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Challenges Confronting The Survival Of The Church In Nigeria: Its Peacebuilding Strategies

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Abstract

The church in Nigeria faces numerous challenges that threaten its very survival. This paper identifies and discusses these challenges, including corruption, insecurity, and religious intolerance among others. It also explores the coping strategies employed by the church to address these challenges. Historically, external challenges the early church faced weaken not the church but internal challenges such as discrimination as in Acts 6:1-7 and disunity as seen in 1Corinthians 3:1-23. This research aimed at evaluating and examining the challenges to the church in Nigeria, to identify the challenges and analyze the coping strategies, thereby providing understanding to the challenges of the church in Nigeria, as well as proffering solutions to the problem. Through systematic review of related literature and the use of "Systems Theory" and "Resilience Theory", this study identifies the key challenges that the church must overcome and provides insights into effective coping strategies. The findings reveal that the church must address issues such as proliferation of churches, the survival of the church in the mist of 'Islamic' threats; secularism; declining membership, financial challenges, the changing cultural landscape and many others. Peacebuilding strategies include community outreach, innovative fundraising, and adapting to the needs of a diverse congregation. This study contributes to the understanding of the challenges facing the church and offers practical recommendations to help the church thrive in the face of these challenges. These are spiritual revival, social engagement, and interfaith dialogue among others.

Key words: Challenges; confronting; church; peacebuilding; strategies

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Introduction

Globally, challenges of socio-economic, political and terrorism are the most common organized crimes that impact negatively on the survival of church in the world. The world is undergoing a major cultural transformation leading to a widespread lack of faith, an increase in moral relativism and a rejection of absolute truth. The churches in North Africa and Asia Minor are no more because of internal and external factors that militated against them (Pokol, 2020). The church has consistently carried out the mission given to her by Christ for two thousand years, is constantly faced with internal and external challenges carried by the tides of history: Wars, schisms, and epidemics.

For decades, Africa has tried to rid itself of the most oppressive powers that have dominated the continent and have become a challenge to the church. Throughout the 20th century, the church has played a vocal role in engaging the powers that refused Africans the right to be part of their own heritage. Although various sectors of the church had a different view on how to engage these oppressive powers, to a great extent the church cried out against them (Coertze, 2005). The African church is finding itself in the middle of social, economic and political issues. It cannot take a position aloof from these issues, not only because it has a responsibility resulting from its very nature to address these issues, but also because the majority of its membership find themselves caught up in the effects of poverty. The African church is finding itself in the middle of a multi-religious society.

The church in Nigeria is confronted with various challenges that imperil its survival (Adeyinka, 2017). These challenges necessitate a critical examination of the church's peacebuilding strategies. Since the political changes in Nigeria in May 1999, there have been communal and ethno-religious conflicts (Dashit, Ibrahim & Gana 2019) with north-central and north-eastern regions being the areas worst hit (Abdul & Kabiru, 2017; Haldun & Opeyemi, 2016). The situation of poverty, misery, injustice and corruption which seem to be the order of the day in Nigeria pose some quite daunting challenges to the church. Nigeria is in the eye of the storm for insecurity and persecution, where the rights of minorities including Christians are violated. Nigeria is now a country where being a Christian is synonymous with martyrdom to some extent (Barkindo & Dyikuk, 2022). Beyond the few figures reported in Western media, issues of religious freedom in the country are real and grave. The issues are complicated because of palpable fear, political correctness, lack of an agreeable response from leading church figures and at times, fear of elimination.

Beyond the physical violence, there are all kinds of discriminatory and marginalizing legal and non-legal instruments used to exclude Christians from access to power, including infringements on the right to freedom of worship. Violent attacks of particular concern are the systematic targeting of Catholic churches as well as the abduction and killing of Catholic priests. On June 5, more than 50 Catholic parishioners were killed on Pentecost Sunday in an attack on St. Francis Xavier Catholic church in Owo, a town in southwestern Nigeria by suspected Fulani herdsmen. The Owo incident is similar to the 2011 Christmas suicide-bombing at St. Theresa's Catholic Church, Madalla, in Niger state, which claimed the lives of 39 parishioners. However, the spate of terror attacks on churches in the northern parts of Nigeria in the past, have shown that during religious riots the churches are consistently under attack. Security problems and existential challenges in Nigeria are creating more internally displaced people every day as more continue to either feel endangered or dislodged from their homes or places of abode (Abimaje, Augustine, Nadi, Ayado & Ismail, 2014).

