

## **Conflict Resolution Beyond Identity: Insights on Peacebuilding from Acts 6:1-7**

*Joel Haruna Usman, Pilani Michael Paul*

### **Abstract**

Cultural, racial, social, and religious conflicts abound across societies. This paper analyses the conflict that arose in the early Jerusalem church, as described in Acts 6:1-7, to identify effective strategies for peacebuilding. Using a literary analysis approach, the study examines the underlying issues and causes of the conflict, which arose from the unequal distribution of resources among the Hellenistic and Hebraic believers. The findings reveal that the Apostles' response to the crisis was crucial in resolving the conflict. Rather than addressing the issue through the lens of culture or race, the Apostles employed an inclusive approach that involved collective decision-making and the delegation of responsibilities to address the needs of all parties. This strategy prevented the conflict from escalating and provided a model for peacebuilding in similar situations. The paper argues that the Apostles' approach transcended cultural and racial divides, and offers valuable insights for contemporary efforts to build peace in conflict-ridden societies. The passage from Acts 6 demonstrates the possibility of constructive conflict resolution by prioritizing inclusive and collaborative problem-solving over divisive identity-based frameworks, even in the face of deep-seated differences.

*Key words:* Conflicts, Acts 6:1-7, Equity, Conflict Resolution, Race, Socio-cultural, Peacebuilding

---

### **Introduction**

Acts 6:1-7 sheds light on the early life of the early Jerusalem community, which was growing in numbers, the challenge it posed to the Apostles, and how it was dealt with. Based on the text, Richard J. Dillion, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Taylor inferred that the early Christian community was made up of two groups: those who spoke Aramaic and those who spoke only Greek (Dillion 1990, 739; Johnson 1992, 105; Taylor 1998, 1593). This allusion is made because the appellation 'Gentiles' is not used for any of the groups in the Jerusalem community. The narrative puts a proper perspective on the lived experience that led to the crisis faced by the believers. The number of believers had increased and those responsible for the distribution of the daily food were presented to have neglected a faction, the 'Hellenists' widows. The name,

'Hellenists' is found only in this chapter and Acts 9:29 (Johnson 1992, 105; Taylor 1998, 1593). The said resources, meant to serve the common good of the needy members, the widows, were not evenly distributed. Thus, the widows of the Hellenists suffered.

It was this skirmish over the daily distribution of food that resulted in what Joseph A. Fitzmyer called "Community restructuring" (Fitzmyer 1997, 343) of the early Jerusalem church. This restructuring was able to address a crisis that almost truncated the apostolic mandate that Jesus entrusted to the Twelve disciples; the proclamation of the gospel message to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8). In order not to impede the earliest Christian missions, the Twelve tasked the members of the Christian community to choose from among themselves, people of good standing, filled with the Holy Spirit, and endowed with divine wisdom. Their mandate was to oversee the daily impartial distribution of food to the needy. Though the narrative does not tell whether the crisis in the distribution of food was resolved or not, the reader is informed that the word of God grew tremendously. This is indicative of God's presence among them (Haenchen 1970, 264) and the absence of crisis. The growth of the church means that the approach employed by the Twelve was able to quell and curb the crisis. Thus, the crisis that would have impeded the spread of the gospel was put to rest.

The passage suggests that the approach taken by the Apostles, which bridged cultural and racial divides, provides valuable lessons for contemporary attempts to promote peace in societies torn by conflict. The events described in Acts 6 illustrate the potential for constructive conflict resolution, even in deeply-rooted differences by emphasizing inclusive and collaborative problem-solving rather than divisive identity-based frameworks. The study will employ biblical exegesis, a literary analysis method (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Biblical Commission Document 51), to understand the text of Acts 6 and then explore how insights from this passage could be applied to contemporary conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

The significance of this biblical case study lies in its potential to inform modern approaches to peace-building. In a fractured world divided along cultural, religious, and ideological lines, the Apostles' model offers an alternative framework focused on inclusive, solution-oriented strategies, rather than identity-based approaches to conflict. By analysing the dynamics and outcomes of this historical episode from the Bible, the paper aims to derive valuable lessons on navigating communal divisions and achieving lasting peace. The goal is for this analysis to guide contemporary efforts to build peace in conflict-ridden societies.

### **Exegesis of Acts 6:1-7**

#### **The Historical Context of Acts 6:1-7**

A close reading of Acts 6:1-7 shows that the Greek phrase "*En de tais hemerais taútais*" in those days" signals the historical context of Acts 6:1. It is most likely

that the conflict took place in the earliest days of the Jerusalem Christian community, shortly after the events of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). After listening to Peter's speech, the converts, who joined the movement of the disciples, cut across cultures and nationalities. That was the time when more Jews and God-fearing Gentiles embraced the message of the Apostles about Jesus, the Messiah. According to Haenchen, the phrase, "*these days*", was meant to bind two episodes closely together: the time when the disciples were increasing in numbers and the difficulties that such growth comes with (Haenchen 1970, 260). What the narrator of the text sets out to do is to show that with such geometric growth, some challenges abound.

