Christian Ethical Principles as a Necessity for Peacebuilding in the Nigerian Society

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Abstract: The history of Nigerian nation is incomplete without a discourse on socio-religious issues threatening the peace of the Nigerian nation. Thus, the Nigerian nation has records of socio-ethnic and religious conflicts, intra and inters religious conflicts caused by violent religious extremists, leadership contest, discrimination etc. The continuous upsurge in these conflicts have claimed several lives and rendered many people homeless. This is in addition to negating socio-economic, religious and infrastructural developments of the nation. Remarkably, indices of intra/inter personal, religious and group conflicts with its negative effects are traceable in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. However, should conflict be permitted between or within Christian religious groups? How can Christian religious conflict be stern to ensure peace in the Nigerian society for sustainable development of the Nigerian spheres? What are the virtues expected by the Christian adherents for sustained peacebuilding in the Nigerian society? This is the thrust of this paper using

New Testament texts as a guide. The paper employs the historical and hermeneutic methods and argues extensively that the virtues such as love, transparency, integrity, justice, obedience to the law and established government, honesty, accountability, servant leadership, dialogue, fairness and equity which form the cardinal Christian ethical values are necessary for peacebuilding in the Nigerian society. The paper maintains that the Nigerian society and religious circle can be peaceful to accommodating all the Christian religious groups if advocates of the Christian religion could imbibe the Christian ethical principles as enumerated above and as enshrined in the Christian Holy book, the Bible.

Keywords: *Christian Ethics, Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Peace, Peacebuilding.*

Introduction

The Nigerian history like most African nations is replete with wars and conflict scenarios which have contributed less to the socio-economic, religious and infrastructural growth of the Nigerian and African nations. While some of the wars and conflicts experienced in Nigeria and some other African nations have been adduced to be politically motivated, others have been adjudged to be ignited by ethnic and religious disharmony between the predominant religions in the African nations. Still others have been evaluated based on discrimination, leadership tussle, divergent theological viewpoints, ideological perceptions, economic stress, deplorable social amenities, and extremism among others. Thus, the ethnic and religious conflict that have claimed many lives in countries such

as Rwanda, Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia, Eritrea, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria etc is a case study (Samuel, 2008). While religious conflict whether between two religious groups such as Hindus and Muslim or within a religious group such as Christianity be it Catholic or Protestants persist, numerous lives and properties unquantifiable are lost, many people rendered homeless, socio-economic development halt and peace extinct. This is to say that religious conflict does not in any way enable the progress of any nation rather it brings about retrogression. The negative effects of religious conflict in the Nigerian society and Africa at large and the need for peacebuilding with focus within the Christian religion as reflected in most new testament writings has resonated the writing of this paper.

The issues germane for discussion in this paper include but not limited to: What is Christian ethical principle? What constitute the Christian ethical principles? Moreover, what are the virtues expected of the Christian adherents for sustained peacebuilding in the Nigerian society and by extension Africa? Though the issues of intra/inter personal, religious and group conflicts with its damaging effects are traceable in the Judeo-Christian Biblical writings that is the Bible, however, does the Bible validates conflicts in any sort? What are the causes of conflict within the Christian organizations in Nigeria? Consequently, how can the Christian adherents enable the process of peacebuilding in their everyday activities? This paper provides succinct answers to these posers. Relatedly, the paper is concerned on how conflict within the Christian religious circle could be stern to accommodating one another and to ensuring peacebuilding and lasting peace in the

Nigerian society for sustainable development of the Nigerian nation. This is in view of the fact that conflict is an inevitable part of human life and living and could occur when there are divergent views, opinions, scarce resources etc, within groups, institutions or organization.

This paper also endeavours to provide a new approach to ensuring peacebuilding in the Nigerian society especially within the Christian organizations by emphasizing on the continuous expression of the cardinal principles of the Christian religion such as love, peace, integrity, servant-leadership, dialogue, stewardship, justice, equity, fairness, etc, in order to attain a just, egalitarian and sane society thereby negating all forms of religious chaos and violence particularly within the Christian religious spheres. This is premise on the fact that even within Christian religious groups with reference to the Nigerian society there are overt manifestations of conflicts which have led to the proliferation of churches among the Christian faith, character assassination and even litigations with members pitching their tents with their perceived leaders.

