Paul's Model of Mediation: Principles and Applications for Conflict Resolution in Churches

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Abstract

Purpose: The article explores Paul's model of mediation with a focus on the principles and applications that can inform effective conflict resolution in the contemporary church. Apostle Paul's letter to Philemon offers valuable insights into conflict resolution and mediation, particularly in respect to conflict management amidst church members.

Materials and Methods: Using the method of critical examination and hermeneutical assessment of Paul's epistle to Philemon, this article identifies and analyses the essential elements of Paul's mediation model.

Findings: It is discovered that Paul's mediation model as a reconciliatory model of conflict management has the following attributes: establishing authority and rapport, appealing to shared values, reframing the relationship, advocating for the vulnerable party, offering reparation and appealing to conscience rather than coercion.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: This article recommends the adaptation of Paul's mediation model to conflicts arising in the contemporary church.

Keywords: *Mediation, Principles, Conflict Resolution, Churches*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Conflict has been an inherent part of human interaction since biblical times, affecting all spheres of society, including religious institutions. The church, as a community of diverse individuals, is not immune to disputes and disagreements. These conflicts, if left unresolved, can significantly impair the church's productivity, spiritual growth, and overall mission. The need for effective conflict resolution methods in churches has become increasingly apparent in recent years. Traditional approaches to dispute management within religious settings have often relied on hierarchical authority structures or simplistic applications of biblical principles. However, these methods have not always been successful in addressing the complex interpersonal dynamics and diverse issues that arise in modern church communities.

In the context of this study, the Apostle Paul's approach to mediation, as exemplified in his letter to Philemon, offers a compelling model for conflict resolution that combines spiritual wisdom with practical interpersonal skills. Paul's epistle to Philemon, though brief, provides a rich case study of mediation in early Christian communities. It demonstrates how Paul navigated a sensitive situation involving Philemon, a slave owner, and Onesimus, his runaway slave who had become a Christian under Paul's ministry. Paul's mediation model, as revealed in this epistle, encompasses several key principles: the emphasis on Christian brotherhood, the importance of love and forgiveness, the recognition of individual worth regardless of social status, and the use of persuasive communication to facilitate reconciliation. These principles offer a nuanced approach to conflict resolution that goes beyond mere problem-solving to address the deeper relational and spiritual dimensions of disputes within a church context.

The relevance of Paul's mediation model to contemporary church conflict resolution lies in its holistic approach. It addresses not only the immediate dispute but also the underlying relationships and community dynamics. This approach aligns with modern conflict management theories that emphasize the importance of preserving relationships and addressing the root causes of conflicts. Moreover, Paul's model offers a biblically-grounded alternative to secular mediation techniques, which may not fully account for the unique spiritual and communal aspects of church life. By studying and applying Paul's principles, church leaders and members can develop more effective strategies for managing conflicts that arise within their congregations.

This study aims to explore Paul's model of mediation as presented in his letter to Philemon, analyze its key components, and consider how these principles can be applied to contemporary conflict resolution in churches. By examining this biblical example in light of modern conflict management theories and practices, we can develop a more comprehensive and spiritually-informed approach to addressing disputes within Christian communities. The findings of this study have the potential to enhance the conflict resolution skills of church leaders, foster healthier church communities, and ultimately contribute to the more effective fulfillment of the church's mission in society. As churches continue to navigate complex social and interpersonal challenges, Paul's model of mediation offers valuable insights for maintaining unity, fostering reconciliation, and promoting spiritual growth within Christian communities.

Concept of Conflict

From a general perspective, the word conflict comes from the Latin word *conflictus* which literally means, to strike together, clash or collusion. Conflict results when two or more objects try to occupy the same space at the same time. The object could be persons, groups,

organisations; the "space" refers to their interrelatedness, where the interaction of their goals or intention takes place (Lewis, 1981:5). In the words of Mc Swain and Treadwell (1981), "conflict describes those experiences of individuals and groups trying to achieve goals which are either incompatible or appears to be so". The evidence of such incompatibility usually appears in sharp arguments and serious disagreements.

In human organizations, the general notion of conflict seems to be predicated on disagreement over values; so that conflict is seen as a process that begins when an individual or a group perceives differences and opposition between itself and another individual or group about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them. (Thomas, 1992; Van de Vliert, 1997; Wall and Callister, 1995) The idea of conflict as differences in goals and collision of interests is supported by Willimore (1994) in his article "*Crisis and Conflict in Leadership*" where he opines that whenever two or more people pursue mutually exclusive goals, or whenever one person's needs collide with another's, conflict becomes inevitable. Therefore, if there were no efforts among humans to fulfil ideas, goals or desires, there would be no conflict.