Understanding this text in the cultural context of the first century, Jerusalem is very crucial to unravel the depth of the crisis at hand and how dealing with and nipping it in the bud was imperative to the Apostles. Jerusalem was a diverse city inhabiting Jews from all over the regions and backgrounds and other Hellenist Jews, who spoke Greek and were influenced by the cultures of the Greeks. It is most likely that the Jewish Christians must have maintained connections to their Jewish heritage, customs, and religious practices, including caring for the widows. Thus, their differences in ethnicity and culture are enough to cause the tension the early Jerusalem Christians experienced at the beginning.

Caring for widows among the Jews was very significant in Judaism, stemming from their biblical injunctions on justice and compassion for the marginalized (Exod 22:22; Deut 24: 17-21). Most of the 8th-century prophets, Micah, Hosea, Isaiah, and Amos confronted the ill-treatments meted out to those classified as the poor, including widows, orphans, and weaker members of society (cf. Mic 6:8; Isa 1:16b-17a; Amos 5:1-17; Hos 4-8). In the New Testament, Paul asks the believers in Romans 15:25-28 and 1 Cor 16:1-4 to make collections for the needy in Jerusalem. Thus, even among the Gentile Christians, the task of caring for the poor was entrenched. It was unfortunate however, that in the said early Christian community, those whose responsibility it was to distribute daily ration, actually provided for the widows of the Hebrews, but were averse to the needs of the Hellenist widows. This culture and tongue bias, even if unintentional, that resulted in the neglect of one faction, would have constituted a major challenge for the early Church (Vanderpyl 2018, 1; Taylor 1998, 1593).

### **Literary Context of Acts 6:1-7**

The Book of Acts chronicles the remarkable growth and expansion of the early Christian Church following the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It documents the Apostles' evangelistic efforts and the rapid proliferation of the new faith, as thousands upon thousands of people from diverse backgrounds converted to Christianity in the years after Pentecost. Acts 6:1-7 specifically occurs within the context of the early church community in Jerusalem, which was experiencing remarkable growth and increasing diversity as more and more people joined

the movement. This passage comes shortly after the pivotal Pentecost event described in Acts 2, where the outpouring of the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to preach the gospel with boldness and authority, leading to a surge of new converts.

As the Jerusalem church grew exponentially, the Apostles faced an early organizational challenge. The increasing numbers and diversity within the community began to create tensions, particularly between Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking believers. These growing pains represented a critical juncture for the young church, as the Apostles had to find a way to effectively minister to the diverse needs of their expanding flock (Vanderpyl 2018, 1). This passage in Acts 6, thus serves as a transition point, bridging the initial phase of rapid growth and enthusiasm chronicled in Acts 2-5 with the church's subsequent outward mission and expansion that will unfold in the later chapters. The resolution offered by the Apostles in Acts 6:1-7 – delegating certain administrative responsibilities to a team of seven leaders – sets the stage for the church's continued flourishing and the Apostles' renewed focus on preaching, teaching, and outreach.

In summary, Acts 6:1-7 is situated firmly within the broader narrative Arc of the Book of Acts, addressing a key organizational challenge that the growing and diversifying early church in Jerusalem had to navigate to maintain unity and effectively minister to all members of the community. The passage marks a pivotal moment of transition for the young church.

### **The Structure of Acts 6:1-7**

For this paper, the structure of the text of Acts 6:1-7 is couched in the themes of crisis and resolution presented in a chiastic form of A, B, C, B` and A`. In A (v. 1), one is presented with the initial crisis situation, where the mission of the Apostles and the Gospel message was at stake because the Hellenists' widows complained of neglect in the distribution of food. In B (2-5a), designated as the first resolution includes the well-received proposals of the Apostles for the community to elect people of reputable character to oversee the distribution. C includes v. 5b, which is the implementation of the proposals, namely the election of seven deacons. B` (v. 6) is the second resolution, that is, the commissioning of the Seven Deacons. Finally, comes the closing situation that signals the outcome of the resolution designated as A`: The Spread of the Gospel as the outcome of resolution (v. 7). Accordingly, in this paper, the design of the structure of Acts 6:1-7 is presented in the following fashion:

- A: Initial crisis situation: The Hellenist widows are neglected (v. 1).
- B: First resolution: well-received apostolic proposal (vv. 2-5a).
- C: Implementation of the first resolution: the election of the Seven Deacons (v. 5b).

B` : Second resolution: Commissioning of the Seven Deacons (v. 6).

A` : Closing Situation: Exponential increase in Gospel spread and disciples' number (v. 7).