Conceptual Clarifications

Christian Ethical Principles

Every religion of the world is made up of two parts, namely: what is believed and what is practiced in the religion. The doctrines and practices of a religion is the distinctive mark of that religion from other religions of the world. The doctrine of a religion centres on the beliefs of that religion while the practices are mainly concerned with the religious duties of the adherents of

the religion. Similarly, all religions of the world have their own ethics. The ethics of every religion is what makes the religion distinct and unique from other religions. Since this paper centres on the Christian ethical principles, it seeks to unearth the Christian ethical principles necessary for peacebuilding in the Nigerian society. Thus, Christian ethical principles is a systematic examination of the way of life characterized and taught by Jesus; applied to the manifold problems and decision of human existence (Katsina & Agile, 2020).

Christian ethical principles centre on the appropriation of the teachings of Jesus Christ in the everyday activities of humankind to ensure peace and harmonious living among people of the same or different religious affiliations. The Christian ethics are enshrined in the writings of the Old and New Testament and in the writings and teachings of authorized leaders of the Christian Church. Thus, this paper emphasizes on the continuous expression of the Christian ethical principles such as love, forgiveness, reconciliation, dialogue, accountability, justice, transparency, fairness, equity etc as taught and expressed by Jesus Christ in the writings of the New Testament to be imbibed and live out by Christians in their everyday life and activities for sustained peace and peacebuilding in the Nigeria society and in the global community.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a process or means in which programmes are devised to address the causes of conflict and the grievances of the past and to promote long term stability, justice, liberty development and to ensure lasting peace (Inyom, 2013). Peacebuilding is also a

viable process of inhibiting internal menaces to human security from causing lingering violent conflict by addressing the root cause of conflict in the society (Nwobueze, 2022). Benjamin J. Pokol citing Elizabeth Porter asserts that peacebuilding involves all processes that builds positive relationship, heal wounds, reconciles hostile differences, restores esteem, respect rights, meets basic needs, enhances equality, instils feelings of security, empowers moral agency and democratic participation, inclusiveness and promotion of justice. In the context this paper, peacebuilding centres on restoring peace in a conflicting situation by concentrating on the cause of the conflict with a view to restoring lasting peace. The scope of the paper which is the Christian religion is premise on the fact that within Christian denominations in Nigerian under the umbrella of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), TEKAN/ECKWA among others, there are obvious demonstration of conflict which have led to proliferation of churches, and even litigations among others issues.

The intra group conflict which rocked the Assemblies of God Church in Nigeria over a decade between Professor Emeka Nwankpa and Rev. Dr. Chidi Okoroafor of who becomes the authentic General Overseer of the church and the lingering conflict between St. Matthew's Anglican Church Nkpogu Port Harcourt; a church formerly under the episcopal jurisdiction of the Anglican Communion Diocese of Niger Delta North but now fully integrated as one of the churches under the primatial chaplaincy of the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion due to several decades of unresolved conflict between the church and diocese bordering on some liturgical, doctrinal and ecclesiastical

issues among others are significant instances. Similarly, the leadership tussle in the Synagogue Church of All Nation of who becomes the head of the Church at the demise of prophet T.B. Joshua and the controversy in the Anglican church of the West (Church of England) with the rest of the Anglican communion in the world as regards to human sexuality, same sex marriage and other doctrinal issues which have apparently divided the Anglican communion worldwide into the liberal and conservative Anglicans thus leading the later to establish GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference which first held in Jerusalem from 22nd- 29th June, 2008), and the former maintaining the traditional Lambert conference in Canterbury London is another clear case.