To Wilson and Hanna (1979), inability to unite personal ideas, value or resources amidst human organisations can lead to conflict as man would naturally want to have his way. And since life is generally about struggle for survival, the likelihood of conflict in the pursuit of goals within the ambits of personal ideas, values and limited recourses would be inevitable. This notion is supported by Omojola (1998:15) when he describes conflict as a clash of interest and personality. Specifically, Mc Swain and Treadwell (1981) opine that conflict describes those experiences of individuals and groups trying to realise goals which are either incompatible or seems to be so. "Conflict is essentially about needs, interests, positions and goals often competed for by men in the society". It suffices to say that conflict involves disagreement of individuals over issues of different views. Conflict occurs when two people believe that their current desires, aspirations, interests, cannot be achieved simultaneously.

Man, as a social being cannot live alone; the interaction from this mutual co-existence leads to conflict over resources, interests and desires. As such, conflict can be the result of man's unique interests and desires clashing with one another. Aligned with this thought, Akintunde and Dzurgba (2006) holds that diversities in human society is the result of man's inability to manage God's given resources in a way that would bring positive outcomes from conflict.

Rodgers (1979) also views conflict as a strained relationship between two or more people of a given body or group. He observes that conflict may be a product of uneven share of privileges and responsibilities between those individuals. For instance, where an individual gives much more attention to his personal interests and benefits than the goal of the whole group or when the group fails to pay adequate attention to the interests and wellbeing of the individual members within the group, this may result in conflict. In fact, this arguably is the cause of most inter-ethnic conflicts.

Dale (1974) further suggests that many of the conflicts experienced in organisations grow out of lack of communication and interpersonal contract agreement between individuals within the organisation and others. This lack of understanding amongst people of a group often results to further breakdown of communication when the channels of communication are not properly defined. Ezegbe (1997) says that conflict is the mutual hostility at inter-personal, inter-human, inter-actions levels. This mutual hostility can be verbal, physical or emotional depending on the

nature of the conflict. Ogunna (1993) sees conflict as a situation in which persons or groups disagree over means or ends and try to establish their views in preference to others. It is also a behaviour by a person or group that is purposefully designed to block the attainment of goals by another person or group. The fact that people within a given association, or social group, religious bodies or organisation decides to be members of such organisations with some specific needs that are expected to be met by the group or association they have joined. Therefore, conflicts are liable to emerge when those needs are not met. Conor (1995), also emphasized that conflict may surface within a given organisation as a result of the reaction of extreme criticisms from members of such an organisation to the leadership and leadership to the members respectively. This implies that conflict may generate from leadership to the organisation and from the organisation to the leaders.

In his book, *Contentious Community,* Miller (1978) speaks of the inevitability of conflict in human relationships, even among Christians who profess the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and holistically agree to biblical teachings. This is difficult for many people (including Christian) to understand. Many think of the church of Jesus Christ as a company of people among whom there should be no divisions, no disagreement but peace, harmony, love and total calmness. However, such people fail to understand that the church can love each other, but many can still be divided and disagree over issues and matters of diverse interests. One may tend to agree with Miller's position because the church being a human organisation is not immune to conflicts. Thus, conflict is an integral part of any social organisation where people with differing nature, opinion and resources interact at a common place, pursuing same interests. Such interaction would show individual concerns, goal and aspirations that are likely to compete with or impede other persons within the group. So as human beings interact in organisations, differing values and situations create tension. Conflict is thereby viewed as a situation in which two or more individuals operating within a unit appear to be incompatible.

From the foregoing, conflict can be an endemic situation common to all human associations which could be negative (destructive), if not adequately managed, motivated and upheld by selfishness of any group or individual. It can equally be positive (constructive), if it is perceived by members or individuals within the group as challenges through which the organisation can be better solidified in terms of foundation as well as mutually understanding one another. In the context of this study, conflict is an inevitable situation of disagreement between two or more groups within the church which should not be seen as negative circumstances alone; but be seen as positive condition that could lead members of the Christian body to solidify their foundation, values, goodwill, and mutual understanding. Through it, a holistic acceptable environment can be created and sustained for the work of the ministry; thus, the need for conflict management. Since conflict is inevitable, there is need to change the way one understands the word conflict and learn to deal with it in a healthy way.

Concept of Church

The word church is derived from the Greek word, ecclesia, which means the called-out ones. The church is therefore a congregation of called persons who come together to form an association having the same interest to pursue. Menn (2021) defines the church with several metaphors amidst which we have: the Vine of God, God's field, Royal Priesthood, God's house/tabernacle, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ and sons or children of God. This study identifies and expatiates on only two of these metaphors as it applies to the context of this study.

