Christian Faith and Doctrine: A Tool for Sustaining Peace in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *Nigeria is a nation of three major religious groups that has different faith dynamism and practices. The history of Nigeria as a country will not be complete without a research on the issues currently threatening the peace of the nation. More so, over the years, the issue of the diversity in the ethnic groups and tribes has contributed to the division among Nigerians and has done more harm than good in fostering peace and unity in the country (Nweke 2018). Religious and ethnic sentiment has also contributed negatively to the growth and developmental sustainability of Nigerians a whole. What is Christian faith and doctrine? What constitutes the Christian doctrine? What are the teachings and values expected of a Christian in order to bring peace to the country? What role can Christian faith, teachings and practices play in the sustainability of peace in Nigeria? This paper provides succinct answers to these questions. The paper adopted a descriptive and analytical research approach. The research revealed that Christianity just like the other two religions in Nigeria is an advocate of peace and they it also creates a sense of dependence and oneness among human beings (Churchill & Michael 2023). The paper concludes that Christianity is an indispensable tool in sustaining peace in Nigeria since it comes with teachings and practices worth emulating. This paper recommends that people should be sensitized about the importance of sustaining peace in Nigeria. However, the effective teaching of religious studies and uplifting of moral and spiritual values by the religious leaders will go a long way to bring about peace in Nigeria.*

Keywords: christian faith, doctrine, tool, peace, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable part of human life and it occurs when there are diverse views, opinions, expressions and scarce resources within groups, institutions or religious organizations. In the last three decades, Nigeria has been associated with religious violence and most importantly from two of the three major religions in the country, Christianity and Islam. These issues stems from terrorism to sporadic killings, kidnapping and herdsmen invasion. Despite the fact that religion is

one of the major causes of dispute, we can say that Christian faith and doctrine can restore balance and the peace needed in the country. Religion is present in all the aspect of the Nigerian society and its one of the key variables in choosing the leaders of the country. This research aims at exploring the connection between faith and doctrine and its impact on the sustainability of peace in Nigeria.

The Basic Concept of Christian Faith

Christianity began in the 1st century after the birth of Jesus as a Judaic sect with Hellenistic influence in the Roman province of Judea. Jesus instructed the disciples that he will send the Holy Spirit to them and they should go into the world to propagate the gospel and spread their faith around the Eastern Mediterranean area, despite serious persecution. The faith of Christian religion is based on the teachings of Jesus and that of Paul. Christianity came to Nigeria in the 15th century and the church was established in 1842 in Badagry by Henry Townsend. Some Catholic missionaries came into Benin in 1515 and started their missionary activities. The religious ruler and his chiefs were the first to be converted to Christianity, although the aim of the missionaries was to convert the people via education (History of Christianity in Nigeria. School software.com). .

The second missionary journey was to Badagry and it was marked by the advent of English speaking missions in Badagry. In recent times, so many changes have taken place when it comes to Christianity and this is due to the fact that Pentecostalism has introduced what we call the new generation churches. These churches have been growing in size and they are characterized by strong prayer styles. The Christian faith centers on beliefs regarding the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While it started with a small group of adherents, many historians regard the spread and adoption of Christianity throughout the world as one of the most successful spiritual missions in human history. According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, faith has multiple definitions, including "something that is believed, especially with strong conviction," "complete trust", belief and trust in and loyalty to God, as well as a firm belief in something for which there is no proof. Faith is the foundation of Christian worldview, the actions that is recognized as faith gives Christians all over the world a connection and understanding of what the future holds. Faith is a significant aspect of a Christian life and they belief in various aspects of realities and human conditions which found its basis in the bible. There are several core beliefs that define Christianity by setting it apart from all other religions. The bible teaches that despite the sinful nature of man, God loves his creation regardless and he longs for a restoration of relationship within man. Christian faith is a framework of beliefs and guidance for life that addresses most of the situations that man encounters in the course of journeying through life. Apostle Paul taught the Christians to live a life worthy of emulation just like Christ did, as it would help to strengthen their faith.