### Literary Analysis of Acts 6:1-7

#### A. Initial Crisis Situation: The Hellenist Widows are Neglected (v. 1)

The opening verse in Acts 6:1, '*En de tais hemerais taútais*', suggests the historical context of the early Jerusalem church. At the beginning of the church, after Pentecost, the message of the Apostles gave rise to an increase in the number of disciples (*plēthynóntōntónmathētōn*). These believers were most probably of Jewish descent, but products of diverse socio-cultural and ethnic differences (cf. Acts 9:10; and 16:1). As with many cases, such differences are enough breeding ground for biases. It is no surprise, therefore, that one faction in the early Christian community had reasons to raise a complaint. Arndt and Gingrich write that the noun '*gongysmós*' has two senses, as expressed in two texts of the New Testament (NT). In John 7:12 it means an "expression of discontent" while in the current text under study, it means "circulation of viewpoints in a suppressed manner" or "discreet talk and whispering" (Gingrich and Danker 1958, 164). This best describes the expression of the feelings of the Hellenists against the Hebrews. It is the same term employed by the Septuagint (LXX) for the grumbling of the Israelites against Moses and Aaron in Exod 16:7-12 and Num 11:1; 17:5 (Johnson 1992, 105; Vanderpyl 2018, 1, 2). In this context, however, what provokes the grumbling is not the unavailability of food, rather it is about the manner those who were supposed to serve (*diakonia*) the available food at the table, distributed food amongst the needy members of the community. The verb '*paratheōreō*' can be translated as "overlook, leave unnoticed, neglect" (Gingrich and Danker 1958, 616), but when considering a note of discrimination, Johnson says "slighted" would be more appropriate (Johnson 1992, 105). It is not clear in the text if the food supply was not enough to go around the needy. The root cause of the problem was the method that the widows of the Greek-speaking Jews had been or were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (Haenchen 1970, 261; Johnson 2009, 241; Rengstorf 1985, 126). That could have been the cause of the uneven distribution of food at the table; in this context, against the Hellenists' widows, which triggered the complaint that sprang up as a result. The appellation Hebrews "*Hebraious*" is used to refer to the Aramaic-speaking Jews, while Hellenists is for the Greek-speaking Jews. Luke's likely reason for using these terms 'Hebrews and Hellenists', must have been for linguistic distinction (Haenchen 1970, 260; Johnson 2009, 242; Zerwick and Grosvenor 1996, 368; Johnson 1992, 105; Vanderpyl 2018, 2).

#### B. First Resolution: Well-received Apostolic Proposal (vv. 2-5a)

From v. 2, the Twelve immediately swung into action by calling an assembly. According to Gingrich & Danker (1958, 715) the term "*proseklesamenoi*," derived from the verb "*proskaleo*," has the basic meaning of "to summon, call to oneself,

invite, invitation to appear.” In the context of the passage, this term likely refers to a general assembly of the disciples that the Twelve immediately convened (see also Friberg et al., 2000, 530). According to Johnson (1992) and Gingrich and Danker (1958), the use of the term “plethos” (multitude) to refer to the number of believers in a religious sense would have denoted a selected number to constitute a quorum for deliberation, and likely not the entire assembly of believers (Johnson 1992, 106; Gingrich & Danker, 1958, 668). While the use of “plethos” likely referred to a selected group, rather than the entire assembly of believers. This interpretation does not necessarily negate the possibility of it being translated as an assembly of the disciples or all the believers, as Haenchen (1970) suggests. The text allows for both interpretations - that it was a representative group convened, or that it was a gathering of the broader community of disciples and believers. The language used allows for flexibility in understanding the precise nature of the assembly.

The reader notices how swift the Apostles are in attending to the complaints before it gets out of hand. The verb “to summon” in its aorist participle (*proseklesamenoi*), following typical Greek syntax, shows that the assembly that the Twelve summoned together was a one-off thing as far as the issue was concerned. It was meant to affirm the fact that there was an assembly of all the disciples to take action on the crisis that was about to threaten the growth of the early Christians. The Apostles proposed to them to choose from amongst themselves, who to serve at the table. In their view, it was appropriate that they, Apostles, should focus on the ministry of prayer and preaching of the word (Fitzmyer 1998, 344), while the chosen men of repute were to focus on the distribution of food at the table in the best ways suitable for all of them.

The author of Acts employs the verb '*episkoptein*' in its aorist imperative form '*episkeptasthe*' which in its ordinary sense (Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; Acts 7:23; 15:14, 36) means 'to visit', However, Danker (2009, 145) avers that in this context it means “finding a suitable person for an official position, choose, select, look for” (See also Johnson 1992, 106; Zerwick and Grosvenor 1996, 368). Thus, the mandate for the assembly was to select approved men (*martyroumenos*), that is, men whose character has been tested and approved before the assembly. Additionally, the said men must be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to be saddled with the responsibility of service. That the men must satisfy every moral standard, and be well-spoken of, was so that they could carry out this responsibility with discernment and respect to the people they would serve (Fitzmyer 1998, 349). By this, it is the community members themselves, who were to democratically (in its true sense) elect the seven men. Then, the multitude were pleased with the proposals of the Apostles. But the task of commissioning the chosen was the onus of the Twelve.