The Church as the Body of Christ

The status of the church as the body of Christ is recorded in the Holy Scriptures. According to Ephesians 1:22-23, Christ is referred to as the head (of the church), the church being his body. "… God hath put all things under his feet and given him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filled all in all". In another instance, I Corinth. 12:12-13, the church is referred to as the body of Christ, each person performing the roles of the different part of the human body. "As the body is one and has many members of the body, being many, are one body, so also the Christ. For also is one spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or fee and have all been given to drink of the spirit which is one"

The implication of the above-quoted scriptures is that although the members of the church are numerous and scattered over the globe, they are one body in Christ. Neither of the members of the human body can consider itself independent of the other, so also are the members of the body of Christ; they are expected to be united just as the body is. Paul buttressed on this in his epistle to the Romans as recorded in Rom. 12:5 and also to the Corinthians as seen in 1Cor. 10:17 that "we being many are one bread, one body". God really regards His people as those who belong to the Church of Jesus Christ. By one spirit they have all been baptised into one body, once they have been converted no matter what their nationality or race and now, they are one body in Christ.

Nonetheless, the different parts of the body have different uses and different except these body parts adopt unity as a style, it will be difficult for the body to achieve any meaningful thing. The body parts all work together for the wellbeing of the total body. The mouth cannot take claim independence of the other parts likewise the other parts too. Therefore, as the body of Christ, while there may be instances of conflict, the church is expected to manage such conflict for the total wellbeing of the whole body.

The Church as a Building

The church is further typified as a building. In this light, the church is to be seen as bricks that are carefully knitted together in order to give a beautiful building. This translates to the relevancy of all members of the church irrespective of tribe, ethnicity or language. As a building therefore, Christ is the foundation while every member (leaders and followers alike) are bricks laid upon one another. It suffices to say that if each members are bricks that make up the building, no one is irrelevant or less important in the church. Therefore, life's realities must not be permitted to tear apart the church of God.

Before a building can stand and be employed for the purpose for which it is constructed, numerous materials must be put together and different skilful men will work there. All these varying materials and skilful men must work together irrespective of their individual differences in order to produce a useful building. These different materials and skills must be arranged, managed and organized together in order to birth a useful structure. Their differences, when noticed must be ironed out and the primary purpose of the house must be prioritized. In this light, the church is not immune to differences but these differences must not deprive the church of her primary goal. Instead, the church must deploy the knowledge of these differences in the organization of the church.

These metaphors presents the church as an organization composed of, constructed and managed by human beings. In this light, the church as a human organization is not immune to conflicts or disagreement. However, this study supposes that failure to properly manage discord within the church will make it impossible for the church to fulfil her mandate on earth. Conflict in itself is not necessarily negative but failure to adequately manage conflicts in human organization can dissipate the peace and tranquillity of human existence.

Conflict in the Early Church

Conflict in the Early Church was a significant aspect of Christianity's formative years, shaping doctrines, practices, and organizational structures that would influence the faith for centuries to come. One of the earliest and most prominent conflicts in the Early Church centered on the relationship between Jewish law and Christian faith. The Jerusalem Council, described in Acts 15, addressed whether Gentile converts needed to follow Jewish customs, particularly circumcision (Dunn, 2009). This conflict highlighted the tension between maintaining continuity with Jewish roots and embracing a new, more inclusive faith.

Doctrinal disputes were another major source of conflict in the early church. As the church grew and spread, different interpretations of Christ's nature and the Trinity emerged. The Arian controversy of the 4th century, which debated whether Jesus was of the same substance as God the Father, was particularly divisive (Williams, 2001). This conflict led to the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, which sought to establish orthodox doctrine.

Gnosticism presented another significant challenge to early Christian orthodoxy. Gnostic teachings, which emphasized secret knowledge and a dualistic view of the material and spiritual worlds, were deemed heretical by many church leaders (King, 2003). The conflict between Gnostic and orthodox views contributed to the development of a more defined Christian canon and creed. Conflicts also arose from external pressures, such as persecution by Roman authorities and interactions with pagan philosophies. These challenges forced the Early Church to define its beliefs and practices more precisely, often through apologetic writings (Grant, 1988). To address these conflicts, the Early Church employed various methods such as:

1. Councils and synods: Gathering church leaders to debate and decide on doctrinal issues (Davis, 1983).
2. Development of creeds: Formulating statements of belief to establish orthodoxy (Kelly, 1972).
3. Apologetics: Writing defenses of Christian faith against external criticisms and internal heresies (Grant, 1988).
4. Excommunication: Excluding those deemed heretical from the church community (Williams, 2001).
5. Monastic movements: Establishing communities dedicated to preserving and practicing "pure" Christianity (Rousseau, 1978).

