



Can Church Conflict Inhibit Moral Development and Christian Formation? A Study of Emmanuel Kengeleni Parish of Mombasa Diocese in the Anglican Church of Kenya (2000-2010)

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Abstract

The study set out to examine the impact of church conflict on moral development and Christian formation with a special reference to Emmanuel Kengeleni Parish of Mombasa Diocese in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) between 2000 -2010. For acquisition of data, the study used qualitative methodology. The study found that the conflict had enormous effects on the church and society both spiritually and socio-economically. As an opportunity, the conflict became a source of church growth, expansion and Christian maturity whereas on the other hand it became associated with retarded development, rivalry, strained relations and negative publicity. The study recommends that church leaders be trained on conflict resolution and that churches ought to provide avenues and structures of proactive conflict resolution mechanism in order to remain the beckon of moral development and Christian formation in the society.

Key words: Conflict, Moral development, Christian formation, Freretown

Introduction

It is a global assertion that the church should be characterized by cohesion and peace among Christians with an aim of guiding them to live a holistic life (Rubin, 2006). Peaceful co-existence of all Christians regardless of origins and background is a core value of the church. This calls for total peace, which is only achievable in the absence of all types of conflicts (Rubin, 2006). Major changes and continued turbulence in the religious, social, political, technological and economic environments from local to global level, are continuously creating an uncertain and complex environment in which organizations have to operate (Van Tonder, 2008). Increasing uncertainty and complexity in the operating environment of organizations provide fertile ground for the onset of conflicts in the work place. The Anglican Church has not been spared either.

African countries continue to be devoured by various types of conflicts. According to Deng, 20% of sub-Saharan population lives in countries that are at war within themselves (Deng, 2005). Because of poor leadership, Africa accounts for more war-related deaths than the rest of the world. It is evident that leadership remains a big challenge to many people from virtually all occupations and organizations including the churches. The Anglican Church is a product of the conflict based subdivisions and has experienced complex conflicts that have led to further split or subdivisions. Instructional, administrative, and mission efforts are lost because churches are



filled with conflicts that dioceses and parishes manage poorly. The frequency and severity of conflicts seems to be increasing (Odhiambo, 2017).

According to Fredrick Uledi (retired lay leader and long time church elder from Freretown), Emmanuel Kengeleni was initially built to serve the spiritual needs of the freed slaves at Freretown freed slaves settlement (Uledi, OI 9-92016). However, as time went by and with the coming of independence from the colonialist, the church was opened up for all people to worship. The church leadership, which was solely in the hands of the descendants of the freed slaves, slowly changed hands as other communities, came in and outnumbered the Freretown community.

Historical issues such as identity crisis, church ownership, and management of church resources, struggle for leadership and misappropriation of church funds may be some of the triggers of these conflicts. There has been also perceived stigma directed to Freretown community by other communities and the locals who at times looked down at them as “foreigners” because most of them were settled after slave trade was abolished. There is evidence of conflict and wrangles in the church as depicted in an article in the local newspapers on 26th November 2007 (Maundu, 2007). Arguably, the relationship between the leadership of Emmanuel Kengeleni and the Freretown Community has been of co-operation, suspicion and/or accusations and even conflict (Kenya Law Civil Suit, 2007). This has a significant impact on the moral development and Christian formation of the society involved.

Statement of the Problem

The relationship between the leadership of Kengeleni church and the Freretown Community has changed a lot over the years. There has been conflict in the church between the Freretown community (whose majority are Christians and members of the Anglican Church) and the leadership of the church. This contestation has manifested in both internal leadership wrangles as well as in public media. From 2000 to 2010, the leadership of Kengeleni church experienced a very hostile relationship with the Freretown community. What was the impact of the church conflict on the moral development and Christian formation? The study intended to analyse the impact of the conflict on the moral development and Christian formation between the years 2000 to 2010.

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to analyse the impact of church conflict on Moral development and Christian formation with special reference to Emmanuel Kengeleni Parish of the diocese of Mombasa.

Literature Review

Moral development is extremely important in the life of every human being. It is a concern for every parent. Teaching a child to distinguish right from wrong and to behave accordingly is a goal of parenting. As in all aspects of growth, the development of concepts of good and bad, right and wrong, is gradual and depends much on the help of others (Garrett, 1995). According to Kohlberg, a religious person who has experienced the power and love of the indwelling spirit of Jesus and has surrendered to it, no longer behaves in terms of laws or principles, but is moved constantly by the great love for God, for creation, and for people (Garrett, 1995).



