998).

Conflict has been regarded as one of the key problems in the educational institutions, as well as an important tool in the

development of the organization if well-managed (Cetin and Hacifazlioglu, 2004) and despite the different images of conflict in different minds, the management of conflict has become more difficult (Algert and Watson, 2002). According to Volpe and Chandler (1999), conflicts on campus are growing in number, kind, and complexity. The current higher institution context is clearly more challenging than in the past, the range of conflicts and the forums available for their management are much more far reaching than ever before; in fact, as society is changing so the university. However, the church is significant in prevailing over societal crisis as agent of societal change and transformation where the university community belongs. The church is expected to be pro-active in salvaging conflicts emanating from any academic environment as a display of a glimmer of God's imminent reign for reconciliation, peace and newness of life. Therefore, this article seeks to explore the Church's mediatory role in conflict resolution in public higher education institutions.

Higher Educational System in Nigeria

Education is widely accepted as a major instrument for promoting socio-economic, political and cultural development in Nigeria. Higher institutions educate future leaders and develop the high-level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development (Odekunle, 2001). Besides, the main purpose and relevance of higher education in Nigeria is the provision of much needed workforce to accelerate the socio-economic development of the nation. Such specialized education at the higher level is regarded as an instrument of social change and economic development (Ibukun 1997) The role education generally and more especially higher education plays in facilitating the growth and development of a country's economy is significant (Ajayi & Ekundayo. 2008). The National Policy on Education (2014) highlighted the goal of Higher education as follows:

- Contribute to national development through high level relevant human resources training.
- Development and inculcation of proper values for the survival of individuals and society.
- Developing intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate the local and external environment.
- Acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills to enable individuals to be self reliable and useful member of the society.
- Promotion and encouragement scholarship and community service.
- Forging and cementing the national unity.
- Promoting national and international understanding and interaction (FRN, 2014 p.2).

Conflicts and Resolution in Public Higher Education Institutions

Conflict is an inevitable friction in any organization and conflict in higher education institutions is inescapable. Conflict exists at every level of our academic world and while conflict can be negative, it also cause deep rifts in the framework of the institution, it can be used as a tool to take the institution and the people in it from stagnation to a new level of effectiveness, nevertheless what makes the difference is conflict management (Holton, 1998). Conflicts will always occur but a well managed conflict will not degenerate to violence. Every conflict in tertiary institutions degenerated because their causes were not properly managed or that the conflicting parties did not explore the power of communication and conflict manager's personality in resolving the crises (Agbonna; Yusuf & Onifade, 2009). An understanding of conflict from the academic community, exploration of the power of communication and its conflict managers' personality in resolving educational crisis from a socio-religious perspective could be an input into its reduction.

Concept of Conflict

Conflict is a dysfunctional, destructive, and the same time a catalyst for change, creativity and production (Posigha & Oghuvwu, 2009). Conflict results from human interaction in the context of incompatible ends and where one's ability to satisfy needs or limitations depends on the choices, decisions and behaviour of others. It is the result of interaction among people, an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions and an expression of the basic fact of human interdependence (Adejuwon&Okewale, 2009). Wilmost and Hocket (1998) assert that conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceived incompatible goals, scarce resource, and interference from other in achieving their goals. In other words, conflicts bring both danger and opportunity to both parties that are involved, conflict can be destructive and constructive.

Conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties who perceive that they have incompatible concerns. Individuals, groups, departments, institutions, or organizations do experience conflicts whenever an action by one party is perceived as preventing or interfering with the goals, needs or actions of another (Bloisi 2007). Conflict can be described as a disagreement among groups or individuals characterized by antagonism and hostility. This is usually caused by the opposition of one party to another, in an attempt to reach an objective different from that of the other party. The elements involved in the conflict have varied set of principles and values, thus allowing such a conflict to arise. (Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, 2013).