The narrative reveals that '*dōdeka*', the Twelve, refers to the Apostles. The number, twelve, recalls the twelve tribes of Israel from the Old Testament. By choosing twelve apostles, the New Testament signifies that their mission was to

carry forward God's plan of salvation that began with the ancient Israelites. This highlights the crucial role the Apostles would play as leaders guiding the new people of God, the Christians, who are the true spiritual descendants of Israel. (Johnson 2009, 242; Haenchen 1970, 262).

### **C. Implementation of the first Resolution: The Election of the Seven Deacons (v. 5b)**

After the Apostles proposed electing assistants, the following seven men were chosen as deacons: Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, along with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a convert to Judaism from Antioch. Based on the names of those elected to serve at the distribution tables, it appears the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) believers may have outnumbered the Hebraic (Aramaic-speaking) believers in the early Jerusalem church.

While the exact demographic breakdown is unclear, the selection of these seven deacons seemed to have favoured representation from the Hellenistic group (Austin 2022, online page). Perhaps this was deliberate to strike a balance and to checkmate the biases. One notices how the aforementioned requisite virtues are being noted in the elected individuals.

### **D. Second Resolution: Commissioning of the Seven Deacons (v. 6)**

After the Apostles made their proposal to appoint assistants, and the community agreed by selecting the seven men mentioned, the Apostles laid their hands upon these chosen individuals. This laying on of hands was a sacred act of blessing, commissioning, and empowering the seven to take up the important duty of serving at the distribution tables. Having ordained these helpers through prayer and the laying on of hands, the Apostles were then able to focus more fully on their primary mission of preaching the message of the gospels and the word of God. To pray (*proseuchomai*) is understood as directing one's thoughts, words, or desires towards a divine being or deity, often making a request, promise, or expressing a wish to ask for help, guidance, or intervention. To lay "*episthemi*" hand, on the other hand, means to ritually lay hands on someone to symbolize empowerment in a spiritual sense (Arndt and Gingrich 1979, 300, 714). The two actions signal the dependence of the disciples on God's will and choice suggesting that there were no human sentiments, while spiritually empowering the seven to serve in charity.

### **E. Closing Situation: Exponential Increase in Gospel Spread and Disciples' Number (v. 7)**

By delegating responsibilities and appointing the seven deacons, the initial crisis and potential threat to the unity of the early Christian community was effectively resolved. The biblical text immediately notes the positive outcome of this structural reorganization, stating that "the word of God continued to spread." The verb used here, "*euxanen*" from the Greek "*auxano*," figuratively refers to an increase or growth in spiritual matters. Moreover, the passage declares that the church itself continued to expand and thrive, with the good

news of the gospel being proclaimed ever more widely. This proliferation serves as a visible manifestation of God's favour and blessing upon the church's efforts.

The addition of the seven deacons had the dual benefit of allowing the Apostles to dedicate themselves fully to their ministerial duties of preaching and teaching, while simultaneously ensuring the community's practical needs were adequately met. (Fitzmyer 1997, 351; Haenchen 1970, 264). It was only after directly addressing and rectifying this internal dispute in Jerusalem that the gospel message could then spread unimpeded to the farthest reaches of the known world, following Christ's Great Commission. It is in this sense that the importance of conflict resolution beyond identity as demonstrated in Acts 7:1-7 is a veritable paradigm for peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

### **Some Key Themes in Acts 6:1-7**

#### *Addressing Inequalities and Power Imbalances*

Acts 6:1-7 depicts a conflict within the early Christian community, arising from the unfair treatment of certain groups, particularly the Hellenistic believers' widows (Johnson 1992, 105; Taylor 1998, 1593). This led to an imbalance of power within the church, highlighting the need for the apostles to address systemic imbalances and marginalization of particular groups. True unity cannot be achieved if some members feel sidelined, discriminated against, or deprived of their basic needs due to their ethnic, cultural, or social status.

The apostles demonstrated their commitment to creating an inclusive environment, where all people were valued and cared for equally. Effective conflict resolution often requires an honest reckoning with power dynamics and ingrained inequalities. Acts 6:1-7 serves as a model for faith communities and society to remain vigilant against injustice, discrimination, and marginalization of vulnerable persons or groups (Richardson 2021, 64). By proactively working to level the playing field and dismantle systemic biases, genuine reconciliation, harmony, and a sense of belonging can be achieved within a diverse community.

#### *Inclusive Leadership and Representation*

The apostles in Acts 6 exemplified the importance of inclusive leadership in resolving conflicts between Hellenistic and Hebraic believers (Kroll 1990, 6). They appointed seven deacons, including individuals from both Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking groups, to ensure that all members' concerns and perspectives were considered in decision-making. This approach demonstrates the value of leadership that reflects the diversity within a community, fostering a sense of belonging and preventing marginalization. Inclusive leadership sends a powerful message, that every voice matters and that the needs of all will be considered equitably. Effective conflict resolution requires a nuanced understanding of the root causes and contextual factors, and leaders, who share the cultural, linguistic, or social identities of those

involved are better positioned to craft solutions that resonate with all parties (Ngele & Peters, 2019, 3). This approach builds trust and increases the likelihood of finding common ground. Inclusive leadership not only aids in navigating conflicts more sensitively but also enhances the resilience and cohesion of a community in the long run.