The Concept of Christian Doctrine

The word 'doctrine' is used more often than not in contemporary theological discourse to replace 'dogma' In Greek, the word "dogma" is a derivation of *dokein* meaning "it seems" . Dogma in its theological usage is therefore defined as a body of statements accepted by the Christian church. Doctrine has been used to replace dogma and it describes a body of acceptable teachings of the bible. Therefore, doctrines are strictly summary of biblical teachings. Doctrines are also true set of beliefs which defines the border of true Christian faith and by then Christians are able to distinguish between true doctrine and false doctrine (Okeke 2006). Christian doctrine tells us the truth about God, ourselves, and our world. Doctrine means teaching or instruction. Christian doctrine is what the church believes and teaches.. Christian doctrine may be defined as the fundamental truths of the Bible arranged in systematic form.

What does it mean for a Christian to hold a doctrine? After all, many Christians seem to be people who hold on to their doctrine. Some doctrines seem more foundational, more widely held, such as the doctrine of the Trinity or the doctrine of sin. Others, though, seem more particular, perhaps observed by one denomination but not another, such as the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception or the doctrine of double predestination. Holding a doctrine for Christians simply means adhering to the teachings of the said religion. Why do we need Christian doctrine? Doctrines are needed to set parameters for every system, be it philosophical, sociological, ethical, psychological, economical and religious. It is the set of doctrines that states what it is that is to be known and believed. More so, it is through doctrines that a distinction can be made between what is true of a belief system and what is false about a belief system. Doctrine, carries a bold conviction of its own, that God has decided to teach His creation about who He is and about whom we are in relationship to Him (Thomas Alexander 2014). He teaches us in the writings of Holy Scripture. He teaches us in a burning bush and in the prophetic voice. He teaches us in His Own Self, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Church's task to meet Him in His teaching, therefore, is a humbling one.

The biblical creed and doctrine in which core religious beliefs are founded originates from the message from the scripture, which is rooted in the significance of the life of Jesus Christ. In the scriptures, doctrine refers to the entire body of essential theological truths that define and describe the message of Jesus Christ's core beliefs. For instance, the word of God declares, "Those who accept Jesus Christ will live for eternity with him after they die"(John 11:25, 26; 2 Corinthians 5:6). Further clarification of the word states, "Christians will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns" (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17), and lastly, "God will create a new heaven and a new earth" (2Peter 3:13). Christianity is a religion that provides adherents with the ability to fulfill their relationship with God every day. However not all Christians exercise this covenantal relationship the same way. Different denominations express their beliefs in different manners. Some of these beliefs include Revelation, Salvation, the Trinity, and the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. It is through biblical, ethical

teachings and the practice of baptism that adherents are able to connect to God and attain a healthy relationship with God and their fellow man.

Doctrine underlies and, indeed, explains the practice of Christian faith. There is, in fact, no Christian ethic without a foundation of Christian doctrine. The daily practice of this faith is the daily living out of its doctrine. Christianity was nothing if it was not about knowing, believing, living, and preaching apostolic doctrine. There was no such thing, then, as undoctrinal Christianity, or practices unfounded in doctrine. This teaching, this doctrine, is an enduring body of truth to which the church is always bound. It is "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Faith in its truth content cannot be individualized. Christian belief cannot mean one thing to one person and something different to another. It is not different from one age to the next, nor is it different from one culture to another."

We can therefore agree that faith is the foundation on which Christian doctrine is built and this gave birth to most of the teachings and ethical principles that guides the actions of Christians in Nigeria today.