Interestingly, when conflict is properly resolved, it sustains mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, respect for the persons involved, enhances growth and productivity in the spirituality of the organization. However, when conflict is permitted to prolong especially in the Christian organization and the larger society, it slows down socio-economic and spiritual progress in the society and church respectively (Amad-Nche, 2018). Therefore, in view of the negative effects of conflict in the larger society and within Christian organizations, this paper seeks to provide a new approach to peacebuilding particularly among the Christian denomination in the Nigerian society by emphasizing on the demonstration of the basic Christian ethical principles as enshrined in the Christian Holy scriptures as a major necessity to forestall conflict and foster peacebuilding and to maintain peace within the Christian community.

Causes of Conflict within Christian Organizations

It is an established fact that before an agitation, protest, combat, quarrel or exchange of words whether verbally or non-verbally occurs in an organized institution such as the family, church, school, government, etc, something must have led or caused such to occur thus, this sub-section is concerned with the causes of conflict within the Christian organization as noticed in the Nigerian religious spheres. It is believed that when the causes of a problem or disease are known, the solution can be adequately ascertained. Although the causes of conflict within Nigerian Christian organizations vary to a large extend, this paper identifies few of the causes which have negatively affected the unity of the Christian entity. Some of the causes of conflict within Christian organizations are as a result of perceived discrimination, leadership tussle, and divergent theological perspective, ineffectiveness of the minister and lack of vision/purpose. Conflict may also occur when there is communication gap, feeling of infringement, differences in value, goals, gifts, calling, priorities, expectations, interest or opinions (Akintoye & Ojo, 2022).

Moreover, when there is perceived financial misappropriation, inordinate ambition, gross misconduct, unhealthy rivalry either by the leaders or followers within the Christian organizations conflict is bound to occur. Furthermore, ignorance, prejudice, cultural differences and differential perceptions of the adherents of the Christian organization on some doctrinal, financial issues among others may cause conflict within the Christian group. In the light of the above, Professor Emeka Nwankpa and Rev. Dr. Chidi

Okoroafor of the Assemblies of God church believed that they possess the necessary qualification, charisma; proficiency and anointing to lead or say oversee the Church. While the former sees him as having attained the climax in Academia and also tutored his opponent, the later sees himself as having more of the needed qualification having followed the structural organogram sequentially. When the dual personalities failed to concede defeat as regards their intention to oversee the affairs of the church, they and their supporters resorted to litigation in the law court for over a decade in order for the court to decide who the authentic General overseer becomes thus, dragging the name of God to the mud by their actions. Similarly, the unresolved conflict between the liberal and conservative Anglicans has created a dividing wall within the Anglican Communion leaving the confessing Anglicans to choose between the two stands hitherto. Does the Holy Scriptures give credence to conflict? What is the Biblical position as regards to conflict and peacebuilding? This is the thrust of the next sub-section.

Biblical Perspective on Conflict and Peacebuilding
The Biblical writings of the Old and New Testaments are replete with cases of conflict and how they were handled in the scriptures. The fall of man after creation (Genesis 3:1-24), the story of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), the account of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 27), Joseph's conflict with his brothers (Genesis 37:3-28), Moses confrontation with Aaron and Miriam (Numbers 12), Moses confrontation with the Korah (Numbers 16), Elijah and the prophet of Baal (1Kings 18:20-33) are some among the cases of conflict recorded

in the Old Testament. Similarly, the conflict between the Hellenist Jews and Hebrew women over the daily distribution of food (Acts 6), the sharp disagreement which occurred between Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey in Acts 15:36-41 (compare 2 Timothy 4:11, 1 Cor. 9:6), the rift between Paul and Peter (Galatians 2), the Philippians women quarrel (Philippians 4), the conflict over an incestuous man in the Church in Corinth and the factions/ strife of the Corinthian Church (1Corinthians 5; 2,3) the question of who becomes the greatest among the disciples (Mark 9:33-37) are few instances of conflict in the New Testament. These instances underscores that conflict is not entirely negative rather it sometimes helps to resonate new ideas, effect change and also enhance the growth and productivity in the spirituality of the church (Amadi-Nche, 2018). Correspondingly, the growth and positive impact of conflict in any system depends to a great extent on how the conflict is handled. According to Lukan narrative in Acts 2:44-47 and Acts 4:4 the early church grew at a high speed and as it grew, the problems of the Christian group came to the forefront in the daily distribution of the food and other items from the common fund of the church to the poorer ones in the community. The Hellenistic Jews that is the Greek speaking Jews, those born outside Palestine complained severely about their neglect by the Hebrew women on the daily distribution of food (Nkwoka, 2009).