Meier, Minirth and Wichern (1982), in their book, *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling: Christian Perspectives and Application* state that Psychological development will enable children to live in society and earn a living, but spiritual development will enable them to understand the meaning of life. Young Children are lovingly guided in spiritual development when their parents follow Gods commandments to teach them (Deut. 6:6-7), train them (Prov. 22:6), and bring them up (Eph. 6:4) so they will be able to experience the abundant life (John 10:10). In these obligations, Christian Parents often fall short. Fathers especially may become so wrapped up in their own world that they neglect their highest calling, the spiritual development of their children (Meier, Minirth and Wichern, 1982). Some foundations for spiritual development can be laid during infancy. An infant certainly does not understand religious beliefs and concepts, but parental religious beliefs strongly influence the attitudes they will have toward that infant. The child, sensing the overall home atmosphere, begins to respond to parental behavior and attitudes (Ibid, 1982).

According to Powers, spiritual formation is the process of committing one's life to Jesus Christ. It occurs through reading, classes, and study, as well as through relationships with other believers. Modeling, classroom instruction, mentoring, befriending, and personal devotion in prayer and study are all part of spiritual formation (Powers, 1996). Spiritual formation entails Christian life style, personal piety, prayer and spiritual gifts. The program core contains basic teachings considered critical to the life of the church and common to the churches' denominational identity (Powers, 1996). Each program has responsibility for tasks that give shape to some aspects of Christian growth and development. This clearly demonstrates the importance of the church in moral development and Christian formation.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the qualitative research design, which aimed at gathering an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior (Yates and Leggett, 2016). Data was collected using in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD's) and archival resources. Secondary data was obtained from various libraries (physical and virtual) and from the internet.

The area of study was Emmanuel Kengeleni situated within Freretown, Kisauni sub-county of the larger Mombasa County in Kenya. The choice of this area of study was influenced by the rich old history that goes to around 130 years ago. According to the church register, it was observed that the church had at least 850 registered members before the conflict erupted (ACK Kengeleni, 2003). The study involved 56 respondents, who included both former and present church leaders represented the larger population. Of the 56 respondents, 40 took part in the interview, while 16 took part in the 2 FGDs. The study applied purposive and snow balling techniques to select the respondent. These techniques helped the researcher to select a sample that had vast knowledge on the research topic and reduced the chances of biasness. The table 1 below is a summary of the target population and percentage interviewed.



| Categories of Respondents | Target size | Sampled Size | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Clergy | 12 | 7 | 58.3% |
| KAMA | 14 | 9 | 64.3% |
| Mothers Union | 11 | 6 | 54.5% |
| KAYO | 9 | 5 | 55.6% |
| Church Elders | 20 | 13 | 65% |
| Total | 66 | 40 | 60.6% |

Table 1: Configuration of Sample Size

Source: *Field Research 2017*

The study utilized contextual thematic analysis of data to identify common themes in the data. Data generated was presented in descriptive prose. Data analysis was done through differentiating themes, scrutinizing, comparing, contrasting and finally interpreting them on the basis of emergent meaningful patterns that were observed from the data as the evidence from which the research findings was used to draw conclusions and make generalizations guided by the study objectives.

Study findings

The Conflict led to the Spread of the Christian Faith

According to FGD (1), the Christian Community from Kengeleni who moved out due to the conflict carried with them the gospel and established churches wherever they went (FGD 12-08-2016). Tertullian, an early church Father, asserted that, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (Kendal, 2016). This meant that the martyrdom of the early Christians led to a great desire, passion and zeal for evangelism, and therefore, had a great impact in the spread of Christianity in the early church. This situation was not different with the case of Kengeleni. According to Murutu, the church conflict became a catalyst for church growth (Murutu OI, 14-09-2016). Those who left became active in evangelism and church leadership. Kalama (OI, 17-9-2016), Ofundi (OI, 15-8-2017) and Mwambila (OI, 15-8-2017) share same sentiments.

Conflict contributed to the spread of Christian faith and this then contributed positively to the moral development and Christian formation as reflected on table 2 below. A discussion with FGD 1 and 2 indicate that the conflict contributed to the spread of Christian faith through establishment of daughter churches.