Peace Building in Nigeria
Peace building is the development and growth of a nation that aims and centers around resolving conflicts and injustice in a non-violent way. Peace building efforts aim to manage, mitigate, resolve and transform central aspects of the conflict through official diplomacy; as well as through civil society peace processes and informal dialogue, negotiation, and mediation. Conflict breakout regularly in Nigeria and it ranges from land disputes, religious conflict to terrorism. More often than not, these conflicts are blown out of proportion and the end result leaves the victims a total wreck. The word peace itself is synonymous with tranquility, calm and quiet which is much needed in Nigeria in order for her citizens to make progress. Despite all the terror and violence witnessed by people, the aim is to achieve peace and harmony. The hope for tomorrow is the will and strong force that drives Nigerians. Peace building promotes peaceful coexistence, conflict management, poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods and food security.

Poverty and underdevelopment are commonly known to exacerbate violent conflict as a result of vulnerability caused by social vices. The necessity for peace building in the development process developed in Nigeria as a result of the country's ongoing war disorders, which continue to jeopardize development efforts (Chigozie & Ituma, 2015).
In January 2000, Nigerian government founded the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) as a strategic response to the country's conflict and violence problems. Therefore a shift in favor of conflict resolution will enhance peace building in the country. As a consequence, the International Peace Research Institute (IPCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) worked to design a standard framework for peace building efforts and reconcile the numerous detrimental effects of development initiatives on peace and conflict in Nigeria. The

IPCR and UNICEF are hopeful that the framework would help Nigeria achieve a conflict-sensitive, people-driven, and long-term development regime (Strategic Conflict Assessment, 2003; NEEDS, 2004; Remi, 2007).

However, for a nation to be fully developed and be at peace, it must pass through the phases of having to deal with conflicts, terrorism, crime and all other vices that do not give room for peaceful coexistence. It is paramount that Nigeria adopts a diplomatic method of creating balance and a good relationship between its citizens in order to create a harmonious living.

Principles of Faith and Christian Living
The principles of faith and Christian living centers on the way Christians and the general populace should live and the behaviors they are expected to exhibit as an upright human. Five principles will be discussed and it will be a guide to achieving peace in Nigeria. According to Hans Nikoley, there is the obedience to the principles of the bible, integrity of character, strife for a clear conscience, a humbled and burdened heart,

Obedience to The Principles of the Bible
The world, people, the church, government and religious organizations are all in desperate need of principled living, not to mention principled leadership and the only way to live a principled life is to go back to the word of God. Christians, in particular, should always live an exemplary life when it comes to principled living. So many Christian religious bodies have been preaching the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus but lack the ability to practice it. In order to be able to impact the society and create a peaceful atmosphere, it has become imperative for us to work together and live in obedience to the principles of the word of God just like apostle Paul and Timothy.

Integrity of Character
This is a great need among Christians in Nigeria. It has been said that character is the automatic response of doing the right thing. In the Christian home, this means the husband, wife, and children must be united in doing right. Also the integrity been instilled in the home front is always projected to the society eventually. It is therefore important to do the right thing in order to experience the utmost peace.

Strive to Have a Clear Conscience
"Clear conscience" is that act of judgment of the mind by which we decide between right or wrong by our actions. Apostle Paul is certainly not bragging, nor is he proud of his past; but I must say that he actually thought he was doing God a good service by being a persecutor, though he did it *ignorantly in unbelief*. He obviously did not believe that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah, which caused him to become a product of the beliefs of his teachers and peers. The cause of conflict at times is because of the lack of knowledge of those involved. Just like Paul many people wreak havoc and cause conflict because of their inability to think that their actions have consequences.

Pray for a Humbled and Burdened Heart
With a humbled and burdened heart living a life worthy of emulation that mirrors the society is what we call Christian living. Jesus Christ set an example for Christians and it is certain that peace is guaranteed when people live a humble life.

Develop a Sacrificial Spirit
There are three ways in which we can sacrifice ourselves for others:
- Be willing to tell them of the grace and mercy offered by Christ.
- Be willing to be longsuffering in winning them to Christ.
- Be willing to give of ourselves to the point of suffering for them.