These complaints and conflict by the Greek speaking Jews and Hebrew women did not only tear the unity of the early Christian community but it also formed a basis of distraction from the primary aim of which the Christian community was established if not for the approach and method employed by the early

church and the apostles to stern the crisis. The approach employed by the early apostles includes firstly the identification of the crisis through desensitization that is, giving fair hearing to the widows and dialogue. Having understood the nature of the crisis; it was extensively and freely examined. Through dialogue and deliberation, resolution and recommendation were issued (Dajwan, 2021).

The recommendation of the early church which gave rise to the growth and expansion of the Christian community brought about the choosing of seven deacons of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom the affairs of the daily distribution of food were committed to while the church gave themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word of God. Thus, saint Luke the physician and the only gentile New Testament writer affirms that:

> ... And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:5-7).

While biblical writings reveal cases of conflict it further uncovers that peace is given a pride of place. The bible emphasizes the need for peace and processes which bring about peace are highly commended in the scriptures. Peace as emphasized in the Holy Scriptures

connotes wholeness, soundness and completeness. It also means cessation from war and anything working towards safety, welfare and happiness is included in the concept of peace. In addition, peace has reference to health, prosperity, wellbeing as well as quiet from war (Kuden, 2014).

The concept of peace and peacebuilding are dominant in the Old Testament scriptures and in the teachings of Jesus and the early apostles. Cosmos consenting to this view remarks that a quick search through the Bible would reveal that the whole business of peacebuilding 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 peacebuilding, non-violence and engagement in peace making (Wule, 2020). Likewise, the account of Genesis 13:7-12 is a concrete expression of peacebuilding by Abraham through selfless dialogue, negotiation, servant leadership, love and relegation of his rights. The scripture reveals that with the increase in the livestock of Abraham and that of Lot his nephew during their journey in the land of Canaan and the need for more harvest fields and water resources to feed and water their flock, in addition to the flock of the local resident herdsmen, conflict arose between Abram herdsmen and Lots herdsmen. Amazingly, the same scripture gives insight of how Abraham used resource control and restructuring to resolve the strife between

his herdsmen and that of Lot his nephew. The resolution through resource control led to separation of both parties and the separation between Abraham and Lot laid to rest the strife between Abram herdsmen and that of Lot (Nwazonobi, 2022).

As may be expected in a gerontocratic organization, the conflict situation made Abraham to do something without delay to remedy the conflict. Abraham being the eldest as well as the head of the team, proposed the solution to the problem between his herdsmen and Lots herdsmen. His proposal could be seen in his unwillingness to quarrel with his nephew, his willingness to negotiate with his brother and his openness and willingness for his brother to choose suitable place for himself and his herdsmen from the land apportion (Adedeye, 2019). Abraham's approach was not only constructive that the conflict could be friendly resolved, but also his attitude showed his responsibility in times of trouble and difficulties. Most interpreters assert here of Abraham's nobility and readiness for a peaceful settlement. The quarrel between the herdsmen's threatened the existence of the two groups. It is a question of living space and sustenance. Abraham does not make his proposal as an individual; rather he is responsible for his family and the people. He comes to a decision in view of the life and well-being of his group. In order to avoid at all cost a violent outcome to the quarrel, because this would not accord with Abraham's responsibility for his kinsmen, he made the proposal, showing his fatherly role. When something goes amiss or against the prescribed plan, the elder from the group or family proffers the situation (Adedeye, 2019). This was succinctly exemplified in the action or proposal of Abraham. The account of genesis recounts:

So Abram said to Lot, please let there be no strife between you and me and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left (13:8-9).

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 neighbours 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 neighbours 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; Hebrews 13:20).

Barclay (2006) affirming this thought asserts that the person 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. They are involved in doing the work of the devil and cannot be called sons of God. Mojirayo and Kehinde (2022) 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 neighbourhood, society, church, and even within oneself.