#### *Division of Labour and Shared Responsibilities*

Acts 6 describes the apostles' decision to assign deacons to manage the daily distribution of food and resources within a growing Christian community. This division of labour allowed each group to focus on their core strengths, allowing the apostles to focus on spiritual leadership and the deacons to ensure fair allocation of provisions and cater to the physical needs of the community members, particularly widows and vulnerable groups (Guzik, 2018, c). This approach exemplifies task-sharing and leveraging diverse talents for the collective good. It makes the overall workload more manageable and efficient, fostering a sense of shared ownership and responsibility among all members (Butler 2001, 133). The early church's model emphasizes the importance of recognizing the multifaceted nature of any organization's needs, whether spiritual, practical, or administrative. By embracing a division of labour and shared responsibilities, diverse groups can work harmoniously towards common goals, while ensuring no critical aspect is neglected or overlooked (DESA 2009, 20; Usman 2020, 92).

#### *Participatory Decision-Making and Community Buy-In*

The apostles' approach to resource distribution conflict exemplifies the importance of participatory decision-making. They involved the entire community in the selection process, ensuring the chosen individuals had trust and support. This approach increased stakeholder ownership and investment in the outcome, fostering a more nuanced perspective on the root causes and potential solutions. Sustainable conflict resolution requires a long-term commitment to building and maintaining healthy relationships within the community. Active participation in decision-making leads to greater buy-in, empowerment, and a shared sense of responsibility for the community's well-being (Usman 2020, 92; Muhamad et al., 2020, 4; North Central College, 2022). According to Usman (2020), Abraham was the exemplar of the early church as it underscores the need for open dialogue, transparency, and collective input in navigating conflicts and implementing change (86).

#### *Empowerment and Capacity-Building*

The apostles appointed seven deacons and formally endorsed their roles, demonstrating the importance of empowerment and capacity building in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. They emphasized the need to empower all stakeholders involved, cultivating a sense of ownership, agency, and competence among those directly affected by conflicts. The apostles' act not only delegated tasks, but also actively developed local leadership and grassroots capacity. This approach contributed to the church's growth and well-being, enabling the deacons to take on vital functions and contribute to the

community's cohesion. Effective peacebuilding efforts should prioritize capacity-building at all levels, equipping individuals, communities, and institutions with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed for conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery (Anderlini & Stanski 2013, 55). Empowerment and leadership development are crucial for ensuring lasting peace and sustainable peace within communities.

#### *Prioritizing Unity and Reconciliation*

The apostles' actions in the early church community emphasized the importance of preserving unity and preventing further divisions. They prioritized reconciliation and the restoration of healthy relationships between all parties involved in a conflict. True peace requires healing fractured bonds, fostering mutual understanding, and creating open dialogue for mutual understanding. Reconciliation involves acknowledging past harms, extending forgiveness, and rebuilding trust (Schmitz 2021). The appointment of deacons in the early church was a symbolic act of reunification, ensuring fair representation and meeting the needs of both Hellenistic and Hebraic groups. Effective peacebuilding initiatives must prioritize unity and reconciliation, fostering an environment, where all parties can move forward as equal partners in creating a more harmonious future together.

#### *Divine Favour and Spiritual Renewal*

The biblical account of the early church demonstrates that successful conflict resolution can lead to spiritual vitality and revival. The apostles' plan to appoint deacons and resolve internal conflicts led to significant growth, with the gospel message spreading widely. This positive outcome is a sign of God's favour and blessing upon the community. Unresolved conflicts can hinder spiritual growth and obscure divine workings. However, when addressed constructively, with humility and a genuine desire for reconciliation, spiritual renewal can occur. This can take various forms, such as rekindled worship, charitable works, and evangelism (National Open University of Nigeria, 27). The early church's experience serves as a reminder that peacebuilding is not just a practical necessity, but also a spiritual imperative. By prioritizing reconciliation, unity, and the restoration of right relationships, faith communities can experience divine favour, spiritual growth, and a tangible sense of God's presence.

### **Insights from Acts 6:1-7 on Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution in Contemporary Societies and Organizations**

Like the early Jerusalem church, there is a wide range of dimensions of conflicts in the society or organization in our world today. Nwaoru (2015, 483) has argued that human agents engender, promote, and even proliferate conflicts. They are, for him, even the greatest threat to peaceful co-existence. He affirms that relatives, servants, maids, friends, co-workers, and many others in the nuclear and extended families are fermenters of conflicts. The account of the early church's resolution of internal conflict, as described in Acts 6:1-7, provides a timeless framework for effective peacebuilding in modern societies and organizations, where human agents stand as threats to peaceful co-existence. At

its core, this biblical narrative highlights the importance of addressing systemic inequalities and power imbalances that can breed resentment and divisions within diverse communities. By taking proactive steps to ensure fair representation and equitable distribution of resources, the apostles modelled an approach that prioritizes inclusivity and rectifies marginalization - key tenets for achieving true unity and reconciliation. In this connection, Obiora (2015, 47) has argued from the point of view of Gen 13:8 that (unlike the Christian community in Acts 6), it is struggling to survive from the meagre resources that cause conflict in Africa today, especially when the interests of other people are not considered at all. As a result, the struggle for one to survive can lead to even the sacrifice of others. These are rooted in the conflicts that manifest themselves in “many families, tribal, ethnic, national and international conflicts...” (47).