Christian Faith and Doctrine, a Tool for Sustaining Peace
From the perspectives of history and sociology, the Christian community has been related to the world in diverse and even paradoxical ways. The Christian community has always been part of the world in which it exists. It has served the typical religious function of legitimating social systems and values and of creating structures of meaning, plausibility, and compensation for society as it faces loss and death. The Christian community has sometimes exercised this religious function in collusion with tribalism and nationalisms . The Christian body has held to its teachings, however, they can express it more and exhibit these teachings in their day to day lifestyle.

Peace as a term is contested. Colloquially, by governments and in academia itself, peace is often defined negatively as the absence of war and physical violence. This is problematic, not least of which is that peace is often defined differently by different groups in a conflict. In order to define peace in a broader and more positive way, Johan Galtung differentiated between negative and positive peace. Whereas negative peace is the absence of direct violence e.g., people being killed), positive peace also includes the absence of structural violence e.g., dying as a result of poverty, and cultural violence e.g., factors that blind people to injustice or allow them to rationalize it. (Michelle Gawerc 2006). Biblical events reveal cases of conflict and how peace was restored and sustained. The bible elaborated how the need for peace is highly recommended in the scriptures and how it brings about wholeness, soundness and completeness. Peace also means putting a stop to war and working assiduously towards the welfare, safety and happiness of the Nigerian people. In addition, peace has reference to health, prosperity, wellbeing as well as quiet from war (Kuden, 2014).
The concept of peace is predominant in the scriptures, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The teachings of Jesus and the early apostles promoted peace all through their life time. Cosmos consenting to this view remarks that a quick search through the Bible would reveal that the whole business of peace building runs through the Old and New testament teachings coded in concepts such as love, justice, tolerance, integrity, forgiveness compassion, peace treaties, humility or weakness and benevolence. Consequently, from the old testament perspective, the

account of the discourse between Abigail, David and Nabal in 1 Samuel 25; David and Shimei in 2 Samuel 16:5-14; 19:16-23 and the four Good Samaritans in the reign of King Pelah of Israel in 2 Chronicle 28:8-15 are instances of peace building, non-violence and engagement in peace making (Wule, 2020).

Jesus in his sermon on the mount remarks "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:9). The Greek word *eirene* is the most preferred word for peace in the New Testament and it has the equivalent of the Hebrew word Shalom. Peace in the Hebrew translation conveys the idea of everything which makes for a man's highest good and happiness. The sense of the expression "blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall see God" as used by Jesus Christ in the sermon on the mount is that the person who makes peace is involved on the task which God Himself, the author of peace is doing and so the reward is that such persons will become the *huioi* that is sons of God. In other words, the person who makes peace with God, himself and his neighbors is carrying out the divine purpose of God, leaving out the virtue and attribute of God as the God of peace. Thus, such persons stand to be called the sons of God. God is a God of peace and so all who tend to follow Him must leave a life of peace with themselves, their neighbors and God. They must resolve to doing the very act of God always in order to be called His sons (2 Corinthians 13:11; Romans 15:33;

Barclay (2006) affirming this thought asserts that the person who unites men is carrying out the divine plans of God, while the man who divides men and those who ferment troubles in the church, society and within themselves are doing the direct opposite of the will of God. This is to say that Unity brings peace and according to the teachings from the scriptures Christianity is a viable tool for peace building. Note that Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount as expressed in Matthew 5:9 calls on Christians to be keenly involved in making peace among aggressive people. They maintain that the peace being referred to here is not living to attain personal peace and comfort or avoiding any sort of conflict only but living to help resolve conflict and make peace wherever there is hostility within their neighborhood, society, church, and even within oneself. The faith and doctrine been taught right from the Sunday school service till a man is mature in the things of the spirit has shaped the life of some Christians to live up to the standard of upholding peace. Jesus Christ is a perfect example of peace and this is a challenge for every Christian not to encourage violence, because this reflection of Jesus' behavior might be the change the society needs.
The scripture emphasizes the need for peace and to maintain a civil relationship at all times especially among people of every race, religion, sex etc. It further explains that God's children must embrace peace and not associate with things that foster violence.