Apostle Paul in his epistle to the church at Rome writes that "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). He further writes in his second epistle to Timothy "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and reverence, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Also, the epistle to the Hebrews writes "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14) and the Petrine text remarks "Let him turn away from evil and do well; Let him seek peace and pursue it" (3:11). These scriptures emphasize the need for peacebuilding and to maintain peace at all times especially among people of every race, religion, sex etc. It further underscores that God's children must embrace peace and work towards all that tend to foster peace and peacebuilding. It also shows that the Bible encourages peace and peacebuilding. Peace as presented in these

biblical text is not optional but mandatory as it reveals the nature of God and Christians must constantly live out such nature and attribute. Consequently, in order to sustain peace and promote peacebuilding within the Christian organization in the Nigerian society, the next sub-section is aimed at examining the principles necessary for peacebuilding.

Principles Necessary for Peacebuilding

Forgiveness: Amidst various intra personal conflict as earlier observed in the Christian organizations, forgiveness is one of the Christian ethical principles necessary for peacebuilding among Christians in the Nigerian society. Interestingly, the whole of the Old and New testament writings and for the greater percentage of the teachings of Jesus Christ stresses 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). Jesus here condemns any form of violent response stressing apostle Paul statement "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).

Apostle Paul maintains in Romans 12:18 that irrespective of what the other persons may be saying or doing, peaceful living is non-negotiable for Christians.

Christians are to be at peace with all persons no matter the stand of the other person. The call for peaceful living by Apostle Paul which transcends from neighbours to friends and even home may appear herculean however it emanates from a heart that loves God. The text infers that so far as it is possible, live at peace with all men. This implies doing all we reasonably can to be peaceable with all but not to the extent of compromising God's righteous principles (Akinyemi & Oki, 2019). Christians are encouraged to leave all revenge for Jesus Christ and forgive. Although forgiveness may not be easy, it is a necessity for peacebuilding. Pope John Paul 11 once said the only guarantee for lasting peace is forgiveness. He further remarks that a world without forgiveness is a world of ceaseless violence. However, with the virtue of forgiveness, past injuries, hurt, wounds, bitterness and anger over such hurts could be healed adequately and amicable human relationship restored (Ehuani, 2022).

The importance of the principle of forgiveness is also found in the interaction between Peter and Jesus in the gospel of Matthew "Then Peter came to Him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (18:21-22). As a Jew, who through Rabbinic teaching believed that the issue of forgiveness must not exceed three times (Amos 1:3,6,9,11,13; 2:1,4,6), Peter took the Rabbinic three times, multiplied it by two for good measure adds one, and suggests, with eager satisfaction that it will be enough if he forgives seven times which suggest completeness and wholeness but Jesus descents on his view and asserts that the Christian must forgive seventy times seven (Barclay, 2006:193). Remarkably, while Peter tried to set limit to the issue of

forgiveness, Jesus taught that there is no limit to forgiveness. This then infers that as Christians, we must understand that offences must come, when it does happen our responsibility is to make known the offences to the offender and forgive irrespective of the periods the offences may arise. Similarly, we must forgive in order to be forgiven by our creator. Anyone who fails to forgive his fellow neighbour cannot hope for God's forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15). Forgiveness is a balm that heals past wounds giving birth to a fresh wholesome human positive relationship and peace (Dajwan, 2021).

Servant-Leadership: For peacebuilding to be ensured in the Nigerian society and Africa at large, leaders at all levels of government be it ecclesiastical, political, secular or traditional level must know that the call to leadership is a call to selfless service to God and humanity and not a call to be served by others. 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). The purpose of servant leaders is not to dominate, marginalize, defraud, work against the citizens' hopes and aspirations or infringe on the rights of their followers but to serve the masses selflessly. Servant-leadership is people oriented and not selfish. As exemplified by Abraham (Gen. 13) and Jesus Christ, the Nigerian socio-political and ecclesiastical spheres would have been better if this principle is imbibed by those who occupy various leadership positions. Similarly, intra personal conflict as witnessed in some Christian organizations which have led to litigation in some states in the federal, state and

local levels would have dispersed thus, creating room for peace and peacebuilding in the Christian community.