Ijezie on his part affirms that conflict is caused in human society when it lacks people with integrity in leadership positions. Leaders, who are not enthroned by God and do not rule with righteousness. He argues that “for the enhancement of relationships on all levels, righteousness must be the motto in all activities” (Ijezie 2015, 193). Pilani (2023b, 233) affirms that there are such leaders because rather than being elected into positions, they are selected by powerful individuals. In this regard, a central aspect of the apostles' response was the promotion of inclusive participation and leadership with honour and integrity that reflected the diversity within the community. The selection of the seven deacons, comprising both Hellenistic and Hebraic believers, sent a powerful message about the value of representation and the importance of empowering all stakeholders. Beyond the inclusiveness, the biblical leaders showed leadership with ethics and morals. But as Ijezie would affirm, good leadership enthroned by God is absent in many African countries. He captured this view thus: “Unfortunately, many countries of Africa have had experiences of leaders, who could be described as wolves and dangerous lions to their people. Most of the time, the state apparatus is used as an instrument of oppression and subjugation of the citizenry” (193). As a result of such leaders cutting across Africa, the author argues that they only inflame ethnic, religious, and other socio-political conflicts among the people living within the same territory or under a political arrangement. These conflicts are endemic because these people often live together without being in just and righteous relations (193). Thus, the principles in Acts 6:1-7 remain relevant today, as organizations and societies grappling with conflicts must intentionally cultivate leadership structures that mirror the varied identities and perspectives present, fostering trust, integrity, justice, and a sense of shared ownership in conflict resolution processes.

Furthermore, Acts 6 exemplifies the wisdom of task-sharing and leveraging the unique strengths of different members for the greater good. By appointing deacons to handle practical needs, the apostles could focus on their spiritual leadership roles, modelling a division of labour that enhanced efficiency and

accountability. This approach not only prevents overburdening but also encourages collaboration and a spirit of mutual responsibility within diverse groups, invaluable qualities for sustainable peacebuilding initiatives (Richardson 2021, 61, 62.).

The involvement of the entire community in selecting the deacons underscores the significance of participatory decision-making and consensus-building. Pilani (2023a, 39), argues that “The exclusion of some community members in deliberations may hinder or forestall meaningful viewpoints culminating in stunted growth and progress.” Indeed, when stakeholders have a voice in shaping resolutions, they are more likely to embrace the outcomes and remain invested in their long-term success. This inclusive approach fosters transparency, empowerment, and a shared commitment to the well-being of the larger community – essential elements for navigating conflicts constructively and maintaining durable peace. Where leadership is not purposeful and emerges not from the people, there is mutual suspicion and hatred. This mutual hatred, according to the author, emanates from “injustice, intolerance of difference, and fear of the other” (Ijezie 2015, 194).

Additionally, the ceremonial laying of hands by the apostles exemplified the importance of empowerment and capacity-building in peacebuilding efforts. The lack of inner disposition to work for peaceful co-existence by the parties involved is the major cause of conflict (Obiora 2015, 47). By affirming the deacons' roles, the apostles invested authority and dignity into grassroots leadership, cultivating local ownership and the ability to contribute to long-term stability. Effective conflict resolution initiatives must prioritize developing the skills, knowledge, and resources of those directly impacted, ensuring they are equipped to be active agents in shaping their destinies.

Ultimately, the passage reveals that the successful resolution of the conflict paved the way for spiritual renewal and the manifestation of divine blessings, as evidenced by the continued growth and spread of the gospel message. This underscores the profound truth that authentic peacebuilding, grounded in principles of unity, reconciliation, and the restoration of harmonious relationships can create an environment conducive to flourishing – whether in religious contexts or secular spheres. By prioritizing these timeless values, contemporary societies and organizations can unlock transformative potential and foster lasting peace.

### **Recommendations**

From the foregoing study of Acts 6:1-7 on conflict and its resolution, this research proffers the following recommendations.

*i. Leaders should act with urgency to tackle conflicts at their earliest stages.* Leaders should act with urgency to tackle conflicts at their earliest stages. This principle is demonstrated in Acts 6:1 when the grumbling party in the Christian community, were swiftly attended to by the church leaders. The Twelve

Apostles, who were the leaders, did not ignore or delay in dealing with this issue. Instead, they responded right away before the situation could potentially escalate further. The passage describes the Twelve gathering together quickly to form a council or group to address the matter immediately. They did not waste any time in tackling the conflict as soon as it arose. By acting with a sense of urgency at the very first signs of discord, the Twelve Apostles showed wise leadership by aiming to resolve the disagreement before it became an even bigger problem. Leaders in any context must be watchful for early warning signs of conflict and be prepared to respond swiftly to address grievances or tensions among their people before they fester and grow out of control.

