

A Sociological Perspective on the Election of Deacons in Acts 6:1-8: An Insight for National Integration in Nigeria

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Abstract

The point of departure for this paper is to examine the election of deacons in Acts 6:1-8 and its capacity to bring the desired unity in Nigeria. The early church was engulfed in crisis due to the diversity of the composition of the church which was made up of both the Jews and the Gentiles. The crisis threatened the continued unity and existence of the church. As a result, the Apostles acted swiftly by appointing deacons to take care of the Grecian widows. This challenge to the apostles was a menace to the union of the already conventional Christian community in Jerusalem and its effects on other places. Nigeria is facing the same challenge and efforts must be made to nip it in the bud the ill-fated situation or Nigeria runs the risk of disintegration. The study focuses on a sociological perspective of the election of deacons in Acts 6:1-8 as an awareness for national integration in Nigeria. The study adopted the qualitative method as resources were obtained from secondary sources on the subject matter. Descriptive and expository analyses were used to assess the election of deacons in Acts 6:1-8; from a sociological perspective. The study reveals that the socio-religious relationship of the early church bred social challenges in the book of Acts 6:1-8 which triggered the need for the election of deacons that engendered peaceful coexistence for national integration between Grecian and Hellenist Jews. The study is of benefit to students, policymakers and government



functionaries since it unveils some possible solutions that could help in solving the problem of disintegration in Nigeria. The paper recommends among others unity in diversity, that Nigerians should take their ethnic diversity as a source of strength rather than divisions. Religious leaders should adhere to the true tenets of their religions without prejudice and religious tolerance and fair play should be encouraged to annihilate disintegration.

Keywords: Apostles, Deacons, Sociological Perspective, Jews and National Integration

Introduction

National integration is not negotiable, because, it is through it that Nigeria can move forward in all its ramifications. People of different ethnicities and customs, coming together to dwell in a geographical location that was amalgamated into a country by colonial masters, called Nigeria was not just a mere coincidence, but the making of God. Having this in mind could always help to look for ways to keep this divine arranged entity together, because if true, the coming together is indeed a divine plan, then, going against this by way of trying to divide this country can only amount to a state of anarchy and chaos which is already telling on the Nigeria citizens.

This paper is saddled with the responsibility of harnessing ways that could proffer solutions to the problem of national disintegration in Nigeria. To do that, the paper is anchored on the theme: “the election of deacons in Acts 6:1-8, an insight for national integration; a sociological perspective” to build upon the status quo so as to learn from the experience of the apostles. The sociological perspective is a way of understanding human behaviour and social interactions from a broader societal context. This approach focuses on examining social structures, institutions, and cultural norms that shape the behaviour of individuals and groups. The sociological perspective seeks to identify and analyze patterns of social behaviour to better understand how social structures and institutions impact people's lives. In the context of the election of deacons in Acts 6:1-8, a sociological perspective can help shed light on the broader social and cultural context that may have influenced the selection process. By examining the social structures and cultural norms of the time, researchers can gain insight into the factors that may have influenced the election of deacons and their role in promoting national integration. In the context of national integration in Nigeria, a sociological perspective can help to identify the social, cultural, and political factors that have contributed to societal divisions and tensions. The sociological perspective views social problems as the result of broader societal factors rather than individual shortcomings and therefore seeks to identify and address these underlying issues, by examining the election of deacons in Acts 6:1-8 through a sociological lens. The researchers have given insight into the social and

cultural dynamics that may have contributed to the emergence of factions and conflicts within the early Christian Community. This perspective can help to inform strategies for promoting national integration in Nigeria by addressing the broader social and cultural factors that contribute to societal divisions and tensions.

The paper is then divided into these divisions: The socio-religious nature of the early church, a brief exposition of the social challenges in the book of Acts 6:1-8, the need for the election of deacons in the early church, and an insight into national integration. This paper will be helpful to students, researchers, Government institutions, Religious groups, and Ethnic groups in Nigeria and society in general.