Conflict has also been described as disagreement on the procedure of distributing power and resources in an organization. Basically, conflict is what occurs when two or more parties have divergent interests over distribution of resources and issues touching on their development. It is what can come up in the event of staff and student's interactions. It

can emanate from school administrative cadre among students, or sometimes it can come up between school and its host community. It connotes a disagreement over social issues, beliefs and ideologies (Horowitz And Borden 1995).

Transformative Theory

The transformative theory of conflict describes a unique approach to conflict intervention that was first enunciated by two scholars (Bush and Folger, 1994). It is also known as transformative mediation; the transformative theory of conflict takes a social and communicative view of human conflict by getting beyond individual problem solving and sees as its primary goal the need to develop personal empowerment and empathy for others (Milner, 1996). Two explanations for transformative mediation are empowerment and recognition (Folger and Baruch Bush, 1996). The reason is that the transformative mediation method does not seek resolution of the immediate problem but instead seeks the enablement and communal recognition of the parties involved (Folger, 2018). In a researcher's words, parties are empowered in mediation when they see what matters to them, why and when they recognize that what matter is essential (Milner, 1996).

This theory is in contrast to problem-solving mediation. The aim of problem-solving mediation is to resolve specific disputes between parties and devise a mutually acceptable solution to the immediate, short-term problem. The mediator typically plays a very active role in guiding the process (Spangler, 2013). Although both approaches use a third party to help the conflicting parties to deal with the conflict in a new way, there are many dissimilarities between transformative and problem-solving mediation.

In a follow-up article, two scholars gave a list of 10 marks of transformative mediation that differentiate its practice from other forms of third-party mediation processes (Folger and

Baruch Bush, 1996). In the words of these scholars, the transformative mediator (or mediators) will:

1. In the opening statement, explain the mediator's role and the objectives of mediation as being focused on empowerment and recognition.

2. Leave responsibility for the outcomes to the parties.

3. Not be judgmental about the parties' views and decisions.

4. Take an optimistic view of the parties' competence and motives.

5. Allow and be responsive to parties' expression of emotions.

6. Allow for and explore parties' uncertainty.

7. Remain focused on what is currently happening in the mediation setting.

8. Be responsive to parties' statements about past events.

9. Realize that conflict can be a long-term process and that mediation is one intervention in a more extended sequence of conflict interactions.

10. Feel and express a sense of success when empowerment and recognition occur, even in small degrees. They do not see a lack of settlement as a failure (Folger and Baruch Bush, 1996).

These scholars later opined that "the most vital feature of the entire body of work on transformative mediation is its

consistent and intensive effort to link sound theory with beneficial practice (Folger and Baruch Bush, 2014).

Conflict in the context of the Public Higher Education Institutions System

The Higher institutions community experiences countless conflict situations which impact on the education system with resultant effect on sustainable development of the nation. Without alternative methods, the conflict situations can contribute to a highly adversarial environment. Conflicts have made management of educational institutions in Nigeria to be the spotlight throughout the country. Educational institutions' conflicts in Nigeria are a phenomenon of great concern. Incidence and severity of institutional conflict has and continues to destroy the primary environmental conditions required to provide suitable environment for developing human resources for Nigeria. The chaotic situation has undermined many programmes aimed at enhancing the impartation of knowledge and skills in the future human resources for the country, aiming at achieving the sustainable developmental goal (Olugbile, 2005).

Nigerian higher institutions are confronted with several conflicts. The conflicts are highlighted within the context of lack of a sound strategic plan, poor leadership, ineffective teaching and learning, poor researching activities, problems of inadequate infrastructure facilities, inadequate funding, poor international outlook (staff, students, research), the poor reputation of Higher institution, academic corruption and fraud, low global ranking, lack of modern laboratories. Moreover, disputes over university reorganization, faculty performance, multimillion dollar grants, intellectual property, affirmative action, freedom of information, all are embodied into the conflicts within the Nigerian educational system (Fatile and Adejuwon 2011).