*ii. Leaders should have a mission for growth and development.*

Wise leaders keep their organization's core mission for advancement and development as the highest priority, addressing anything that jeopardizes or distracts them from that mission with a sense of urgency and resolve. The twelve Apostles in Acts 6 demonstrated the importance of having a clear mission for growth and development. Their mission was to preach and spread the gospel message, as well as to devote themselves to prayer and spiritual leadership. If they had allowed internal conflicts to continue unresolved, they would have become major obstacles in fulfilling their divine calling. The apostles recognized the threat of internal strife and disunity to their divine calling. They understood the need to remove hindrances to facilitate growth, both numerically and spiritually, for the church and believers.

*iii. Leaders should be seen to possess integrity, honesty, and transparency.*

The Apostles' integrity and honesty earned their trust, allowing them to maintain the respect and loyalty of their followers. As Usman (2020) asserts, it was the unquestionable integrity of Abraham that made peace possible in the Abraham – Lot story in Genesis 13 (86). By doing so, the Apostles demonstrated the importance of integrity, honesty, and transparency in early Christian leadership. First, they acknowledged the issue and took proactive steps to address it. Second, they involved the entire community in finding a solution and delegated the task to seven individuals known for their wisdom and the Holy Spirit. This decision not only addressed the issue but also ensured accountability and trust in the community. This led to the early Christian community's continued growth and unity in following Jesus Christ's teachings. Similarly, leaders of nations and local communities as well as religious sects should be seen to possess integrity, honesty, and transparency as these are veritable values that signal accountability and elicit trust in their followers. This is important because as it has been observed, many leaders including religious ones have come to be known to lack honesty and integrity (Pilani 2022, 84).

*iv. Leaders should be seen to be consultative*

Leaders of different groups, nations, and associations should employ consultative leadership skills to foster unity, harmony, and mutual respect among diverse groups. In Acts 6:1-7, the Apostles demonstrate the importance of consultative leadership in the early Christian community. They called for a

gathering to discuss the neglect of their widows in the daily distribution of food, valuing the perspectives of all members, regardless of their background or status. This inclusive approach empowered the disciples to voice their concerns and ideas, fostering ownership and participation in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the Apostles sought input from the community and considered their proposals, ensuring that the solutions devised were acceptable to all parties involved.

*v. Leaders should possess the quality of inclusiveness and delegation of powers*

As in Acts 6:1-7 leaders should be seen to possess the principle of inclusiveness. They should also have the capacity to delegate powers within the community. The Twelve Apostles addressed the issue of neglecting the widows of Hellenistic Jews by involving representatives from all parties involved in the decision-making process. They formed a consultative body with individuals from both Hebrew and Hellenistic backgrounds, ensuring all voices were heard and represented. This inclusivity fostered unity and collaboration among diverse groups. Again, the Apostles also demonstrated their willingness to delegate powers, entrusting the responsibility of selecting the seven deacons to the consultative body. This empowered the community and acknowledged their capability in decision-making. This model of inclusive leadership promoted engagement, unity, and trust among all members.

## **Conclusion**

This research claimed that, for the fact that human society is faced with a plethora of conflicts and wars, making peace is achievable. The only obstacle to peaceful coexistence is rooted either in the lack of men and women, who are competent, vision-driven, and have integrity and character or the methods or approaches for making peace are faulty. The world of human society cannot be completely rid of conflicts and wars; therefore, it is imperative to have leaders, who possess the qualities the authors of this research have recommended. Hence, the events described in Acts 6 illustrate the potential for constructive conflict resolution, even in deeply-rooted differences by emphasizing inclusive and collaborative problem-solving, rather than divisive identity-based frameworks.

Some biblical examples of conflicts in both the Old and New Testaments have shown that conflict is as old as humankind. What would have become violent if care was not taken, was nipped in the bud because of the personality of the parties involved and the honesty and sincerity of the brokers of peace. Thus, Abraham and Lot avoided bloodletting in Genesis 13; the same was with the Apostles in Acts 6. Therefore, this research's findings have affirmed that if those who are driven by conflicts sincerely seek peace and pursue it with honesty and transparency, resolving conflict in human society would be achieved.