Modern times are not significantly different in the scale of challenges from what the church has faced in the past. From rape to abduction and forceful conversion to Islam through marriage, churches in the north-central Nigeria have suffered trauma with little success in litigations due to biased judgments in courts. However, a number of challenging issues facing the very existence of the church in north central Nigeria did not disappear. Biblically the challenges confronting the church in Nigeria are liken to the end times. In 2Timothy 3:1-9 and especially verse one (1) says "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty" ESV). The church in Nigeria has been impacted by persistent violence due to religious issues, political issues and cattle grazing/land issues. The introduction of sharia in the past in some northern states in Nigeria, and the emergence of Boko Haram alongside religious extremists have made the existence of Christianity difficult in Nigeria.

Excessive desire for institutionalization which is a misconception of church ministry perspective is prevalent in Nigeria. Institutionalization in this context is more than just being an institution; it is an ideology that militates against the common good and unity of purpose within the north central Nigerian church. Internal dangerous competition among churches in the north central Nigeria has become a poison to the existence of the church. The kind of competitive spirit characterizing the Christian family is such that can leave crags for external threats to invade and destroy the church. History is said to repeat itself; the constantinian error of drawing the church into cohabitation with government in the fourth century seems to

be repeating itself again in the 21st century. The church has never been ordained to be a symbiotic partner of government. The church of the 21st century is called to develop people and not to uncritically promote deadly political systems that destroy human lives. Development of human life, according to Mahatma Gandhi, is the first line of defense, while impoverishing people is the worst violence against them.

Many attempts were made to curb the challenges of the church in north central Nigeria, some succeeded while some failed. This study is set out to investigate coping strategies to existential challenges to the church in north central Nigeria. Therefore, the research will be a call for a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges of Christian communities who remain vulnerable to discrimination and persecution in the region.

Definition Operational Terms

Challenges

A challenge is something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination. It is a situation that creates pains and affects the community or citizenry negatively. Challenges are difficulties, obstacles, or hurdles that hinder progress, growth, or success in personal, social, or organizational contexts (Brewer, 1999, p. 105). Challenge is something that by its nature or character serves as a call to battle, contest, special effort. Indeed, inadequate space and space exploration offers a challenge to humankind (Dajwan, 2021). Referring to the challenges, it is understandable that various researchers will formulate what they perceive to be the challenges that should be dealt with. The challenges, therefore, would differ from one researcher to another. The challenges that are discussed in this study are in a sense confined to the subjects' views that we have at. The researcher affirms that, the existential challenges referred to in this study are by definition limited solely to the internal and external challenges like spiritual, socio-political, economic and challenges of terrorism and its various forms perceived will be relevant to discuss (Dajwan, 2021).

Church

The term church refers to the assembly of believers to fellowship with one another and Christ. The term is discussed to make a distinction between two senses in which the term church is used in this research. In one sense, the church is used as an institution while another sense it is used as an organism. The church as an institution is referring to the visible or physical building and as an organism, on the other hand as the individual believers that make up the

invisible building. The institutional church refers to a unified organization while the church as an organism refers to an aggregate of individual believers in which each Christian acts as a personal agent with a purpose and a call in God's plans. (Dajwan, 2021: p.5).

Peace-building

The term peace building was conceived as an important part of the United Nations effort to promote peace. Goodhand and Hulme (1999) in Lamle's work (2015), Peace building found its place among the UN's traditional instruments of peace which includes preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace keeping. It is defined as; "An action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict". Peace-building is the long-term process of promoting social, economic, and political development to prevent the recurrence of violence and conflict. Lederach (1997) defines peace-building as a "comprehensive concept that encompasses both the social and political transformation needed to nurture sustainable peace." Indeed, peace building is those activities and programmes put in place to address the root cause of conflict, prevent the re-escalation, re-establish democratic structures, and restore relationships and capacity building for sustainable peace and development. Peace-building at this point, the parties are no longer thinking of any violent conflict, rather, they are participants in peace and development process. Pokol called it "ambulance peace building".