An Overview of the Socio-Religious Problem of the Early Church

The early church that was inaugurated by Christ was a socio-religious group. Even though Jesus said that his kingdom is not of this world, (John 18:36), it consists of human beings that make the society. As such, social attributes were bound to manifest in this kingdom or group. The group was seen gathering together (Acts 2:42-47). They were seen studying together (Acts 2:42). They created what looked like a socialist state where they lived and interacted with one another (Acts 2:44-47) social life was exemplified in this group as they shared their emotions, goods, commonwealth, and homes, with one another. The social life of the Church helped the Church to thrive for progress. It is said that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2: 47). Guthrie et al, call this church “The primitive Christian community” (976). In line with Guthrie, Hargreaves corroborated that in the early days documented in chapters 1-5, most Christians resided in Jerusalem and adhered meticulously to their Jewish traditions. They were, with some concessions, a united body, and their leaders did not need to organize them. The people of Jerusalem cherished them (58). The classification by Guthrie et al agrees with the researchers’ view by way of seeing this group as a community. Since the community is defined as “a body of people with a faith, profession or way of life in common” (Webster ed. 198). As it was stated, the church can be seen as a socio-religious group since it involves human beings with their way of life.

The sequential, coherent and comprehensive analysis of the social-religious nature of the early church is important to appreciate. According to John Hargreaves; the early church had devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching: The Apostles together with the men and women who lived in some part of Jerusalem handed on what Jesus had taught and what the Old Testament had been fulfilled. They had fellowship together: And all had things in common. The word fellowship is a translation of the Greek ‘*Koinonia*’ which is also translated as ‘sharing’ community; in the New Testament, it had several meanings: fellowship with God, with each other, sharing of Holy communion with each other and the collection of money for people in need.



The breaking of bread (Acts 2:42c). Jews often took bread and broke it and shared it as part of a fellowship meal (Hargreaves, 30).

The early church prayed together (Acts 2:42c): In their homes, synagogues, temples, and country and they probably attended the 3:00 pm service of prayer the place where the priest offered a burnt sacrifice. They had all things in common (Acts 2:44). Hargreaves avers that some people held that the first Christians were communists because they shared their assets and that contemporary Christians should do a similar thing but this sharing was different from the life of the contemporary communists. The early church shared their assets in common because they thought Jesus was returning soon or they shared it voluntarily. They did not compel others to emulate them. Thus, the operation of contemporary communists is different from the kind of communist life the early church was practising (Hargreaves 31).

Moreover, the early church fellowship in their homes (Acts 2:46a. At that time, it was in private homes that Christians usually met one another and worshipped together since we know special church buildings did not exist until after AD300. They partook of food with glad and generous hearts (Acts 2:46b) one thing that people noticed about Christians was their joy. They were praising God together (Acts 2:47a) which is an important part of public and personal worship. They had favour with all the people (Acts 2:47b) people respected them. As far as possible Christians need to gain the good opinion or favor of those who do not belong to the church. If people find that Christians are good neighbours, they are more likely to join them (Hargreaves 31).

All that is stated by Hargreaves is very true of a social group because they did everything in common even though they may not be categorically affirmed as a socialist or communist state. But their conduct was closely related to them. And if possible one can say that they were communists or socialists during their days. The researchers are convinced that the early church was a social-religious group considering the nature of their operation depicting social and religious elements. It then means that the church or Christian religion is practised in the Society. The church was socially established and had social problems, but were resolved and Nigeria can learn from the church to solve its problem of national disintegration which is anchored on social issues.