In summary, conflict in the Early Church played a crucial role in shaping Christian theology, practice, and organization. Much more, the measures through which these conflicts were managed engineered positive social growth and development in the early Church. Till date, the

conflicts in the early church and the ways they arrived at resolutions continue to influence Christian thought and denominational divisions to this day.

Till date, the causes of conflict in the early church such as ethnicity, marginalization, maladministration, and so on are still evident in the contemporary church. Beyond that, the contemporary church has manifested disputes over leadership roles, doctrines and denominationalism, tribalism and many others. The early church managed uprising conflicts to strengthen the church. The contemporary church can do the same.

Causes of Conflict in the Contemporary Church

The church organisation is a spiritual association. Disputes in the church can be of some peculiar dimensions. Some notable causes of disputes in the church nowadays are discussed below:

Theological disagreements: One of the primary sources of conflict in modern churches stems from differing interpretations of scripture and doctrine. For instance, debates over issues like same-sex marriage, women in leadership roles, and the literal interpretation of the Bible have led to significant divisions among church leaders. (Smith, 2018).

Cultural and societal changes: As society evolves, churches often struggle to adapt while maintaining their core values. This tension can lead to internal conflicts, particularly between more progressive and conservative factions within congregations (Johnson, 2020). For instance, there are churches where premium attention to given to the dressing and appearance of members of the church. Members who cannot adhere strictly to outline of the church on such matters are either ostracised or considered as non-adherents. Attempt at correcting some people even leads to conflict within the church members.

Leadership and governance issues: Disagreements over church leadership styles, decision-making processes, and financial management can create significant friction. Power struggles between clergy and lay leaders are not uncommon (Brown, 2019). There are church denominations where the question of who becomes the leader or who should assume certain leadership roles causes division amidst them.

Generational differences: Many churches face challenges in bridging the gap between older and younger members, who may have differing expectations and preferences for worship styles, community engagement, and church priorities (Wilson, 2017).

Racial and ethnic tensions: Despite efforts towards inclusivity, many churches still grapple with issues of racial and ethnic diversity, which can lead to conflicts and divisions (Garcia, 2021).

External pressures: Conflicts can also arise from how churches respond to external factors such as political issues, social movements, or global events like the COVID-19 pandemic (Taylor, 2022).

While these challenges are relevant across many denominations, their manifestations may vary based on cultural and geographical contexts. More so, these causes often intersect and compound each other, making conflict resolution in church settings particularly challenging. It suffice to restate it again that while conflict can be destructive, it can also lead to positive change and growth when managed constructively (Lewis, 2016).

Conflict Management

Conflict management is best understood as any effort to control or contain an ongoing conflict between parties, typically through the involvement of a third party (Burton and Dukes: 1990). Conflict management is centrally concerned with making an ongoing conflict less damaging to the parties directly engaged in it. Conflict management also often originates from a concern on the part of a third party with the aim of containing the conflict's damaging and destabilizing effects, to other semi-involved or non-involved parties as well as containing the conflict's ascent up the ladder of violence. Conflict management operates from the premise that the escalation or intensification of a conflict is not inevitable. Conflict seeks to avert the use of aggression.

According to Hamad (2005:4), conflict management refers to "the long-term management of intractable conflicts involving institutionalized provisions and regulative procedures for dealing with conflicts whenever they occur." It describes the way we respond to and deal with conflicts before, during and after it has occurred. It is the label for the variety of ways by which people handle grievances, standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider being wrong. Briefly stated, conflict management is about using managerial tactics to contain a conflict and control the environment. It would then mean that a model is constructed that would help persons, organisation or even countries contain conflict for the overall good of the persons concerned. To this end, it can be arguably stated that managers of organisation would be responsible for conflict within the group where adequate managerial models for conflict management are not defined. The focus of this study is therefore justified as it examines a model that can be used for conflict management.

The purpose of conflict management, whether undertaken by the parties in conflict or whether involving the intervention of an outside party, is to affect the entire structure of a conflict situation so as to contain the destructive components in the conflict process (for instance: hostility, use of violence) and help the parties possessing incompatible goals to find some solution to their conflict. Effective conflict management succeeds in minimizing or obliterating disruption stemming from the existence of a conflict.

Rahim (2002) is of the view that conflict management involves every activity aimed at inhibiting the negative aspects of conflict while advancing the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher than where the conflict is taking place, so as to promote learning and group outcomes in the organisation. To this end the goal of conflict management is not primarily concerned with eliminating all conflict or avoiding it but trying to contain and settle it. Gordon (2004) agrees with this view when he portrays that conflict management is the practice of identifying and handling conflict in a sensible, fair and efficient manner. It requires such skills as effective communication, problem solving, and negotiating with a focus on interests.