Christian Teachings Necessary for Sustaining Peace in Nigeria
Forgiveness: This is one peculiar attribute that is expected in every Christian organization and it is a tool that enhances peace building not just among Christians but also in the society at large. The Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus Christ in the New Testament stress the need for

forgiveness (Genesis 45:1-45; Genesis 33:1-18; Matt. 5:7; 5:23-24; Mark. 11:25; Luke 15:11-32 etc). Apart from the stated biblical text, another text of the new testament scriptures which presents the idea and the need for forgiveness especially among people of the book more clearly is "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him, who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either" (Luke 6:27-30, compare Matthew 5:38-41). It is therefore clear that Jesus Christ condemns any form of violence and the Nigerian society should exhibit the ability to forgive.

Servant Leadership: For peace to be sustained in Nigeria, we must have leaders who are humble enough to serve without have a selfish interest. A call to leadership is a call to serve God and humanity selflessly. Thus, leaders at various levels must consistently exhibit servant-leadership tendencies as clearly exposed in the scriptures (John 13:1-16; Mark 10:35-37; Matthew 20:26-28). Servant-leadership here refers to leaders who dedicate themselves to service and meet the needs of the people that they govern (Atere, 2012). In doing this, the citizens hope and aspirations will be met.

Integrity: The word integrity is derived from a Latin Word *Integer* which means wholeness, soundness or completeness. It is a state of being honest, truthful and undivided. This means the exhibition of sincerity at all times. In other words, integrity means doing the right thing at all times and in all circumstances, whether someone is watching or not (Amadi-Nche, 2021). Christians must first be true to themselves in order to be true to their fellow humans. Apostle Paul wrote "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (I Timothy 4:12). Integrity is required by Christians in financial transaction, relationship with the opposite sex, marriage, gospel proclamation, governance, administration etc (1 Timothy 3:1-7). Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount likened Christians as the salt of the earth and the light of the word (Matthew 5:13-14). This biblical text shows that Christians are called to uphold the virtue of integrity at all times and in all places, positively affecting their neighborhood and also eschewing vices such as corruption, double allegiance, bribery, hypocrisy, nepotism, materialism, selfishness, etc which is one of the causes of conflict in the contemporary society and in the Church of God today. Jesus through the sermon on the Mount calls Christians to be a sign of contradiction in a world of darkness and sin; to shine out the light of holiness, love, purity of heart, mercy and peacefulness (Dami, 2021).

Reconciliation: This is another attribute expected to be useful for the sustenance of peace in Nigeria. This word means to re-unite or re-establish a close connection between two or more parties. Restoring failed relationships and connections helps to build peace and eradicate violence. The fundamental scriptural basis for reconciliation is thus stated "for when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6), and in John 3:16 "For God so

loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life".

Equity: The body of Christ as well as every good human being must stand against oppression, victimization and all forms of inequality. Seeing as these vices promotes violence. Privileges should be given to all who deserves it and not to those who don't have a right to it.
Fairness: Jesus Christ is an embodiment of fairness and he never oppresses, marginalize or speak ill of the needy. He cares for the poor, weak, orphans and hungry and those discriminated against thus giving them a sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined Christian faith and doctrine a tool for sustaining peace in Nigeria. This became paramount due to the conflicts and violence that people exhibit which causes disunity among the citizens of Nigeria. This paper elaborated on the meaning of Christian faith and doctrine, and also the principles of Christian living and how the teachings of Jesus Christ can restore peace to Nigeria. Similarly some references were made to some biblical text to give a vivid explanation of how peace can be sustained. Consequently, the paper encourages Christians, Christian organizations and all the Christian body in Nigeria to be alive to the responsibility God has charged them with and instill in their members the principles that can be used to sustain peace in Nigeria. It is hoped that if the teachings in this paper is adhered to, it will bring a lasting peace to the nation.

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