Brief Exposition of the Social Challenges in the Book of Acts 6:1-8

The church consisted of human beings, and socialization formed part of their daily lives; because they were a community, there was that tendency to record social problems or conflict, and their conflict was an intergroup type as captured. This kind of conflict can be described as “intra-group conflict” (Shive 13) because the

conflict was coming from within a single ethnic group. Under this section, the text is exposed by identifying those social challenges within the church in the following sub-headings:

Numerical increase of members: One of the social problems that challenged the social-religious and peaceful co-existence of the early church was the increase in number “in those days when the number of disciples was increasing” (Acts 6: 1a). This was indeed a problem, since managing of human beings is not an easy task. Going with the evidence within the Bible, there was an explosive increase of believers of Jesus Christ “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about Three Thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41) This was an explosion, for about three thousand people coming in, in a single message preached by apostle Peter. Another piece of evidence was shown again “Never the less, more and more men and women believed in the Lord (Act 5:14). Here too, the number was not stated, but it then means, many were added to their numbers. This group had an explosion of increase of believers. This situation made Tokunboh Adeyemo state that “the increasing number of believers made it more difficult to distribute goods effectively” (1335). This entails that there was a managerial problem or challenge. Since the number stated above was not a small number to cope with. Inyaregh avers that this incidence was the first cross-cultural conflict among Christians in the early Church. However, there are various views on the nature of the episode (50). The challenge and result in Acts 6:1-6 display the hitches they were facing which were the problem of cross-cultural conflict among Christians and deficiency in administration. This prompted them to reshuffle the system to enable the spread of the gospel (Inyaregh 49).

The negligence of the Grecian Jews’ widows: Another problem that arose among this socio-religious group was the negligence of the Grecian Jewish widows “The Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1b). Under this subsection, there are two sets of people or group that need to be looked into.

- i. The Grecian Jews: According to the text, there were two clusters of people in this community, the Grecian Jews, who were they? According to Hargreaves, “the “*Hellenists*” were Jewish Christians who spoke Greek (the word comes from *Hella*” i.e. Greece). And many of them lived outside Palestine, in another part of the Roman Empire” (59). The New International Version footnotes also attest that “the Grecian Jews were those born in lands other than the Holy land who spoke the Greek language and were more Grecian than Hebraic in their attitude and outlook” (1687). According to D.A Carson et al, “these people called the Grecian Jews were many of those converted from the visitors at the Pentecost Festival, for instance, could be called



Grecian or Hellenistic Jews and their main language was Greek. Both groups were Jewish (1077).

- ii. The Hebraic Jews: “The Hebraic Jews here means, Jewish Christian who spoke Aramaic (the everyday language which Jesus spoke) and who lived in Palestine” (Hargreaves 59). On their part “we may assume that the disciples and other native Palestinian Jews spoke Aramaic (a language related to Hebrews) as their first language (Carson et al, 1077). This group is further defined as “those who spoke Palestinian Aramaic and or Hebrews and preserved Jewish culture and customs (NIV footnotes, 1687). In the actual sense of it, this was not an ethnic crisis *per se*, but sections among a single ethnic group since both of them were Jews. Though with some variance in culture, “the Grecian Jews and the Hebraic Jews appear to be two cultural groups within Christian and Jewish society (Carson et al 1017)). Hargreaves asserts that, long before the coming of Jesus, these two groups had found it difficult to understand each other. The Hebrews thought that the Hellenists were too much influenced by the Greek way of living the Hellenists thought that the Hebrews were too much unwilling to adopt new ideas (59). Margaret Baxter further posits that; Hebrew is the language in which most of the Old Testament is written. It was the language of the Israelites until the time when the Jews went into exile. It was the language of scripture, so eventually, it came to be thought of as a sacred language. Every Jewish boy learnt to read Hebrew (13)

So, it could be deduced from the above explanations why there were conflicts among the early church or Christians. As mentioned earlier, this kind of conflict can be said to be an ‘intra-group’ conflict.

Intra-group conflict within a group involves three or more group members. It is usually short-lived but splits a group into many other groups if the group does not use constructive controversy. This type of conflict usually arises from disagreement about what/how to do particular thing/things or as a result of interpersonal conflict among members of the group. It harms multiple members of the relationship; and entangles most of the group conflict if the group splits into factions (Shive 13).

This was a true picture of what happened with the community of believers in the early church. They were one ethnic group, but disagreement arose as a result of negligence of some members within the group. This called for solutions, and the solutions sought by the early church are the next target of investigation.