There are various styles that can be used to manage conflicts in organisations. Among the early writers, Follett (1940) suggested three main ways to handle conflict: domination, compromise and integration. Moreover, she also found others such as avoidance and suppression. Blake and Mouton (1964) were the first management thinkers to present the conceptualization of the five conflict styles as avoiding, obliging, dominating, compromising and integrating (Rose, Suppiah, Uli and Othman (2006).Visinki (1995) cited in Saduman (2012) suggested five methods of coping with conflict. The first method is competition. The competition approach to conflict resolution is an attempt at complete victory. It is a win/lose approach, a "winner takes all"

position. Usually, the focus is on winning the conflict at all costs, rather than seeking the most appropriate solution for everyone concerned. The second method of coping with conflict is accommodation, which is the opposite of competition.

It is a lose/win approach. The third method is avoidance, where both sides in the conflict withdraw. It is referred to as the lose/lose outcome in managing conflict because neither side is able to deal with the issue, much less manage or resolve it. The fourth one is collaboration, which is usually considered the best method to cope with conflict. It is called a win/win approach. It does not require either side to give up a valued position. Rather, both sides honestly seek new and common higher grounds. This kind of problem-solving requires an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, the surfacing of hidden agendas, and a genuine willingness on both sides to resolve the conflict. The fifth method is compromise-conflict resolution. It involves negotiation and a high degree of flexibility. It is referred to as the win-lose/win-lose position since both parties in the conflict will get some of what they want, while at the same time giving up something in the process.

Hotepo (2010) noted that conflict can be managed in different ways, some focusing on interpersonal relationships and others on structural changes. He goes on to advocate for managing conflict toward constructive action is the best approach in resolving conflict. When conflict arises, there is need to manage them properly, so that it becomes a positive force, rather than a negative force, which would threaten the individual's relationship or group.

Butler (2009) has discussed styles used by negotiators and found that those negotiators who use integrating (collaborating), obliging (accommodating) or avoiding style were more effective than those who use dominating (competing) style. Individuals who use integrative (collaborative style) conflict handling style experience lower level of work conflict and stress at job, but people using avoiding or dominating (competing) style were facing more conflicts and work stress (Friedman, 2000).

Overall, conflict management should aim at minimising affective conflicts at all levels, attain and maintain a moderate amount of substantive conflict, and use the appropriate conflict management strategy to effectively bring about the first two goals, and also to match the status and concerns of the two parties in conflict (Rahim, 2002). Conflict management strategies should satisfy certain criteria. The first criterion is learning and effectiveness. In order to attain this objective, conflict management strategies should be designed to enhance critical and innovative thinking to learn the process of diagnosis and intervention in the right problems.

The second criterion is the needs of stakeholders. Sometimes multiple parties are involved in a conflict in an organisation and the challenge of conflict management would be to involve these parties in a problem-solving process that will lead to collective learning and organisational effectiveness. Organisations institutionalise the positions of employee advocate, customer and supplier advocate, as well as environmental and stockholder advocates. Ethics is noted to be the third criterion for conflict management strategies to be effective. A wise leader must behave ethically, and to do so the leader should be open to new information and be willing to change his or her mind. By the same token subordinates and other stakeholders have an ethical duty to speak out against the decisions of supervisors when consequences of these decisions are likely to be serious. Without an understanding of ethics, conflict cannot be handled" (Algert, and Watson, 2002).

Zartman (2008) in his work, *Negotiation and Conflict Management: essays and practice,* is of the view that security, the world over, can be made possible if conflict management, through negotiation is allowed. This negotiation can be done through mediation which he calls a "catalytic form of negotiation in which the third party has only procedural interests"(Zartman, 2008: 16). Zartman goes further to state that mediators use three modes: communication, formulation and manipulation to marshal the interest of parties in the conflict towards a mutual settlement of the dispute since parties in a dispute cannot communicate effectively. The mediator then creates a means for a mutual communication, draws a formula for getting out of such conflict and he uses his power of mediation to manipulate a solution to the dispute. Collaborating with Touval he developed a conceptual idea of mediation (Touval and Zartman (1985, 1989, 2007), seeing it as a catalysed negotiation that helps the parties in a conflict to do what they cannot do alone by overcoming identifiable types of obstacles; the mediator has its own motivating interests and need not be impartial but is expected to deliver to the side toward which it is biased. So, Touval and Zartman (1985) call mediation a negotiation by an "external involvement" and that the crucial conclusion about biased mediators is that they be effectively used in assisting negotiations only if they deliver the party to whom they are biased.