Similarly, another important principle necessary for sustained peacebuilding in the Nigerian society especially among Christian groups is the principle of integrity. The word integrity is derived from a Latin Word *Integer* which means wholeness, soundness or completeness. It is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness. Integrity is the state of being whole and undivided. It is also the quality or state of being of sound moral principle, uprightness, honesty, and sincerity. 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 Christians. 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 neighbourhood 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). Moreover, Christians are encouraged to be willing to denounce evil orchestrated by their fellow Christians or by any instituted authority irrespective of who is involved. This is one way to achieve peacebuilding among Christian organizations in the Nigerian society.

Reconciliation, Justice, fairness and Equity: These are other principles that must be sought for and sustained by the Christian community for peacebuilding to ensure in the Nigerian society. Reconciliation here connotes to unite, to re-establish a close affiliation between two or more parties. It also entails to resolve dispute between two or more parties, restoration of severed relationship or removal of all the causes of conflict. 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 5:6ff), 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".

The severed relationship between man and God as a result of the sin of the first man (Adam) was resolved by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Thus, man was reconciled to God and restored to his position through the death of Jesus Christ and through grace man can now approach God in humility. Jesus having shown us an example, requires that Christians irrespective of the hurt and violence that may have been caused by their fellow professing Christians or non-Christians should be open to reconciliation for it is to the ministry of healing and reconciliation that the Christian

church and community has been called upon (2Cor. 5:18). However, while the Christian community is called to seek reconciliation at all times when hurt as a necessity to ensuring peacebuilding within her spheres, she is also required and encouraged to promote justice as a means for peacebuilding to forestall conflict. Samuel citing Wink (2008) remarks:

> When church leaders preach reconciliation without having unequivocally committed themselves to struggle on the side of the oppressed for justice, they are caught straddling a pseudo-neutrality made of nothing but thin air. Neutrality in a situation of oppression always supports the status quo. Reduction of conflict by means of a phony peace is not a Christian goal. Justice is the goal, and that may require an acceleration of conflict as a necessary stage in forcing those in power to bring genuine change (p. 122).

The Christian leaders, church and adherents as a way to ensure peacebuilding within her must be advocates of justice, fairness and equity. The Church must not stand aloof but speak against injustice, oppression, apartheid, victimization, ethnicity, nepotism, sectionalism and denial of rights and privileges melted on the less privileged particularly members of the Christian organization irrespective of who is concerned in appointments, rights and other emoluments. The Christian community must stand alongside the oppressed, marginalized, care for the poor, weak, orphans and hungry and those discriminated against thus giving them a sense of belonging (Matthew 25:31-46). When there is fairness, justice and equity for

all in the Christian community, there will be little or no avenue for conflict in the Christian organization but peacebuilding will be ensured and sustained.

Conclusion

This concise paper examined the Christian ethical principles necessary for peacebuilding in the Nigeria society with emphasis on the Christian religion. This was necessary because it is observed that within the Christian community conflict and strife abound which have caused disunity within and among some Christian adherent and in some quarters led to litigation. The paper stresses on the causes of conflict within the Christian community and infers that not all conflict is negative. Similarly, the paper traces cases of conflict in the Biblical text of the Christian religion and how they were handled to prove that conflict is biblical. However, the paper made frantic effort to show that while conflict is upheld in the scriptures, peace is given a pride of place.

Consequently, the paper enjoins proponent of the Christian religion under the aegis of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), etc to embrace peace and peacebuilding, instil in their members the virtues of peace, dialogue, forgiveness, servant-leadership, reconciliation, promotion of justice, fairness and equity. Also, proponent of the Christian religion through their teaching and preaching are called upon to make every necessary effort to disdain conflict in order to ensure progress and productivity in the society and the Christian community. It is hoped that if the principles and virtues highlighted in this paper are

practised and sustained within and among Christian adherent it will not only lead to peacebuilding but will bring about lasting peace to the myriads of conflict faced by some of the Nigerian Christian leaders and Christian Community.

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