The Election of Deacons to Handle the Social Problem Against the Grecian Widows

This section takes care of how the social conflicts among the disciples were resolved in the following order.

- a. **The Apostles identified the problem:** “So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said” (Acts 6:2a) this statement clearly proves the Apostles’ sensitivity to the problems of the rest of the disciples. Calling the rest of the disciples together points to the fact that the apostles identified the problems within the group. By doing this, they also prioritize the task ahead of them. They understood that the ministry of the word and the social needs are the most important aspects of the group.
- b. **The apostles used religious and social (ethnic) approaches:** “It will not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2a), this can be called division of labour. This means that the Apostles were sensitive to both the religious and social (ethnic) needs of the people. Titre Ande assert this as “the call of God to take responsibility implied faithfulness, accountability to God and care for the people of God” (7). Marx Weber states this in the affirmative “This was proved by the observation that division of labour caused every individual to work for others and every legitimate calling had same worth in the sight of God” (qtd In Akpenpuun Dzurgba 31) The Apostles demonstrated this dual responsibility ‘responsibility to God and care for God’s people. This is holistic and worth emulating by Nigerian leaders.
- c. **They get the rest of the people involved in solutions:** “You brothers must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation; fill with the Spirit and wisdom, to which we can hand over this duty. We will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and the service of the word” (The New Jerusalem Bible, Acts 6:3-4). The statement above was symptomatic of the inclusiveness in matters of leadership by the apostles. The apostles identified the problem but did not proffer solutions because they were the apostles or leaders, this can be seen as a democratic regime. This kind of administrative wisdom is recommendable “there is a need among Christian leaders to seek wise cancel in those areas in which they themselves are lacking in aptitude, training and experience” (Ralph Mahoney 197). Even though the rest of the disciples were involved in looking for solutions, the Apostles took the lead by laying down criteria for the election “men from among you who are known to be of good reputation, full of spirit and wisdom” the inclusivity of the rest of the disciples could also be coming from the tradition of nominating rulers of the synagogue “no one was eligible for this office until he had a certificate from the great Sanhedrin stating that he possessed the required qualifications. His election



however was by the members of the synagogue “(James M. Freeman, 526) having the understanding that this group was still romancing with the synagogue, their actions here were not strange, they prayed in, the Temple courtyard. They probably attended the 3:00 PM service prayer at the place where the priest offered burnt sacrifices. Christians still did this because they were loyal Jews. It was only later that they realized that Jesus Christ had made possible a new relationship with God and that they had to choose between the old and the new. (Hargreaves31)

- d. **The qualification of the deacons:** “Brothers, choose seven men from among you of the honest report who are known to be of good report, full of spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3a). the election was conducted on the basis of qualification and was not randomly selected “The Apostles said that they would give authority to seven men on condition that they were of the right sort, i.e. (a) those whom other Christians could trust (of good repute) (b) those who were open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and did not depend only on their own ideas (full of the spirit) (c) those who were able to administer the work of relieving the poor and could keep account of the money received and spent (full of wisdom) (Hargreaves 60
- e. **They chose men who understood the problem:** “This proposal pleased the whole group. “They choose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the holy spirit, also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenans and Nicolas from Antioch, a covert to Judaism” (Acts 6:5). These men were chosen from the Grecian Jews, going with their names “we can see from their names that all the seven wereGreek–speaking Jews, and thus were able to meet the needs of the Hellenists widows “(60) the seven were not strangers of both the problem and the people. It is always good to choose people who are conversant with the issues at hand.
- f. **An office was created for the deacons:** “They presented these men to the apostle, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6), this office was created by way of praying and laying of hands which were significant to the public Commission “the seven were selected by the rank and file; the imposition of the apostolic hand confirms this selection, commissioned the seven for their special work, and expressed the apostles’ fellowship with them in the matter” (Guthrie 980). Going with the above, the apostles’ laying of hands upon these people signified their acceptance and agreement with what the rest of the disciples did. As mentioned by Guthrie, ‘this was a special work’, Hargreaves called them ‘social workers’
On this occasion, the apostles laid their hands on the seven men in order to give them the authority to carry out special work. They did this in the presence of other Christians so that everyone should know that the seven had been given authority, we should say today that the apostles commissioned them to be