The Church in the context of Conflict

The Church in God's purposes for the world, as reviewed in much of the available research on congregational and societal Conflict, is convincing that the Church is significant in God's purposes for the world. That Church conducts is a crucial feature of its existence (Mckay, 2008). Therefore, the Church needs to pay close attention to what makes the Church because the work of spreading the faith is intimately bound up with how the church functions. There is a great deal on relationships within the Church and relatively little on preaching the gospel, indicating that it is being preached through how the Church lives its everyday life. Invariably, the view is that the Church is God's primary mission agent and not simply as somewhere to take the person seeking faith, but as the supreme means by which God has established that the gospel should be demonstrated in human life and human community(Warren, 1995). This represents a high view of the Church and a challenging one for the Church in our contemporary society. It emphasizes the importance of the Church's corporate life: It is the Church's business to change the world, not only by changing individuals but also by being a different kind of human community (Yoder, 1969).

Further, it offers a specific challenge of how to handle conflict in relationships and functioning within and outside the Church:

> Despite the forces at work which seem to marginalize the Church, a great new opportunity to speak the good news of Christ into our culture, by the way, we live that truth in the local Church's life, becomes evidence. Hunger in our society makes the life of the Church, at least potentially and of great significance. There is a great hunger for relationships today; there is also a great hunger for a demonstration today. People want to see whether it works. The Church is the

> pilot project of the new humanity established by Christ, an outpost of the kingdom of God and the 'community of the Age to Come.' Not least is, the world looking for models of handling conflict. A church where there is no conflict has little relevance to our society. A church that has found a way to handle Conflict creatively will be good news to all around it and the community. Conflicts in the Church can seem such a distraction from getting on with the actual work, but this is the real work. When people come near such a community, they will instinctively know how real the relationships are (Warren, 1995:15-18).

This view of the missional nature of the Church's corporate relational witness affirms that the Church can be a credible sacrament of salvation for the world as it displays humanity as a glimmer of God's imminent reign – a kingdom of reconciliation, peace and new life (Bosch, 1991). At the same time, it is essential to ground this realistic view of the Church's limitations and sinfulness. The Church should not only fight against the power of sin in the fallen world but against it amid the ecclesial body and the society as an unavoidable aspect of the Church in its pilgrim state (Healy, 2000). Handling conflict in the Church should be a healthy and transformative model, not rooted in fear and avoidance.

Church Mediatory role in Public Higher Education Institutions Conflict

To explore the possibility of the church mediatory role in conflict resolution, a theology of mediation will be examined. The theology of mediation will assist in providing a theological framework for conflict resolution for the church because mediation and conflict resolution both refer to the attempt to resolve a clash between two or more apparently irreconcilable

interests, and is most often used in other disciplines such as management, sociology and politics.

Theology of Mediation

To explore the possibility of the church mediatory role in conflict resolution, a theology of mediation will be examined. The theology of mediation will assist in providing a theological framework for conflict resolution for the church because mediation and conflict resolution both refer to the attempt to resolve a clash between two or more apparently irreconcilable interests, and is most often used in other disciplines such as management, sociology and politics (Şuştac,2013). The Christian theology of mediation has its source in the mediation between God and humanity through the person of Jesus Christ the Mediator. An analysis of Jesus Christ's role as Mediator therefore provides the foundation for a theology of mediation and elucidates the relation between mediation and conflict resolution in theological terms. The traditional story of Genesis places the responsibility for sin on the first persons, Adam and Eve who by their own free choice acted out of self-centered interest and alienated themselves from God and from each other. The fall corrupted human nature to the extent that all later generations of humankind are depraved or, as Paul says are under the power of sin (Romans 3: 10).

As a result of the fall, people live in separation from God and therefore are often in destructive relationships with one another. It was noted that the conflict which resulted from the fall is a condition of alienation that was a consequence of sin. In other words, the argument was that conflict itself was not the problem. It was the sin of humankind that caused the conflict. Alternatively it was a provocative decision on the part of human beings who failed to deal constructively with the conflict between themselves and God. The risk of creation placed humankind in a condition in which sin was possible. Furthermore the fact that we are not God places limitations upon us so that we can do nothing to overcome the alienation

caused by sin (Cormick, 1977).We find ourselves in a helpless situation. We are estranged from ourselves, our fellow human beings from the earth and from the source of our life, God, and there is nothing that we can do to overcome the estrangement. Therefore the alienation of God and humankind requires mediation.