It is interesting to note that the three codes of communication, formulation and manipulation which Zartman identifies in the mediation process. It is also thought provoking that bias is possible in mediation since the mediator would have his own motivating interest. Situating these in Paul's mediation model where the fear of God, love, forgiveness and the usefulness of all the parties in dispute are advanced, it becomes obvious that the idea of mediation as Zartman, Touval and Zartman portend lacks this. However, Paul's mediation uses effective codes of communication as identified by Zartman. The fear of God, love, forgiveness as well as the understanding that there is a benefit derivable from feuding parties which can only be realised in a peaceable atmosphere can go a long way to model relationship. This is the goal of negotiation as advanced by Zartman and it can possibly be achieved using Paul's model.

Methods of Resolving Disputes

Dispute resolution processes fall into two major types: 1. Adjudicative processes, such as litigation or arbitration, in which a judge, jury or arbitrator determines the outcome. 2. Consensual processes, such as facilitation, mediation, conciliation, or negotiation, in which the parties attempt to reach agreement. Not all disputes, even those in which skilled intervention occurs, end in resolution. Such intractable disputes form a special area in dispute resolution studies. Some methods of dispute resolution include: litigation, arbitration, mediation, conciliation, negotiation, facilitation.

Arbitration

Arbitration is "a process in which an impartial third party (after hearing from both sides) makes a final, usually binding, agreement." It involves an impartial outsider being asked to make a decision on a dispute. Liebmann (2000) The arbitrator makes a firm decision on a case based on the evidence presented by the parties. The Advisory Conciliation Arbitration Services (2008) adds that arbitration is voluntary, so both sides must agree to go to arbitration; they should also agree in advance that they will abide by the arbitrator's decision. Arbitration is a quasi-judicial method of dispute resolution which takes place before one or more independent and impartial

adjudicators chosen by the parties. The adjudicators, called arbitrators, hear and consider the merits of the dispute and deliver a binding decision called an "award".

Although the modern arbitral process has lost its earlier simplicity and so has become more complex, more legalistic and more institutionalized. Yet, in its essentials, it has not changed. There is still the original element of two or more parties faced with a dispute, which they cannot resolve by themselves, agreeing that some private individuals would resolve it for them.

Negotiation

Negotiation is a process in which two or more parties hold discussions in an attempt to develop agreement on matters of mutual concern. This process of communication which involves the give and take of ideas and mulling over options in an endeavour to find common ground forms the basis of every non-adjudicative dispute resolution procedure.

Negotiation is an indispensable step in any Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process as it is consensual to all ADR activities. It is believed to be the most satisfactory method of dispute settlement. It involves the discussions or dealings in a matter with the intention to reconcile differences and establish areas of agreement, settlement or compromise that would be mutually beneficial to the parties. Usually, negotiation consists of the giving up of something in other to get something else in return (Odiri, 2004).

Facilitation

When a neutral party enters discussions to help the parties work towards a consensus, the process is described as - "facilitated negotiation" or "facilitation". The "facilitator" does not concentrate on the substance of the issues for discussion. Rather, he or she assists the parties to focus on the salient issues to improve their chances of reaching an agreement (Odiri, 2004).

Conciliation / Mediation

Conciliation is a method of settling disputes by consensus rather than by adjudication. The Arbitration and Conciliation Act (CAP 19- LFN 1990) provides for the right to settle disputes by conciliation. Part II of the Act, that is, Section 37 to 42 and 55 stipulate detailed provisions for conciliation. Section 37 provides that the parties to any agreement may seek amicable settlement of any dispute in relation to the agreement by conciliation under the provisions of the Act. In addition, Section 55 provides that parties to an international commercial agreement may agree in writing that a dispute in relation to the agreement shall be settled by conciliation under the Conciliation Rules set out in the Third Schedule to the Act 10.

In Nigeria, conciliation and mediation are used interchangeably even for the purpose of the Arbitration and Conciliation Decree No.11 of 1988 (now Cap 19 of the LFN 1990). There is therefore no clear-cut demarcation between conciliation and mediation in Nigeria (Odiri, 2004).

Mini-Trial

The mini-trial is a form of evaluative mediation, which is a non-binding ADR process; it assists the parties to a dispute to gain a better understanding of the issues in dispute, and so enables them to enter into settlement negotiation on a more informal basis. The mini-trial procedure is recently developed. It is intended to facilitate the exchange of information among parties and provide the necessary basis for the parties to fashion a settlement. It resembles a trial, in that a Lawyer for each party presents the party's case. The presentations are short, typically for a

duration of about four hours and are heard not by a judge but by representatives of each of the parties who have authority to enter into a settlement.