“social workers” or ‘administrators’ i.e. to do special work in Jerusalem and for that special period (60-61). So, in a way, we may allude to the problems faced by the early church as social problems or conflicts. By the way, conflict can be defined as; a “social problem.” This therefore gives this paper the credence it deserves, since the problem faced by the early church was sociological in nature and a relevant office was created to mitigate the challenge. Learning from this can help in solving the social problem of national disintegration in Nigeria.

- g. **There was a great increase of disciples:** “so the word of God spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests becomes obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). The right attitude to the problem brought about a great, rapid increase of disciples. The will of God was increasingly understood and acted upon. This verse is just a short report of the progress the apostles had helped to heal the split between the ‘Hellenists’ and the ‘Hebrews’ and as a result, the church grew rapidly (Hargreaves 61).

If Nigerian leaders would learn from the wise ways the disciples used, there would be a great increase in the country, and the problem of national disintegration would be solved. This brings this work to take lessons from the apostle as an insight for national integration in Nigeria as the next line of action.

An Insight into National Integration in Nigeria

Under this section, consideration is given to learning or queuing from what the apostles did in Acts 6:1-8 to solve the problem of national disintegration in Nigeria as is discussed below:

1. **The Apostles managed the growing population:** “in those days when the number of disciples was increasing” (Acts 6:1a). The number of the Apostles was increasing by the day as they preached the gospel to others. They were faced with the problem of managing the crowd.

In the same vein, Nigeria is faced with the same challenge. “Back in 1st Oct 1960 when the country declared its independence from the United Kingdom, Nigeria recorded an estimated 45.2 million people (population growth in Nigeria-world data. Info.www.worlddata.info...Nigeria). That was the estimated population that Nigeria started with as a sovereign state. There was an increase in population after the independent “2006 census Nigeria population was estimated at 140. 431,691 people” (en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki Nigeria) this was a shoot from 45.2 million to 140, 431,691 this was a great difference of about 100 million. Since human beings are bound to increase,



there is this growing number at present in Nigeria “Nigeria is presently estimated with a population of over 218 million people, it is the most populous country in Africa and the world’s seventh most populous country (www.statista.com> statistics population, en.m.wikipedia. org>wiki Nigeria).

Nigeria had an explosion of the population going with what is stated above “most populous country in Africa and seven world’s populous country” It is expected that Nigerian leaders and managers take cognizance of this fact, otherwise, we may be running a country of 1960 in 2023. Policies and programs of the Nigerian Government must change to accommodate the growing population of Nigeria. When this is done, the teeming populace will be cared for. Social amenities should be provided commensurate with the population. This will also enhance equity, fairness and justice which will heal the wounds of ethnicity and religion that will culminate in national integration.

2. **The Apostles managed the ethnic sections among them:** “The Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews” (Acts 6:1b). Within the disciples, there was this problem of ethnic sectionalism, the Hebraic Jews posing to be superior to the Grecian Jews, even though both of them were a single ethnic group, but still had this challenge of factions. A solution was sought by choosing people that answered Grecian names, and who understood the background of the Grecian Jews to help them out. “This proposal pleased the whole group. They choose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, also Philip, procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas from Antioch a convert of Judaism” (Acts 6:5), it is said that those people were given Greek names and could be Grecians Jews too. “We can see from their names that all the seven were Greek-speaking Jews, and thus well able to meet the need of the Hellenist Widows” (Hargreaves 61).