Religious Peace-building

According to Little, David, Appleby, and Scott (2004): Religious peace-building is a term used to describe the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence.

Philpott, Daniel, Powers and Gerhard (2010) contend that religious peace-building includes the beliefs, norms, and rituals that pertain to peace-building, as well as a range of actors for whom religion is a significant motivation for their peace-building.

Strategies

Strategies are planned and deliberate approaches to achieve specific goals, manage conflicts, or resolve problems (Deutsch, 1973, p. 50). Strategies involve a series of actions, decisions, and tactics that take into account the context, resources, and stakeholders involved. American

Psychological Association Dictionary (2018) defines coping strategies to mean "an action, a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation or in modifying one's reaction to such a situation". Coping strategies will also be referring to church roles, church response, prospects, and ways of mitigating the existential challenges. Again, coping strategies typically involve a conscious and direct approach to problems, in contrast to defense mechanisms" (A.P.A Dictionary, 2018). This can be any conscious or unconscious decision which causes relief or manage, mitigate or consolation in challenging and stressful situations.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical perspectives: The bases for challenges

Based on the research topic "existential challenges confronting the church in Nigeria and its coping strategies", is anchored on these two theories:

The "Systems Theory" Propounded by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1951)

Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1951) provides a framework for understanding the church as an open system, interacting with its environment and facing challenges such as corruption, insecurity, and social change. According to this theory, the church can cope with these challenges by adapting to its environment (Bertalanffy, 1951, p. 12), maintaining equilibrium and homeostasis (Bertalanffy, 1968, p. 25), and engaging in continuous learning and innovation (Ludwig von Bertalanffy, 1972, p. 18).

Systems Theory therefore, views the church as an open system, interacting with its environment and facing challenges such as corruption, insecurity, and social change. This theory suggests that the church can cope with these challenges by: Adapting to its environment, maintaining equilibrium and homeostasis, engaging in continuous learning and innovation.

The "Resilience Theory" Propounded by Emmy Werner (1993)

Resilience Theory (Werner, 1993) emphasizes the church's ability to withstand and recover from adversity, trauma, and stress. This theory suggests that the church can develop resilience by building strong relationships and networks (Werner, 1993, p. 34), fostering a culture of hope and optimism (Smith & Carlson, 1997, p. 12), and developing adaptive leadership and management strategies (Higgins, 2001, p. 25).

Resilience Theory therefore, emphasizes the church's ability to withstand and recover from adversity, trauma, and stress. This theory suggests that the church can develop resilience by:

Building strong relationships and networks, fostering a culture of hope and optimism, developing adaptive leadership and management strategies.

Both theories offer valuable insights into the existential challenges facing the church in Nigeria. Systems Theory highlights the importance of adaptation and continuous learning, while Resilience Theory emphasizes the need for building strong relationships and fostering a culture of hope. By applying these theories, the church can develop effective coping strategies to navigate the complex challenges it faces.

Internal And External Challenges Confronting The Church In Nigeria

Several researches have been undertaken on challenges to the church. In this section, he researcher has be discussed scholars and literatures on both the internal and external factors of the existential challenges to the church in Nigeria. On the existential factors researcher observes the following challenges facing the church in Nigeria:

Insecurity and Lack of Unity

Insecurity is another existential challenge confronting the church in Nigeria (Nwosu, 2018). It hinders the church's mission and ministry (Okorie, 2019). The concept of insecurity in Nigeria, as described by Nwosu in 2018, is a complex issue with various factors contributing to it [1]. These factors include illiteracy, unemployment, poor leadership, porous borders, and proliferation of arms, among others. The effects of insecurity in Nigeria are equally diverse, ranging from underdevelopment and poverty to insurgency, militancy, and kidnapping.