Table 2: Spread of Christian Faith as an Impact of conflict at Kengeleni

| Category | Number Interviewed | Respondents who viewed Spread of Christian Faith as an Impact | Percentage |
|----------|--------------------|---|------------|
| Clergy | 7 | 7 | 100% |
| KAMA | 9 | 3 | 33% |
| MU | 6 | 1 | 17% |
| KAYO | 5 | 1 | 20% |
| Elders | 13 | 3 | 23% |

Conflict Contributed to the Development of Christian Maturity

According to Bishop Kalu, conflict provides Christians with an opportunity to develop virtues that lead to maturity (Kalu OI, 12-08-2017). These include patience, humility, forgiveness, tolerance, love, gentleness, self-control among others. It is in such a situation that they develop spiritual characteristics and it deepens their faith, trust and dependence on God. They become more prayerful, as they seek divine intervention. Reverend Mwaro Baya observes that when a church is involved in a conflict, its congregants get an opportunity to reflect on their relationship with God and their fellow human beings (Baya OI, 12-8-2017). According to the study findings, majorities are in agreement on the effects of conflict on Christian maturity (see table 3 below). A discussion with FGDs 1 and 2 are of the opinion that no Christian maturity was attained because of the conflict.

Table 3: Christian Maturity as an Impact of conflicts at Kengeleni

| Category | Number Interviewed | Respondents who Viewed Christian Maturity as an Impact | Percentage |
|----------|--------------------|--|------------|
| Clergy | 7 | 5 | 71% |
| KAMA | 9 | 5 | 56% |
| MU | 6 | 3 | 50% |
| KAYO | 5 | 0 | 0% |
| Elders | 13 | 2 | 15% |

The Conflict Hindered Development

The conflict hampered the growth and development of Emmanuel church Kengeleni. Ndumbi noted that, “The Court cases were cumbersome, expensive and demanding. This left no time for pastoral duties and evangelism; as a result there was no congregational growth” (Ndumbi OI, 11-8-2017). A large number of participants in the study reported that the conflict hindered development in the church. All of the Mothers Union (MU) 100% , 92% of the elders, 80% of youth (KAYO), 78% of men (KAMA) and 57% of the clergy were of this opinion (see table 4 below). Both FGD 1 and 2 strongly agree that there was slow or retarded development during the conflict.



Table 4: Slowed Development as an Impact of conflict at Kengeleni

| Category | Number Interviewed | Respondents Who Viewed Slowed Development As An Impact | Percentage |
|----------|--------------------|--|------------|
| Clergy | 7 | 4 | 57% |
| KAMA | 9 | 7 | 78% |
| MU | 6 | 6 | 100% |
| KAYO | 5 | 4 | 80% |
| Elders | 13 | 12 | 92% |

Rivalry and Strained Relations

Rivalry groups were formed because of the conflict at Kengeleni. The rivalry was characterized by ill talk, defamation and counter accusation and even demonstration. Otieno observed that, “The conflict took a different twist when it became an issue between the Freretown community against the non-Freretown members (Otieno OI, 12-9-2016). A considerable number of participants in this study reported that the conflict at Kengeleni had led to rivalry and strained relationship among the leaders and congregants. The table below gives a summary. From the discussion with FGD 1 and 2 the conflict resulted into strained relationships among church members.

Table 5: Strained Relationships as an Impact of Conflict at Kengeleni

| Category | Number Interviewed | Respondents who viewed Strained Relationship as an Impact | Percentage |
|----------|--------------------|---|------------|
| Clergy | 7 | 5 | 71% |
| KAMA | 9 | 8 | 89% |
| MU | 6 | 3 | 50% |
| KAYO | 5 | 3 | 60% |
| Elders | 13 | 10 | 77% |

Negative Publicity by the Media

The conflict in the church took a different twist when it attracted the attention of both print and electronic media, observed Mbui (Mbui OI, 9-9-2016). In the Daily Nation on Thursday August 23 2007, a whole page was dedicated to the conflict at Kengeleni. The article entitled ‘Spirit of Controversy: Property dispute mars rich history of the second oldest church in Kenya’ (Nation Media 2007). Another article by Mathias Ringa published in the Taifa Leo November 27 2007 carried the title ‘Mizozo: Kasisi ahamishwa-Kanisa lake limekuwa likikumbwa na migogoro’ (Controversy in church, the priest whose church was in controversy has been transferred). Another one “Mwenye Nguvu Mpishe”, (Give way to the strong ones) which appeared on Taifa Leo November 26 2007 and many others in both radio and local Television and the persistent protests and closure of the church painted a very negative image of the church. Most of the participants in the study reported that conflict at the church put the church in bad light due to



negative publicity in the media (see table 6 below). The discussion with FGD 1 and 2 revealed that there was indeed negative publicity by the media.