In the same vein, even though, Nigeria also has this challenge, and there is more ethnicity than that of an ethnic section. Nigeria has different cultures in those ethnic groups which to some extent vary from one to another. The country has about 374 Tribes (Soyoda). Nigeria must learn from the Apostles in other to attain national integration. The biases of ethnicity must be dealt with. The elevation of other ethnic groups over the other must be checked. The posing of certain ethnic groups over the teeming populace of Nigeria must be reversed. The elevation of some ethnic groups over others in Nigeria has caused so much national disintegration. Since the creation of Nigeria, the majority of Nigerian leaders have emerged from certain ethnic groups. This

is not healthy for this country. Until we deal with this problem, national Integration may be difficult.

3. **The apostles used religious and social (ethnic) approaches;** this can be seen as a division of labour. “So, the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said “it will not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables” (Acts 6:2). The apostles acknowledged the facts that the two services are not the same but very important, so, they divided the labour among themselves, so that there will be concentration, accountability and result oriented services. They made sure that; religion did not collapse ethnicity and ethnicity did not collapse religion, rather, attention was given to both, and the result was a success.

In the same manner, if Nigerian leaders would adopt this method and adhere to the rules of engagement by not interfering with the individual ministries and other Government agencies, and above all; when due attention is given to religions and the different ethnic groups in Nigeria, undoubtedly, there will be that sense of respect, recognition and autonomous but coordinated operations of every section of the Nigerian state. This cannot but bring national Integration in Nigeria.

4. **The Apostles choose men of proven integrity to handle the problem,** “Brothers choose seven men from among you of good repute, who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility to them” (Act 6:3).

The Apostles knew that the task of catering for the social needs of the people demanded men of proven integrity. And when they did that, success was recorded within the group. Just like the Apostles, to attain national integration in Nigeria, people of unquestionable character must be chosen from among Nigerians to serve in both private and public offices. People who have the fear of God, people who know what it takes to solve the challenges bedeviling the country and not people chosen from ethnic or religious sentiments. It is only in Nigeria that a lawyer like could be chosen to handle the Ministry of Works and Housing instead of an engineer, a medical Doctor could be chosen to handle the Ministry of Labour instead of an engineer or vocational specialist, a journalist could be chosen to head a ministry of education, where people who are allegedly charged with corruption could be chosen to handle sensitive offices in the land. If we must attain national integration, people of proven integrity, God-fearing and full of knowledge



must be placed in positions of authority. Because the management of human beings deserves such people.

5. **Both the disciples and the apostles agreed with the choice** “they presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6) this act of the apostles was a kind of acceptance and authorization to function in public office On this occasion the Apostles laid their hands on the seven men to give them authority to carry out special work. They did this in the presence of other Christians so that everyone would know that the seven had been given authority. We should say today that the Apostles commissioned them to be social workers or administrators, i.e. to do special work in Jerusalem and for that special period (Hargreaves 61). National integration is realizable, if the process of selecting leaders is transparent and acceptable by all. Offices or relevant ministries should be created to cater to such needs, as such, leaders will be accepted by all and maximum cooperation will be given to them.

The researchers recognize the fact that this in a way is done in Nigeria, the Government of President Muhamadu Buhari created a national social intervention programme in 2016 which was later taken to the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs under the supervision of Hajiya Sadiya Umar Farauq in 2019. With programmes such as conditional cash transfer, Government enterprise and empowerment programmes (GEEP), National Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) Nation Home Grown School Feeding Programmes (NHGSFP) among others (www.blueprint.ng>humanitarianaffairs). But the question remains, how many Nigerians are lifted out of poverty? As of 5th August 2021. Primary schools engaged with the feeding population of 104,504 in primarys one to three. According to statistics, “only 53,000 schools out of 117 thousand primary schools have benefited from these programmes since its inception (Doris Dokua Sasu n. pag). Pua Okah posits that, for many Nigerians, the best achievement of President Mohamadu Buhari's administration is the creation of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development in 2019 which is mandated to oversee the malnutrition, the suffering of Nigerians especially disaster victims and to lift as many citizens as possible from the shackles of poverty through the numerous agencies under the ministry of humanitarian and disaster affairs (n.pag).