> Two significant events constitute Jesus Christ as the Mediator in the alienation between God and humankind. First, the incarnation event that reveals Jesus Christ as the Divine-Human revelation of God. Christ wholly identifies himself with God's cause but also identified himself completely with humankind. He gave himself so unceasingly to humankind as really to feel the whole misery of humanity (Brunner, 1946). Jesus Christ is the Mediator, then, in the first instance because of who he is: the Divine-Human revelation of God. It is due to his nature, therefore, that he constitutes the mediation between the Creator and the fallen world.

The second event that constitutes Him as the Mediator in the alienation between God and humankind is his work of reconciliation. The event of the Cross is the focal action in which Jesus Christ mediates the encounter between God and humankind. Of course we must not separate the Person of the Mediator, Jesus Christ, from the work of the Mediator. Jesus is the Mediator on account of his work, and also because of who he is in himself. He is the Mediator because in him the eternal Word is present, and because in him the eternal light enters our world, and also because in him the eternal purpose of God is made known. The Incarnation and the Cross form an indissoluble unity in the mediation of Jesus Christ (Torrance, 1975).

Mediatory role in Public Higher Education Institutions Conflict

Mediation is a process based on communication between the conflicting parties, which is part of the collaborative strategy for resolving a conflict and which can result in both parties winning when the mediation process ends by reaching a mutually beneficial agreement (win-win). This strategy of approaching a conflict is specific to the mediation process, mostly acquired by all practitioners in mediation, including the church as a form of conflict management, which could adapted to resolving conflict in public higher education institutions (Lempereur, et al., 2011). Mediation is a progressively more significant aspect of organizational integrated conflict management systems. Considered to be effective in conflicts involving strong emotions, it is increasingly popular as a means to resolve discrimination and harassment complaints. Mediation also helps in resolving the relational and emotional aspects of intractable conflict found in psychological injury claims (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000).

Mediation is the most frequently employed method by the church because of its satisfactory outcome which makes the experience as collaborative and least traumatic as possible (Bingham, 2004). However, Kidder (2007) presents the features of mediation process either in legal context or in other conflict situations such as peer mediation (McWilliam, 2010) and workplace or institutional conflict resolution (Bingham, 2012) as follows:

Participation: Participants are allowed to actively involved in the interaction, dialogue and decision making process. Participation sometimes reveals the simple misunderstandings at the heart of a dispute.

Representation and Reparation: Each party is allowed representation to express their perspective and feelings

occurrence. Each is allowed to tender apology-one of the most powerful forms of reparation is an apology.

Validation and Reintegration: Every member in the parties is encouraged to work and solve the dispute in a cooperative and respectful way. In restorative justice, balance is achieved through forgiveness as the parties are reintegrated back into the original community (Kidder, 2007). In general there are three kinds of mediation that will enable the mediator strengthen the parties to be clearer about their objectives, and undertake actions intended to make their own and well-thought decisions, they are as follows:

Evaluative: In evaluation, the mediator offers an expert opinion to assess the legal and substantive merits of a claim and give the parties information about the strengths and weaknesses of their case. The mediator presents the case from the financial, psychological and legal perspectives.

Facilitative: In facilitation, the mediator structures the process for the parties and engages in problem-solving techniques to move the parties toward settlement. It focuses on the parties' approach to settlement with the help of the parties, their ideas and proposed solutions.

Transformative: In transformation, the mediator provides opportunities for parties to clarify their own interests, goals and choices to reach a better understanding or acknowledgement of the other's perspective and to resolve their own conflict. The approach aims at changing the character of relationships emerging from a conflict (Bingham, 2004; Nabatchi, Bingham, & Good, 2007).

