

**A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST DENOMINATION'S
STRATEGY FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian Baptist denomination, like every other Christian group since the inception of the Christian church, is familiar with conflicts among members of the church. In order to resolve these conflicts, the Constitution of the Nigerian Baptist Convention provided for the settling of crisis. But these provisions notwithstanding, conflicts have continued unabated and their resolution has been as difficult as ever.

This thesis is an attempt to evaluate the denomination's strategy for conflict resolution in order to establish its sufficiency or otherwise, and make recommendations that may assist in alleviating the situation.

The first chapter deals with the Introduction to the thesis and examines the problem of conflicts and its significance; the method of study; and the assumptions and limitations of the research efforts.

The second chapter looks at the Nigerian Baptist denomination and its denominational bodies like the associations, conferences, and the convention. The need to do this is borne out of the fact that the nature of an organization has a lot of influence on the relationships among those who belong to the organization.

The third chapter is on conflicts in the Nigerian Baptist denomination. Here we examined at some length, the meaning of conflict; conflicts in the New Testament and post-apostolic times; conflict and the emergence of Baptist

churches; conflicts within Baptist churches; conflicts involving two or more churches; and conflicts involving associations, conferences, and the convention.

The fourth chapter deals with the evaluation of the Nigerian Baptist denomination's strategy for conflict resolution. After identifying what this strategy is, its biblical basis; its consistency with Baptist polity; its effectiveness; and its completeness or comprehensiveness were critically examined in that order.

The fifth and final chapter is on conclusions and recommendations that may make the strategy more effective in resolving conflicts in the Nigerian Baptist denomination. The thesis ends with a bibliography and an appendix.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have seen, in this thesis, that the Nigerian Baptist denomination has witnessed, almost since inception, a great deal of conflicts in local Baptist churches and in the denominational bodies like the association, the conference, and the convention. These conflicts have had adverse effects upon the lives of individuals, churches and denominational bodies. Individuals have been hurt, angered, embittered, and had their relationship with other Christians strained by church conflicts. Churches have been thrown into turmoil and split as a result of church conflicts. Church worship services have disrupted by warring factions in a church fight and the police have been drafted to maintain law and order among God's people. Church worshippers have been locked out by police who are determined to prevent the shedding of blood and the breaking of heads in God's house. Members of Baptist churches have taken one another to court, and denominational leaders have also had cases filed against them in court by churches of the denomination. A lot of reproach has been brought upon the name of Christ in neighbourhoods where feuding churches are located. The witness of churches in such places has been weakened by conflicts. This situation, coupled with the withdrawal of members from churches in conflict has led to the dwindling church attendance and membership in many churches. The denominational bodies have also suffered a great deal as a result of conflicts. Financial support due to them from feuding churches has almost always been

diverted to the prosecution of court cases. Conflicts between denominational bodies and churches affiliated with them have also led to dwindling revenue. The resolution of conflicts in the denomination has consumed an enormous amount of time that could have been utilized in more productive ventures like evangelism and missions.

The Nigerian Baptist denomination has not been indifferent to the developments mentioned above. This is the reason for the insertion of a "Procedure for Settlement of Crisis" in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. But this constitutional provision has neither greatly reduced the incidences of conflict among Nigerian Baptists nor helped as much as expected in the resolution of conflicts whenever they occur. In spite of it, we still have unresolved conflicts and increasing reports of conflicts among local Baptist churches and denominational bodies. The aim of this thesis is to discover where the problem lies.

After the introduction, this thesis considered the nature and character of the Nigerian Baptist denomination and its denominational bodies. The principle undergirding any society may provide valuable clues to the understanding of how such a society should function or why it functions the way it does.

The thesis considered next the conflicts in the Nigerian Baptist denomination. Three general kinds of conflicts were identified, namely, conflict within churches; conflicts involving two or more churches; and finally, conflicts involving associations, conferences, and the convention. We looked at several examples of the conflicts and the way they were resolved.