It is better imagined whether this establishment has much impact on the teaming population of Nigeria, in 2018, the Word Poverty Clock (WPC) online tool that monitors the progress against poverty globally and regionally and provides real-time poverty data across countries declares Nigeria the poverty capital of the world with more than 87 million people out of over 200

million population, said to be living in extreme poverty. However, in an update in March 2022 considering the Covid-19 pandemic economic effect, WPC noted that India has once again surpassed Nigeria as the nation with the highest number of extremely poor people (www.blueprint.ng>Humanitarianaffairs).

It looks as if India and Nigeria are battling with the position of who takes the position of having extremely poor people in the world. Nothing seems to have changed even after the Ministry of Humanitarian and Disaster Management was created, for Nigeria WPC stated that 70 million people are living in extreme poverty representing 33 per cent of Nigerians over 200 million people in 2020, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) declared that more than 80 million Nigerians live in extreme poverty (on dollar per day) (www.blueprint.ng.>humanitarianaffairs).

To achieve national integration, credible people and relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Humanitarian and Disaster Management must be manned with people of proven integrity, as such; social problems such as poverty, disease, ethnicity, religious intolerance etc. shall be eradicated from Nigeria. This will make Nigerians trust in Nigeria's project; as such national integration would be enhanced.

6. **There was a great increase of disciples:** “So the word of God spread. The numbers of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). There was indeed a great rapid increase in the work of the Apostles. These increases were in two dimensions.
 - a. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased “There were possibly many who were many who were converted to Christianity as a result of the solutions provided by the Apostles.
 - b. And a large number of priests became obedient to the faith this was religious leaders who believed in Judaism but gave up their faith for Christianity.

One may be right to say that, just like the Apostles, if our leaders would take a cue from the Apostles in Acts 6:1-8, Nigeria would experience rapid growth both internal and foreign growth. People other than Nigerians would want to come to Nigeria to invest. This would bring progress and the nation would be prosperous, as such the problem of ethnic and religious differences would be reduced and the spirit of patriotism would be spurred up in Nigerians, as such, national integration could be greatly enhanced.



Recommendations

Considering the sociological perspective on the election of deacons in Acts 6:1-8: An Insight for National Integration in Nigeria, therefore, the paper recommends the following;

- Nigerians should take their ethnic diversity as a source of strength by making use of the diverse ethnic groups to achieve unity.
- There should be a modern plurality approach to religion and ethnic practices.
- There should be a traditional pluralistic approach to religion and ethnic practices.
- Religious leaders should heed the true tenets of their religions without being biased.
- There should be no superiority in regard to ethnicity and religion.
- Patriotism should be the watchword in religion, ethnicity, business and public life in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nigeria has been greatly bedevilled with the problem of the religious and ethnic divide. “most students of the African scene agreed on the fact that both ethnicity and religion are the most dangerous threat to the attainment of democracy in Nigeria” (Gwamna, 2) This research has proven that it is possible to learn from the Christian religion, particularly in Acts 6: 1-8 to attain national integration in Nigeria. The Apostles used both religious and social (ethnic) approaches in solving their problems. The swift Apostolic approach to restructuring their system by devolution of responsibilities should serve as a model for panacea in the Nigerian milieu. This, when done, will reduce the tension at the Federal level that is triggered by the scramble for political power to rheostat the state’s natural and mineral resources (Inyaregh, 58). Adegba affirmed that; “religion provides society with moral values and symbols which integrate it” (An African Perspective of Phenomenology of Religion 75) Nigeria can take insight from this, by making use of our religious and ethnic institutions to adopt the apostolic principles of solving the problem of national integration in Nigeria. In so doing, all geo-political regions should be treated fairly in the light of development, appointments and employment. Impartiality is expected in any multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious state like Nigeria (Inyaregh 59). Just as the Jerusalem council, Nigeria in a democratic setting should emulate the practice of electing and appointing people into governance; those who are well qualified, God-fearing and full of wisdom to salvage the menace (Inyaregh, 59).

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