In many cases, a neutral third party is engaged to preside and assist the parties in reaching agreement. Following the presentations, the party representatives meet (with or without the neutral) to negotiate a settlement. At the discretion of the parties, the neutral can offer an advisory opinion to facilitate discussions. There are no rules governing the conduct of mini-trials. Typically, procedures are agreed upon by the parties in writing, prior to initiation of the process.

A mini-trial provides a means for exchanging information necessary to the development of a settlement. It allows opportunity for advocacy while keeping the dispute narrow and eliminating many of the legislative and collateral issues that arise in litigation. It is the responsibility of the representatives designated by the parties to resolve the dispute. Even where no settlement is reached, the information and perspective gained through the procedure, typically, are beneficial and result in expediting resolutions of the matter at trials or other more formal proceedings. A mini-trial is often meaningfully employed after negotiation has broken down, mediation has been tried or rejected and the parties already have a considerable investment in pending litigation, but are willing to try a structured but non-binding way to expedite a settlement (Odiri, 2004).

Mediation-Arbitration

Mediation-Arbitration, otherwise known as Med-Arb is a two-step dispute resolution process involving both mediation and arbitration. In Mediation-Arbitration, parties try to resolve their differences through mediation, where mediation fails to resolve some or all the areas of dispute, the remaining issues are automatically submitted to a binding arbitration. In its traditional form, mediation-arbitration uses a neutral person who must be skilled in both procedures, in other to guide parties through the mediation phase and to preside over the arbitration and render a final, binding decision. The final result in a mediation-arbitration combines any agreement reached in the mediation phase with the award in the arbitral phase.

In Mediation-Arbitration process, the decision to go to arbitration if mediation is unsuccessful is one to which the parties commit themselves in advance before the process commences (Odiri, 2004).

Expert Determination (E.D.)

Expert Determination is a voluntary process in which a neutral third party, who is usually an expert in the field in which the dispute arises, gives a binding determination on the issues in dispute. A dispute may be referred to Expert Determination either by means of a term in a pre-existing agreement or on an *ad hoc* basis. It is a quick, inexpensive and private method of resolving disputes. Unlike an arbitrator, an expert has no obligation to act judicially, although he must act fairly. The decision of an expert is, generally, only challengeable on very limited grounds. This method of dispute resolution has only begun to grow in this part of the world, but it is very common in Europe and some commonwealth jurisdictions.

All the above mentioned methods of resolving disputes differ from Paul's model of mediation in the sense that Paul's model of mediation banks on the shared values of Christianity which all the parties involved shares. Paul's model of mediation provides a system where conflicts are

resolved through appeal rather than authority and the primary goal is not to apportion blame or justification but to amend relationships that has been broken due to conflicts.

Paul's Model of Mediation

Paul's letter to Philemon provides an intriguing model of mediation in early Christian communities. This short epistle offers insights into conflict resolution and interpersonal relationships in the emerging church. This model of mediation in Philemon centers on the reconciliation between Philemon, a wealthy Christian slave owner, and Onesimus, his runaway slave who has become a Christian under Paul's ministry (Fitzmyer, 2000). The apostle positions himself as a mediator between these two individuals, seeking to resolve their conflict and establish a new relationship based on their shared faith. The reconciliatory model of conflict management has the following attributes:

1. Establishing authority and rapport: Paul begins by affirming his relationship with Philemon, referring to him as a "dear friend and co-worker" (Philemon 1:1). This approach helps create a foundation of trust for the mediation process (Nordling, 2004).

2. Appealing to shared values: Throughout the letter, Paul emphasizes the Christian principles of love, forgiveness, and brotherhood. He reminds Philemon of his faith and the obligations it entails (Philemon 1:4-7), using these shared values as a basis for reconciliation (Dunn, 1996).

3. Reframing the relationship: Paul encourages Philemon to view Onesimus not as a slave, but as a "beloved brother" (Philemon 1:16). This reframing is crucial to Paul's mediation strategy, as it shifts the paradigm of their relationship from one of ownership to one of spiritual kinship (Wright, 2013).

4. Advocating for the vulnerable party: While Paul acknowledges Philemon's authority, he also advocates for Onesimus, vouching for his character and usefulness (Philemon 1:11-13). This demonstrates Paul's role in giving voice to the less powerful party in the conflict (Petersen, 1985).

5. Offering reparation: Paul offers to personally repay any debt Onesimus might owe Philemon (Philemon 1:18-19). This practical step addresses potential material obstacles to reconciliation (Barth & Blanke, 2000).

6. Appealing to conscience rather than coercion: Despite his apostolic authority, Paul chooses to appeal to Philemon's own sense of what is right, rather than commanding him (Philemon 1:8-9, 14). This approach respects Philemon's autonomy while gently guiding him towards the desired outcome (Thompson, 2005).