Church Mediatory Role Procedure in Conflict

The Church mediatory role aims at restoring the dialogue between the parties involved in the institutional conflict, like an initiated dialogue between the church (mediator) and each party, either during the joint mediation meeting or also at the

mediator's separate meetings with the parties involved, which may have the effect of negotiating an amicable solution, which will implicitly lead to the realization of the communication between the parties, by generating the agreement that will be signed and adopted by them. The church will set up a dialogue as an essential premise of mediation, leading the parties to reconciliation, thus eliminating communication blockage situations (Dorin & Dorin, 2018).

Mediation makes it possible for the church to constructively approach and effectively manages a conflict, and treats each problem as one that can be solved. Irrespective of the type of mediation, there is a procedure in effect in each of them. Mediation proceedings are of a step-by-step character and the following stages can be distinguished in the mediatory procedural roles of the church (Hațegan, 2020)

I. The church should become acquitted with the issue at hand: The church sometimes seems to be ignorance of cases or conflicts in some of the nation's higher institutions, possibly for lack of relationship. The church should be abreast with information and be concerned with conflicting issues in the nation campuses through the campus fellowships. Search into issues that need mediations, create and establish relationship with university authority for intervention.

II. With the permission of the school authority, the church should investigate into cases that need mediation and undergo evaluation to verify the factors that would exclude the possibility of mediation. The church as a mediator offers expert opinion to assess the legal and substantive merits of the claims and give the conflicting parties in the institutions information about the strengths and weaknesses of their case. The case is presented from all perspectives including spiritual (Loghin, 2016).

III. The church calls a preliminary mediation session and gives a monologue to present the rules, and benefits of mediation as well as the church's role as a mediator. This interaction involves the active participation of all the parties concerned in decision making process, creating an opportunity for the parties to present both their needs and expectations and eventually set the date for the joint mediation session. The mediator comes up with a steering towards the future that point to the best solution to solve the conflict that would be beneficial for both parties (Stoica,2014).

IV. The church sets up a joint mediation session: After recalling the rules of mediation and the role to be played by the mediator, and after setting the time frame, as well as defining the subject of mediation;

a. The church will allow representations from each party to express their perspective and feelings about the occurrence, seeking satisfying solutions with the mediator's participation and sometimes tender apology where needed.

b. The church will structure the process for the parties and employs problem-solving techniques to move the parties toward settlement. The church then focuses on the parties' approach to settlement in collaboration with parties' ideas and proposes solutions.

c. The church will encourage every member in the parties to work out modalities to solve the dispute in a cooperative and respectful way. During this meeting, the mediator insists on the right of each party to speak, present their view point, and be treated with respect. The church ensures restoration and stability among the parties through

forgiveness to reintegrate all back into the original community.

d. The church will provide opportunities for the parties to clarify their own interests, goals and choices to reach a better understanding or acknowledgement of the other's perspective to resolve their own conflict. The church aims at changing the character of relationships emerging from the conflict (Blohorn-Brenneur, 2014).

Conclusion

The Church mediatory role aims at restoring the dialogue between the parties involved in institutional conflict, leading the parties to reconciliation, thus eliminating communication blockage situations and changing the character of relationships emerging from the conflict. This paper discussed the purpose for the establishment of higher education institutions, concept of conflict in institutions and meditational procedure through the transformative theory. The article discussed God's purpose through the church in the context of conflict, the mediatory role through the theology of mediation, presenting the features and kinds of mediation. However, it is the opinion of this paper that if the church will become acquitted with different crisis in the nation institutions by creating and establishing relationship with university authority for intervention. Obtain permission from the school authority to investigate into cases that need mediation, call preliminary mediation session to present the rules, and benefits of mediation as well as the church's role as a mediator. Lastly, sets up a joint mediation session that will allow representations from each party to express their perspective and feelings about the occurrence, allows the church structure the process for the parties and employs problem-solving techniques to move the parties toward settlement. Encourage every member in the parties to work

out modalities to solve the dispute in a cooperative and respectful way, and provides opportunities for the parties to clarify their interests, goals and choices to reach a better understanding of the other's perspective to resolve their own conflict. Issues of conflicts in the nation's public higher education would be minimized.

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