On the other hand, Okorie in 2019 views insecurity in Nigeria as a result of years of systemic failure driven by corruption [2]. Contributing factors to the insecurity challenges in Nigeria include failed government, corruption, Kleptocracy, absence of state police, un-remedied wrongs, and porous borders. The need to remember the prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ is that the church will be one (John 17:21)… Christians must work together and emphasize areas of agreement. The church will then develop into a supernaturally potent force when this occurs. According to the book of Genesis, upon the occasion of the building of the tower of Babel, God saw that the people had one language and were of one accord. Because of this, He said that nothing they wanted to do would have been impossible for them (see Genesis 11:6). If the church could achieve unity, it could change the political and social structure of society with no trouble at all. The world would be a beautiful place to live in if the church would get

together (Adeleke, 2022). What will unite the church today will be persecution because it is said that "the blood of the martyrs' is the seed of the church".

Proliferation of Churches and the Survival of the church

The daily increase of churches constitutes challenges to the survival of the church in Nigeria. This is as a result of the doctrinal differences and unbiblical teachings. Secularization is indeed a great challenge confronting the church in Nigeria. Values and ethics from a biblical perspective must be emphasized. No longer should the Church leader expect individuals to automatically know right from wrong. In many cases, people have been so tainted by the culture that they may not realize the impact that it has had on the way they view the world. Christian teachers and preachers must stress values and be unafraid to speak on sin. One may lose a member or two, but great spiritual development will come to those who remain (Adeleke, 2022). As Isaiah denotes, one should "learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" (Isaiah 1:17).

The church is faced with the challenge of coordinated assault by enemies of the cross (Asaju, 2021, p. n.p). Some of the enemies of the cross are Islam, secularism, communism, and occultism. The challenge of Islam can be seen in several perspectives such as ideology, theologies, there are so many killings going on in the name of religion, many communities wiped out and occupied by invading forces and security with stakeholders been compromised. Our battle with Islam can be traced to Genesis 16:1-12 when Ishmael was conceived in the womb (Asaju, 2021). Secondly is secularism, this is another challenge that is confronting the church. Constitutionally Nigeria is operating based on secularism because there is no mention of Christianity. The perspective of communism is that religion is not relevant in our affairs.

The Christian Church is becoming Theologically Illiterate.

What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans, especially young adults. For instance, Barna Group studies in 2010 showed that while most people regard Easter as a religious holiday, only a minority of adults associate Easter with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The results indicate that Biblical literacy is projected to drastically diminish as younger generations gain dominance in both numbers and positions in churches across the nation. The theological free-for-all that is encroaching in Protestant churches nationwide suggests the

coming decade will be a time of unparalleled theological diversity and inconsistency. If you are a biblically educated believer, you know that some of what Barna refers to as "basic, universally-known truths about Christianity" (Adeleke, 2022).

The challenge here is, the type of worship music contemporary or traditional? Or is it hymns or modern worship songs? This is an issue that tends to spark debate within many churches. It's often even a deciding factor when someone chooses a church to belong to. This issue also tends to divide believers between older and younger generations. Even certain instruments can be controversial. A drum set might not be considered acceptable in some churches, while another church may have an entire praise band with a full range of instruments. Some churches have made an effort to end the debate by incorporating both classic and new songs into their worship services or even by offering two distinct services—one that is more traditional and the other that is more modern (Adeleke, 2022).

Political Disempowerment of the Church

Biblically, the Bible says that "if the righteous is on the throne the people rejoice but if the wicked is on the throne the people suffer" and most of the Christian leaders lack the political will in governance or being in place by utilizing power. The church and Christians were instrumental to the building of African nations and leadership from post-colonial times to the First Republic, the tide has turned today. Muslims from Northern Nigeria have taken over and dominated the most offices of leadership in the Executive, legislative and judicial arms of government (Asaju, 2021). Muslims have also taken over the leadership of the nation's security, education and economy.

On the other hand, there is politics on the pulpit. The question is should ministers talk about politics or endorse a specific political party or view from the pulpit? Church-goers have very different views on the subject, but the controversy isn't confined to the church. The Johnson Amendment, which forbade a church from endorsing and supporting a particular political party or candidate as a nonprofit organization, was repealed by an executive order issued by President Trump. Many championed the executive order, saying that it gave churches more religious freedom, but others maintained that siding with a certain political party is not something a church should be doing (Adeleke, 2022).

Corruption and Alcohol

Adebayo (2019) affirms that "Corruption in Nigeria is a pervasive and deeply ingrained phenomenon that permeates all levels of society, manifesting as a complex web of patronage, clientelism, and rent-seeking behavior. It undermines the country's democratic institutions, hinders economic development, and exacerbates social inequality." According to Eke (2020) "Corruption in Nigeria is a multifaceted and entrenched problem that stems from a culture of impunity, weak institutions, and a lack of accountability. It takes various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism, and has far-reaching consequences, such as eroding trust in government, distorting the economy, and perpetuating poverty and inequality."

Should Christians drink alcohol? This question opens up all kinds of debate within the church. Since the Bible forbids intoxication and commands Christ-followers to be sober minded, many churchgoers hold the view that Christians should fully abstain from alcohol, bars, and anything that involves drinking. Other churchgoers, however, believe that consuming alcohol in moderation is not a sin. These Christians often argue their point from 1 Corinthians 8 in which the Apostle Paul says "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak." Many take this to mean, by the context surrounding it, that drinking alcohol is permitted, but Christians should be careful not to cause someone prone to alcohol abuse or someone who believes it is a sin, to stumble in his/her faith by seeing another Christian drinking. A church's views on alcohol can even be seen sometimes in the worship service; some churches use grape juice for communion, while others use wine (Adeleke, 2022).

The influence of Christianity on Culture and Individual lives is largely Invisible and World System entering the Church System

The issue is that these principles are not taught in schools. It's not that "new techniques of exposing the heart and spirit of the Christian faith" are necessary. What we must do is instruct him, and what we need to do is teach the heart and soul of Christianity-Jesus Christ, the living truth. He is not some “God-man” or “all God and all man” being with whom we cannot possibly identify, but a human being who perfectly trusted the same heavenly Father he calls you and me to trust (Adeleke, 2022).

To some extent the researcher shares the saying of the onetime Governor of Plateau State Chief Joshua Dariye who said “the world is becoming more of the church and the church is becoming more of the world”. The possibility of the world system entering the church system

is undeniable. While we need to incorporate good governance in church, we must know the danger of having wicked people managing a church. The philosophies of man are nothing in comparison to the teaching of God (Adeleke, 2022).

Spiritual Gift and Lack of knowledge of the function of Spiritual gift

Although spiritual gifts are mentioned several times in the New Testament, different church denominations have different interpretations of what it truly means to have and use a spiritual gift. The spiritual gift of speaking in tongues tends to be the most controversial of any spiritual gift. Others have even gone so far as to claim that speaking in tongues is disrespecting the Holy Spirit, but Pentecostals fully recognize this spiritual gift. Other Christians embrace spiritual gifts and even encourage congregants or church staffers to take spiritual gift tests to see where they are best equipped to serve (Adeleke, 2022).

The lack of knowledge of the function of spiritual gifts prevents a church from functioning well. In a church, God gives us different gifts for serving the church. Some people are gifted with the ability to sing or worship, host guests, teach the Bible, pray, etc. Normally, we will ask those given the gift of music/songs to lead praise and worship service, and those given the gift of teaching to preach etc. If we ask a person who has no skills in music and singing to lead praise and worship, that will prevent the church of blessings. A person who has a certain gift has passion or love for that area of ministry. And therefore, they will love their ministry and will do it well (Adeleke, 2022).

Religious Intolerance and Lack of love for God

According to Ikelegbe (2017) "Religious intolerance in Nigeria is a pervasive and complex phenomenon fueled by factors such as religious extremism, ethnic and regional divisions, political manipulation, and socioeconomic inequalities. This intolerance has led to violent conflicts, discrimination, and marginalization of minority religious groups, undermining national cohesion and stability." On the other hand, Ojo (2018) affirms "Religious intolerance in Nigeria is a deeply ingrained issue rooted in a culture of exclusivism, dogmatism, and mutual suspicion between Christians and Muslims. It is perpetuated by religious leaders, politicians, and societal norms, leading to discrimination, violence, and human rights abuses. Addressing religious intolerance requires promoting interfaith dialogue, education, and inclusive governance."

The lack of love for God will cause a person to be Luke-worm in zeal for God. They are neither hot nor cold. Many church programs never take off because there is little desire at all. But if we love God, we need no pushing or motivation. The reason why there is a lack of desire is because that is not their interest at all. Not their gifts etc., (Adeleke, 2022).

Abortion and Personal opinion

At first, one might think this subject is not as controversial within the church as it is between those in the church and those without. However, as a recent Pew Research Center study shows, those who claim to be religious yet don't associate themselves with a particular denomination are mostly in favour of abortion, with only 17 percent opposing it. Still, a majority of Christians are pro-life, but the subject remains a controversial one within the church, especially when it comes to the argument that pro-life should mean more than simply "pro-birth" (Adeleke, 2022).

Personal opinion is often misleading. Some people boldly say that what they say is from God and more often than not, what they say is their opinion. Some say “This is the will of God” but in fact, it could be their own opinion or thinking. Of course, we can easily discern what personal opinion is and what is from God, but because some churches have strong personalities or characters, they will just follow regardless (Adeleke, 2022).

Lack of the desire to Evangelize and Spiritual Activities

The main objective of having a church building is not only a place where we congregate to worship God for nurturing and teaching but also for equipping towards spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Without evangelism, the church will not grow and it is not obeying the great commission (Adeleke, 2022).

When asked what matters most, teenagers prioritize education, career development, friendships, and travel. Faith is significant to them, but it takes a back seat to life accomplishments and is not necessarily perceived to affect their ability to achieve their dreams. Among adults, the areas of growing importance are lifestyle comfort, success, and personal achievements. Those dimensions have risen at the expense of investment in both faith and family. The turbo-charged pace of society leaves people with little time for reflection. Spiritual practices like contemplation, solitude, silence, and simplicity are rare.

Practical to a fault, Americans consider survival in the present to be much more significant than eternal security and spiritual possibilities. Because we continue to separate our spirituality from other dimensions of life through compartmentalization, a relatively superficial approach to faith has become a central means of optimizing our life experience. As if "spiritual principles" are not practically applicable! Please. This attitude shows that too many Christians are not being taught the truth of the Word, which is all about how to live, that is, how to be and what to do in any situation. People cannot be living the truth unless they first hear the truth (Adeleke, 2022).

The Postmodern insistence on Tolerance is winning over the Christian Church

Our biblical illiteracy and lack of spiritual confidence have caused avoid making discerning choices for fear of being labelled "judgmental." The result is a Church that has become tolerant of a vast array of morally and spiritually dubious behaviours and philosophies. This increased leniency is made possible by the very limited accountability that occurs within the Body of Christ. There are fewer and fewer issues that Christians believe churches should be dogmatic about. The idea of love has been redefined to mean the absence of conflict and confrontation as if there are no moral absolutes that are worth fighting for. That may not be surprising in a church in which a minority believes there are moral absolutes dictated by the Scriptures (Adeleke, 2022).

Holiness/Integrity

First of all, each Christian needs to be reminded that they are not responsible for their salvation. For it is "by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Second, each Christian must stay focused on Jesus, which can only be conducted through regular private and corporate worship (Adeleke, 2022).

Technology Addiction/Individualization

It is recommended that Christians set boundaries as to their time spent with technology. Technology fasts may be a good disciple to practice. In addition, families may desire to have "technology-free zones;" that is, times when iPhones, IPads, IPods and computers are not permitted. Good "technology-free zones" include supper time, family time, vacations etc., (Adeleke, 2022). Indeed, most of our youths and members no longer have passion for

fellowship because of technology (Hebrews 10:25) is of no effect to most of the congregations today.

The modern church has lost its joy

A few disciplines may help modern Christians reclaim their joy. First, the Christian needs to take time away from the news. If one constantly allows oneself to be bombarded by negative news, one will find oneself becoming more and more negative. Second, limit your time spent around negative people. It is impossible to avoid every negative person, but a person does not need to allow such a person to envelope one's life. Third, take time with God!!! Even Jesus Himself was known to go "out to a desolate place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35). Take time with God privately and corporately! You may find your joy quickly coming back! (Adeleke, 2022).

Biblical Heresies

The solution is relatively simple. Stay true to the Bible! Preachers should strive to preach expository messages, that is, allowing the Bible to speak for itself, rather than choosing topics and jumping around from text to text. Also, as Greg Koukl has often said, don't just read one verse from the Bible, read Bible passages and keep them in proper context. I would say that it is important also for preachers to obtain at least some Bible training from an accredited Bible college or university. This will help one to abstain from straying from the truths of the Biblical text (Adeleke, 2022).

Indeed, the above challenges outlined above are agreed by the researcher as challenges confronting the church in Nigeria and need strategies to mitigate.

Peacebuilding Strategies Used By Some Christian Churches To Mitigate The Challenges In Nigeria

Spiritual Revival

According to Adeyinka (2017) posits that, spiritual revival is a vital coping strategy for the church in Nigeria to overcome existential challenges. He argues that the church must return to its spiritual roots, emphasizing personal and collective spiritual transformation through intense prayer, fasting, and genuine repentance. This revival will rekindle the church's passion for God, foster a deeper sense of community, and empower believers to confront societal challenges with faith and courage. Adeyinka further emphasizes that spiritual revival

will help the church to: Reclaim its prophetic voice and speak truth to power, promote moral integrity and ethical leadership, address internal conflicts and divisions, engage in effective evangelism and discipleship, develop a robust theology of suffering and persecution, cultivate a spirit of forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing.

The researcher believes that spiritual revival will enable the church in Nigeria to navigate existential challenges, maintain its relevance, and fulfill its divine mandate in a society plagued by corruption, violence, and social injustice among other vices. By experiencing spiritual revival, the church will become a beacon of hope, a source of spiritual strength, and a catalyst for transformation in Nigerian society.

Social Engagement

Adebayo (2019) advocates for social engagement as a crucial coping strategy for the church in Nigeria to address existential challenges. He argues that the church must move beyond its comfort zone and engage actively with the broader society, addressing pressing issues like corruption, poverty, inequality, and social injustice. This engagement involves: advocating for policy changes and social reform, partnering with civil society organizations and community groups, empowering marginalized communities and promoting social inclusion, providing humanitarian aid and support services, fostering interfaith dialogue and collaboration, promoting education, skills development, and economic empowerment.

Adebayo emphasizes that social engagement enables the church to: Demonstrate God's love and compassion in practical ways, build credibility and trust with the wider society, address the root causes of social problems, rather than just symptoms, develop context-specific solutions and interventions, empower Christians to be salt and light in their communities, fulfill its prophetic mandate to speak truth to power and promote justice.

Therefore, the researcher agrees with Adebayo that social engagement will enable the church in Nigeria to navigate existential challenges, maintain its relevance, and make a meaningful impact in a society facing numerous social and economic challenges. By engaging with the broader society, the church can become a force for transformation, hope, and positive change.

Interfaith Dialogue

Eke (2020) proposes interfaith dialogue as a vital coping strategy for the church in Nigeria to address existential challenges. He argues that the church must engage in constructive conversations with other religious groups, particularly Islam, to: Promote mutual

understanding and respect, address misconceptions and stereotypes, foster cooperation and collaboration on social issues, develop a culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence, encourage joint advocacy for human rights and social justice, explore areas of commonality and shared values.

Eke further emphasizes that interfaith dialogue enables the church to: Demonstrate God's love and acceptance in a pluralistic society, build bridges of understanding and trust with other faith communities, address the root causes of religious conflicts and violence, develop context-specific solutions to interfaith challenges, empower Christians to be effective ambassadors of Christ in a diverse society, fulfill its Biblical mandate to love neighbors and enemies alike.

The researcher agrees with Eke that interfaith dialogue will enable the church in Nigeria to navigate existential challenges, maintain its relevance, and contribute to a more harmonious and peaceful society. By engaging in interfaith dialogue, the church can become a beacon of hope, understanding, and cooperation in a society facing numerous religious and ethnic challenges.

The Ubuntu Concept

Among the contents of traditional African value is Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a concept from the Bantu people of lower Congo, conceived on the basis of their socio-political and moral philosophy. Ubuntu means ‘vital-force’ as the core of social harmony and solidarity. Accordingly, the basic ontology expresses the highest form of being, of aspiration and of action of the Bantu people about life in all its ramification, covering the divine, spiritual, human and other cosmic realities (Okoro, 2010). Overtly, life is the supreme focus, motive and aspiration of the Bantu being, thought and action. Hence, Bantu greatest pre-occupation concerns essentially the preservation and conservation of life. In relation to African sociology however, Ubuntu means one-ness and wholeness of ontology and epistemology (Ramosel, 2007 in Okoro, 2010).

Ubu- is the generalized understanding of be-ing, may be said to be distinctively ontological, whereas Ntu- as the modal point at which be-ing assumes concrete form or modal living is the process if continual enfoldment may be said to the distinctively epistemological (Ramosel, 2007). Against this background Azouzu defines ‘Ubuntu’ as being human, (humanness)

humane, respectful and polite attitude towards others. Ubuntu denote a sense of collective responsibility among human beings to distribute the life force for common benefit. Ubuntu is equivalent to personhood as such symbolizes human existence, community living and solidarity. This Nguini proverb brings out clearly the meaning of Ubuntu in its traditional setting. This by implication is 'Umuntu ngu – umuntu ngobanta' meaning "I am because we are". Mbiti's philosophy from Kenya, therefore expresses the true meaning of African social existence (Okoro, 2010).

Ubuntu as a major concept in African philosophical existence maintains that the true nature of man can only be realised through traditional education that depends on building relationship with others (Lamle, 2016). Yonah explicating more on this socio-political concept maintains that the spirit of Ubuntu is based implicitly on the union of the opposite, hence, while maintaining their inherent differences which are not exclusive. It creates a unified and interconnected conception of human existence. The sense of collective solidarity characterized Ubuntu through love, unity, caring, tolerance, respect, empathy, accountability and responsibility. Ubuntu is the celebration of being in its Trinity of manifestation- the human, natural and spiritual. Ubuntu is a life force that helps maintain equilibrium of forces, natural, spiritual and human in a community. This is experience in one's existence and as such discrimination on basis of race, gender, status; certificate, ability or handicapped were diminished in the traditional African societies. Ubuntu accepts all person's as belonging to the community of the living (Yonah, 2006).

Conclusion

The church in Nigeria faces numerous existential challenges that require effective coping strategies. By employing spiritual revival, social engagement, and interfaith dialogue among others, the church can overcome these challenges and fulfil its mission. Christianity as well as the church, is one of the major religions in Nigeria. This is with a significant numerical strength as well as a profound religious, socio-political and economic influence both within the states and the entire nation. The socio-economic and political existential challenges include; gentrification and displacement; proliferation of churches; state of killings and destruction of lives in Nigerian churches; physical attacks and harassment; destruction of worship centers; loss of property and resources. External factors or persecutions according to Biblical history have not weakened the church but rather strengthen it. On the other hand,

what has weakened the church are the internal factors or challenges like discrimination and disunity as in Acts 6:1-7 and 1Corinthians 3:1-23.

Recommendations

Churches in the Nigerian state have taken new security measures in self-defense, such as increased security checks, self-defense, restrictions on movement, and the use of firearms in church compounds, schools and businesses. Following the findings above the researcher recommends:

1. That constructive dialogue should be employed by the church towards result oriented results. In addition, existential challenges have hindered the churches in Nigeria the ability to evangelize and carry out other activities due to the disruption and fear that they created. The problem of the study is the existing internal and external challenges that have damages to the church in Nigeria and the strategies to cope with such challenges.
2. That Godly values and morality are missing or distorted in the church and godly values should be brought back in Nigerian State. There is need to revive all of our distorted values. Leaders, members and other people caught abusing church should be disciplined and asked to face the law to serve as deterrent to others.
3. That the church should organize transformational workshops to encourage her members on prayers and evangelism. That training and workshops for leaders, pastors and to some extent community leaders should intensify good and healthy relations.

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