7. Expressing confidence in a positive outcome: Paul concludes by expressing confidence in Philemon's compliance and even hinting at expecting more than what he's asked (Philemon 1:21). This positive expectation can serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy in conflict resolution (Kreitzer, 2008).

Paul's model in Philemon demonstrates a nuanced approach to mediation that balances authority with persuasion, and principle with practicality. It provides valuable insights for conflict resolution in religious communities and beyond.

The Substantiality of Paul's Model of Mediation in the Contemporary Church

Paul's model of mediation, as demonstrated in his letter to Philemon, offers several superior aspects that set it apart from other conflict resolution approaches. This model has been widely studied and appreciated for its effectiveness and adaptability across various contexts.

One of the key strengths of Paul's approach is its emphasis on transforming relationships rather than merely settling disputes. As Witherington (2007) notes, Paul seeks to reframe the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus from one of master and slave to that of brothers in Christ. As such, the main focus of this model of mediation is not adjudicative. Rather, the intention is to mend a broken relationship which became marred in the course of time. This measure goes beyond just achieving conflict resolution to fostering genuine reconciliation and community building.

Also, the model is unique in its flexibility. This study appraises his as another point of superiority. Paul adapts his approach to the specific individuals and situation at hand, demonstrating what Koenig (1985) calls "contextual sensitivity" (p. 89). It is a conflict management model which is effectively applicable across diverse socio-cultural contexts. Both Philemon and Onesimus belong to different social strata. Via this means of conflict management, the platform of Christly brotherhood becomes the centre point of reconciliation and not socio-cultural affiliation.

More so, Paul's use of persuasion rather than coercion is a particularly noteworthy aspect of the process of reconciliation. As Bartchy (1992) observes, "Paul's refusal to command Philemon, despite his acknowledged authority to do so, demonstrates a respect for individual autonomy that was rare in ancient mediation practices" (p. 312). This approach not only respects the dignity of all parties involved but also promotes more sustainable resolutions. In the contemporary church, the virtue of mutual honour is missing and this degenerate conflict into schism amidst affected parties and their solidarity members. Adopting the Pauline Model of mediation will foster honour and respect amidst all parties in a situation of conflict.

The model also excels in its holistic approach to conflict resolution. Paul addresses not only the immediate issue at hand but also the underlying relational and spiritual dynamics. According to Fitzmyer (2000), "Paul's mediation transcends mere problem-solving to engage with deeper issues of identity, community, and faith". In his mediation, Paul emphasized the newness of life which Onesimus had attained and the profit he would bring into the Kingdom.

Furthermore, Paul's model demonstrates a remarkable balance between assertiveness and empathy. He firmly advocates for Onesimus while showing understanding for Philemon's position. This balance, as highlighted by Thompson (2005), "creates a safe space for both parties to engage in the reconciliation process" (p. 203).

The model's emphasis on shared values and community responsibility is another superior aspect. Paul appeals to Philemon's Christian faith and his role within the community, what Dunn (1996) describes as "leveraging communal ethos for individual transformation" (p. 334). This approach strengthens not just individual relationships but the entire community.

Lastly, the long-term effectiveness of Paul's model is noteworthy. While we don't have direct evidence of the outcome, the preservation and circulation of the letter suggest a positive reception. As Wright (2013) argues, "The very fact that we have this letter indicates that Philemon responded favorably, setting a powerful precedent for future conflict resolution in the early church" (p. 456).

In conclusion, Paul's model of mediation demonstrates superiority in its transformative approach, flexibility, use of persuasion, holistic perspective, balance of assertiveness and empathy, emphasis on communal values, and long-term effectiveness. These qualities make it a valuable resource not only for understanding early Christian conflict resolution but also for informing modern mediation practices.

2.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Drawing a cue from the foregoing, Paul's model of mediation is the use of good communication in swaying the parties in dispute to agreement. The focus of this mediation is the identity of the force of brotherhood in the community which would make all to realise that they are one family under God. For the brotherhood to thrive, brotherly love which would allow tolerance of the idiosyncrasiesof all I the community would be in place. The emphasis on the love which Philemon has for the community was to be a major need in the reconciliation process. Moreover, he propped up the need for forgiveness as a basis for true reconciliation. A meaningful mediation is anchored on true forgiveness. Within this Pauline model was the need to highlight the role of the elderly in the reconciliation process, as they become useful in bringing feuding parties to a place of agreement and reconciliation. Also, the model highlights the pursuit of the equality of all within the community as factor enhancing reconciliation. Above all, the model advances the usefulness of all in the community as a measure for reconciliation.

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