## References

- Arndt, W.F. and Gingrich W. F. (Trans. 1979). "Proseuchomai" in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (Trans. 1979). "Gongyzo." In *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: And Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (Trans. 1979). "Proskaleo" in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University Press.
- Austin, P. (2022). *Acts 6 Commentary*. <https://www.preceptaustin.org/acts-6-commentary>
- Bruce, J. Manila (1998). *The New Testament World: Insight from Cultural Anthropology*. Louisville, Westminster: John Knox.
- Butler, E. (2001). Technologising equity: the politics and practices of work-related learning. In Boud, D. and Garrick, J., [Eds], *Understanding Learning at Work*, 132-150. London: Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Understanding-Learning-at-Work/Boud-Garrick/p/book/9780415182294>.
- DESA [UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs], (2009). *Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration*. <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2009/Ghana/inclusive-society.pdf>
- Dillion, Richard J. (1990). "Acts of the Apostles" in Raymond E. Brown, et al. (Eds.) *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. (1997). "The Acts of the Apostles" *The Anchor Bible*. Vol. 31. New York: Doubleday.
- Friberg, T., Friberg, B., & Miller, N. F. (2000). *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Baker Books.
- Guzik, D. (2018, c). Acts 6 – The Appointment of Deacons and the Arrest of Stephen, *The Enduring Word*. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-6/>
- Haenchen, Ernst (1971). *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- Ijezie, Luke E. (2015). "Peace as Fruit of Justice and Righteousness: The Perspective of Isa11:1-9 and implications for Peace in Africa." In Paul Béré, et al. (Eds). *Conflicts and Reconciliation in the Bible: Proceedings of the Fourteenth Congress of the Panafrican Association of Catholic Exegetes*. Abidjan: Panafrican.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy (1992). "The Acts of the Apostles" in Daniel J. Harrington (Ed.), *Sacra Pagina*. Vol. 5. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press.
- Kroll, P. (1990). "Studies in the Book of Acts." Morrison M. (ed). CGS. <https://learn.gcs.edu/mod/book/view.php?id=4475&chapterid=70>
- Muhamad, N. K., K. E. Lee & M. Mokhtar (2020). Sustainable city and community empowerment through the implementation of community-based monitoring: A conceptual approach. *Sustainability*, 12(22), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229583>.
- National Open University of Nigeria [NOUN] (2021). Conflict Management Faculty of Arts: Department of Religious Studies course. [https://nou.edu.ng/coursewarecontent/CRS856\\_Conflict%20Management.pdf](https://nou.edu.ng/coursewarecontent/CRS856_Conflict%20Management.pdf)

- Ngele, O. K. & P. E. Peters (2019). "A critical study of Acts 6:1-3 and its implications for political restructuring in Nigeria", in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 75(4), a5334. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5334>
- North Central College. (2022). Why is Conflict Resolution Important? <https://www.northcentralcollege.edu/news/2022/09/13/why-conflict-resolution-important>.
- Nwaoru, Emmanuel O. (2015). "Separated but not Estranged: Reading Abraham-Lot Narrative in African Family Context" in *Theology and Family in Africa*. Eds. Ferdinand Nwaigbo, John Gangwari, ed. al. Port Harcourt: CIWA.
- Obiorah, Mary Jerome (2015). "Let there be no strife' (Gen 13:8): A Study of Genesis 13 in the African Context". Paul Béré, et al. (Eds). *Proceeding of the fourteenth Congress of the Panafrican Association of African Exegetes in Conflicts and Reconciliation in the Bible*. Abidjan: Panafrican.
- Pilani, M. P. (2022). "Amos 7: 10 - 17 A paradigm for Interpreting Modern Ministers." In Bernard Ukwuegbu et al (eds.). *The Bible on Ministries and Ministers*. Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN) Vol 14. 69-87. Port Harcourt: CABAN.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2023). "Synodality in Numbers 11:24-30: An Architype for Participation in Community Life" in Bernard Ukwuegbu et al (eds.). *The Bible on Synodality: Walking Together in Communion, Participation and Mission*. Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN) Vol 14. 24-42. Port Harcourt: CABAN.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2023). "Socio-Political Neophobia: The Bane of Advancement in Nigeria as A Nation" in Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu et. Al. (eds). *The Economy of Leadership and Social Transformation in Contemporary Africa: Essays in Honour of Professor Ichoku Hyacinth Ementa*. 227-250. <https://www.acjoi.org/index.php/proceedings/article/view/4155>
- Rengstorf, K. H. (1985). "Gongyismos" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich Eds). Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Richardson L. K. (2021), "The Ethics of Inclusion: A Social and Cultural Analysis of Acts 6:1-7." *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 11, no. 1. 59-66.
- Richardson, Leopold A. Kimo (2021). "The Ethics of Inclusion: A Social and Cultural Analysis of Acts 6:1-7" in *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* Vol. 11, No. 1.
- Schmitz, T. (2021, April 20). *Conflict Resolution: An Important Life Skill*. The Conover Company. <https://www.conovercompany.com/conflict-resolution-an-important-life-skill/>
- Taylor, Justin (1998). "Acts of the Apostles" in *The International Bible Commentary: An Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India.
- Usman, Joel Haruna (2020). "Making Peace in Kaduna State in the Light of Gen 13:8-9" in *Nigerian Journal of Religion and Society*, Vol. 10. September.
- Vanderpyl, Tim H. (2018). "The 'Tipping Point' of the Early Church: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Acts 6:1-7" in *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*, Vol. 19 (47). November 25.
- Zerwick, Max & Mary Grosvenor (1996). *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*. Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico.