

“I believe that the way God has chosen to be present and act throughout history demonstrates a methodology of reconciliation. Our mission is to align ourselves with God, who is working to bring all things together, to reconcile all of creation and particularly a broken, estranged humanity.”¹

Introduction:

From time immemorial there have been conflicts in the Church. “As long as there are people in our lives, we will have differences and conflicts.”² Conflict is part of human nature. Every human being – even Christians, pastors, teachers, bishops, parents, daughters, and sons will know conflict in their lives. The closer people come into relationship the greater the possibility for misunderstanding, disagreement, and conflict. “Though Christians claim to follow Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, they can be very nasty toward one another in their conflicts.”³ I therefore agree with David Shenk that “Wherever people are found, whether in Africa or elsewhere, the sinful elements of strife, conflict, tension, dissention and war surface in one form or another. Justice, Reconciliation and peace are necessary in order to overcome these destroyers of human society.”⁴

Although African Independent Churches (AICs) are one of the fastest growing church movements in the world,⁵ they are not exempt from conflict and its devastation. Ayegboyin and Ishola have noted that “one of the serious problems the AICs are facing is the increasing

¹ John Paul Lederach, *The Journey toward Reconciliation* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1999), 160.

² James G. T. Fairfield, *When You Don't Agree* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1977), 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴ David W. Shenk, *Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa* (Nairobi - Kenya: Uzima Publishing House, 1997), vi.

⁵ BBC Focus on Africa magazine (Jan-Mar. 2001) further claims that, “AICs provide guidance to over 32 million believers across the continent, more than the number ministered to by the Catholics and Protestants combined.”

secession within the movements. It appears new church groups emerge every month!”⁶ Most of these separations are caused by conflicts and it is ruining the AICs and Christendom.

With my thirty (30) years experience of serving the AICs in Ghana, I found out that conflict is destroying the moral fabric of the AICs in Ghana. Conflict has negatively affected most AIC members through bitterness, hatred, disunity, tension, fear, enmity, anger, verbal and physical abuse, and secessions.

For me, the Anabaptist themes that are relevant to the AICs are Accommodation and Reconciliation. Thus accommodating the “enemy” is an important part of the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a significant aspect of peacemaking. In a Church where conflict is common, reconciliation is a theme that needs constant consideration in ways that are appropriate to the context of the AICs. Reconciliation is also a subject at the center of Christianity. For “the gospel is about overcoming alienation and estrangement between God and ourselves, between us and others, and between all of us and creation.”⁷

In the book of Matthew, Jesus gave us a process of reconciling with the sinner, the one we may consider as “enemy:”⁸ From the teachings of Jesus Christ it is important to note that for a genuine reconciliation to take place there must be repentance and forgiveness. Conflict is really resolved and the resolution really internalized when confession and forgiveness occurs.⁹ Forgiveness therefore “becomes concrete among men and women who need to be reconciled among themselves and with God.”¹⁰ The Church is a community in which members are called to

⁶Deji Ayegboyin and Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspective* (Lagos, Nigeria: Greater Heights Publications, 1999), 153.

⁷ John W. De Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1.

⁸ Matthew 18:15-17

⁹ Robert Herr and Judy Zimmerman, ed., *Transforming Violence: Linking Local and Global Peacemaking* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1998), 60.

¹⁰ Driver, 41.

forgive and accommodate each other and thus experience reconciliation. “Through forgiving relationships among His people, God makes visible His forgiveness in the world.”¹¹

The AICs are called to be a reconciling community.¹² God has given the ministry of reconciliation and the message of reconciliation to the Church. The AICs are therefore Christ’s ambassadors participating in God’s mission of reconciling the world unto Himself through Jesus Christ in Africa. As Christ’s ambassadors of reconciliation, the AICs must follow Jesus’ teaching on reconciliation to resolve their conflict amicably. It is only when they are able to reconcile with one another, then they can effectively enact the gospel of reconciliation and peace to those in conflict, the oppressed, the poor, and the broken hearted.

Reconciliation and peace do not just happen; it is made. The AICs in Ghana in an effort to bring reconciliation and justice to the people should intentionally take an action to bring relationships torn by conflict into a condition of genuine reconciliation. Their churches must “get involved in the complexities and anguish of conflict and must find the threads from which to weave a new bond of justice and harmony.”¹³

Though AICs at times try hard to avoid conflicts, it periodically enters their lives. Their failure to resolve these conflicts amicably leads to enmity, inability of the leadership of the church to work as a team, resentment, and at times verbal and physical abuse among members.

Finally some AIC leaders and elders at times delay in resolving conflicts. Others try to avoid or ignore the conflict. They pray that the conflict will resolve by itself, but the conflict later becomes serious with devastating consequences. Delaying or avoiding conflict at times builds resentment, tension, gossip, and backbiting. It also causes people to vent their emotions on the wrong people. It is essential that AICs leaders will not ignore or avoid conflicts. Because the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² 2Corinthians 5:17-20

¹³ Buttry, p.xi

earlier they resolve conflicts the better. “the church is a place of encounter. It is a place of Truth-discerning and Truth-telling. It is a place for vulnerable transparency. It is a place for interactive engagement. It is a place of accountability. It is, after all, a place where we journey toward each other and toward God.”¹⁴ As The AICs discern the truth together, as they encounter and interact with each other, as they hold each other accountable and journey toward God and each other, they are liable to disagree with each. In times of disagreements, accommodation should be used in achieving reconciliation because it is not possible to achieve reconciliation through insults, gossips, hatred, quarreling, violence, and secessions.

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¹⁴ Lederach, 132.