Table 6: Negative Publicity as an Impact of Conflict at Kengeleni

| Category | Number Interviewed | Respondents who viewed Negative Publicity as an Impact | Percentage |
|-----------------|---------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Clergy | 7 | 5 | 71% |
| KAMA | 9 | 6 | 67% |
| MU | 6 | 6 | 100% |
| KAYO | 5 | 3 | 60% |
| Elders | 13 | 9 | 69% |

This painted a negative image of the Church as the body of Christ and therefore, affected the moral development and Christian formation.

Recommendations and Areas for further study

The conflict at Kengeleni had spiritual and socio-economic impact, which had a direct effect on the moral development and Christian formation on the congregation and the community at large. On the spiritual aspect, it aided the spread of Christianity. Those who could not contend with the situation moved to other churches and took up leadership and positions in ministry. In addition, those who remained behind became more mature in Christian values and virtues. The endurance and perseverance made them strong in the Lord and grew resilience in their character. They became strong in faith and dedicated to God having gone through the refiner's fire. The experience gained helped them to be more effective and cautious in handling conflict.

The conflict had also socio-economic effects to the Kengeleni church. Because of the conflict the church attendance decreased. There was also low income in terms of Sunday offertories. In addition, the church bank accounts were frozen, making it impossible for the church to access her money for development. The environment was very hostile, congregation so much divided, and this made development practically difficult. No development project was undertaken during this period in time.

The conflict resulted in rivalry and strained relations among the leadership as well as the members of the congregation. There was a lot of hostility among them which resulted into demonstrations and physical fighting. The conflict had a negative publicity on the ACK church in both print and electronic media. The chaos, protests, court cases and physical confrontations were in the headlines in the media. This was a very unfortunate situation for the Kengeleni church and the church of Christ at large. It portrayed moral decay and the church lost its prophetic and moral power to challenge the society in such related issues. This affected the moral development and Christian formation of the members and the society. Therefore, church lost its moral authority as the salt and the light of the world.

This study draws its conclusion based on the findings as analyzed using the Conflict Theory advanced by Karl Marx. As expounded by the theorist so was the case at Kengeleni that tension



and conflict arise when resources, status, and power are unevenly distributed between groups in society, and that these conflicts become the engine for social change. In this context, power can be understood as control of material resources and accumulated wealth, control of politics and the institutions that make up society (determined not just by class but by race, gender, sexuality, culture, and religion, among other things). The outcome of social negligence or dissatisfaction was that affected individuals and communities were prevented from participating fully in the economic, social and political life of the society in which they live. This finally created tension, which led to conflict.

In summary, the study noted that the conflict at Emmanuel Kengeleni was due to differences between the leadership. The differences could have been as a result of identity crisis, struggle for leadership, scramble for resources and misappropriation of church funds. According to the theory insufficient access to social rights, material deprivation, limited social participation and lack of normative integration will lead to disagreements and even conflict. Using the Conflict Theory, the study established that the differences between the leadership of the church and the Freretown community formed the base for the conflict that occurred.

Recommendations

In view of the findings, this study therefore makes the following recommendations. The administrative structures of the church should be strengthened and authority vested in the various committees should be allowed to operate. The church should stick to the constitution in the process of elections and forming any committees. Church conflicts should be handled proactively and not reactively. Proper mechanism (structures of handling conflict) should be developed and enshrined in the constitution that will enable efficient and effective modalities of conflict resolution. Priests and church leaders must be trained and equipped well in matters of conflict management and resolution.

Suggestions for further studies

Taking into considerations the limitation of the study, the following suggestions were made for further research. It would have been of paramount value if such studies are done in another ACK Church with the same challenges but different locality. The findings could help establish the trend of conflict in the ACK Churches and its impact on the moral development and spiritual formation. This is because the findings of this study might not be expressly applicable to other mainstream churches. It should also be noted that, the extent to which a given factor contributes to conflict in one church varies with the context and set up. It is from such studies that key factors causing conflict in the ACK churches can be established. Study should also be carried out to find out the structures and mechanism that other ACK Churches have put in place for handling conflicts. With the increase in the rate of conflicts in the church, it can help the ACK Churches to put in place the right mechanism for conflict mitigation.

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