The mechanisms for resolving conflicts within the Moravian Church in southern and southwest in Tanzania

Anyingisye Anyelwisye Mshani
PhD Student
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Dar es Salaam
Email: anyingisyem@yahoo.com

Thomas Joseph Ndaluka
Senior Lecturer,
University of Dar es Salaam
Email: thomas.j.ndaluka@gmail.com

Abstract

Globally, religious conflicts have been occurring because of various reasons over centuries and continue happening up to the twenty first century. The present study focused at the mechanisms used by the church to resolve church conflicts in the Moravian Church Southern and Southwestern Tanzania. The study grounded in two theories: mimetic desire theory and conflict theory. The study adopted a qualitative approach and employed a phenomenological case study research design. Data were collected by using Focus Group Discussion, documentary reviews and in-depth interviews. Thematic and content methods were used in analyzing the qualitative data. Research findings revealed the following as the mechanisms for solving conflicts within the Moravian church: early identification of elements of conflicts, looking beyond of occurrences mark the awareness on church governance, church relations with government, relations with other denominations, education projects, education and its effectiveness and good church succession plan. On the other hand, the study findings revealed other conflict handling styles like securing repentance and agreement, avoidance, competing, compromising, dialogues and counselling as essential mechanism for resolving conflicts within the church. It was recommended the church to prepare the clergy and future leaders on handling conflicts through including leadership and conflict management courses in the curriculum of the Provincial Theological Colleges.

Key words: *mechanism for solving conflicts, early detection of conflicts elements, securing repentance and agreement, avoidance, dialogue and counselling*

Introduction

Religion has long been a force for both unity and division (Bulkeley et al, 2009). Religious conflicts, far from being new, have occurred globally for various reasons since the advent of religion, persisting into the 21st century (Hutton, 2000; Bulkeley et al., 2009). The Moravian Church, for example, has faced internal and external conflicts since its founding in 1457, driven by personal interests, cultural backgrounds, and ignorance (Kinkel, 2020). These conflicts have

impacted other religious denominations like the Lutheran, Assemblies of God, Pentecostal, and Anglican churches (Kinkel, 2020).

In Tanzania, the Moravian Church's growth has been marred by internal disputes, particularly among leaders in the Southern and Southwest Provinces. Major conflicts occurred between 1982, 1988 to 1993, and 2013-2016, resulting in social divisions. For instance, people stopped attending social events together, such as funerals and marriages. The conflicts in Kyela and Mbeya in 1982 and 1988 were especially devastating, leading to deaths, loss of property, and displacement (Mshani 2015).

Efforts at peacebuilding have included dialogue among clergy and government-led arbitration, though many reconciliation attempts have failed (Morton, 1996). Reconciliation teams included members from the global Moravian Church, but their efforts were not always successful. Empirical research shows mixed attitudes among leaders and pastors towards conflict, with educated leaders showing a more positive approach to conflict resolution through counseling and training (Smith, Goldmon, and Green, 2023).

Ramadhan's (2002) study on conflict mediation in Africa, specifically in Burundi, emphasized dialogue and negotiation as key strategies for achieving peace. Similarly, Mshani (2015) highlighted reconciliation and joint problem-solving as conflict resolution mechanisms within the Moravian Church in Tanzania. Dejene (2002) further identified negotiation, mediation, and arbitration as vital tools for peaceful conflict resolution, echoed by John's (2015) study on conflict within the Southern Baptist Convention in the US, which proposed forming committees to educate and support church members and ministers in conflict.

This study draws on two theories: Rene Girard's mimetic desire theory and Max Weber's conflict theory. Girard's theory emphasizes the role of mimetic desire and scapegoating in conflicts, with repentance as a path to resolution (Andrade, 2022). Weber's conflict theory explains how social order is often maintained through power and domination rather than consensus, shedding light on organizational conflict resolution.

Methodology

This study was conducted in regions within the Southern and Southwest Provinces of Tanzania, particularly in Mbeya (Mshani, 2015). The researcher selected six parishes in the Mbeya region: Tukuyu, Kyela, Rungwa, Ruanda, Mbeya town, and Itili. The aim was to gather information to describe religious conflicts within the Moravian Church in Tanzania. A phenomenological research design was employed to understand the subjective experiences of Moravian leaders and believers in the Southern and Southwest provinces (Creswell, 2014). Data was generated using six focus group discussions, ten key informant interviews, and twenty-four in-depth interviews, all recorded using a mini recorder while field notes were concurrently taken.

The total sample size consisted of fifty-four respondents, selected using a purposive sampling technique. This approach involves identifying and selecting individuals or cases that are particularly informative about the phenomenon of interest (Singh & Jadhav, 2023). This non-

probability sampling method allowed the researcher to intentionally select respondents who could provide valuable data.

While methods can vary across disciplines, the emphasis on accuracy and honesty in methodology remains consistent. Data analysis adhered to the principles of thematic analysis, which identified emergent themes and patterns in participant responses, focusing on common ground, breakthroughs, collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethical processes, and problem-solving. Thematic analysis was chosen for its feasibility in linking concepts and themes derived from replicated data (Kigera & Varpio, 2020).

Findings and Discussion

This study analyses the mechanisms used in dealing with conflicts within the Moravian Church as experienced in the study area, looking in Southern and Southwest in Tanzania. This section presents and discusses the findings based on the themes that emerged during data analysis. The subsequent findings obtained about strategies used in dealing with conflicts included the following hereunder.

Early detection of conflicts elements

Early identification of conflict elements emerged as a crucial topic in the discussions. Respondents highlighted that identifying these elements early on is the most effective mechanism for timely conflict resolution. When asked about the optimal timing to address conflicts, one respondent shared their perspective:

> *Conflict resolution depends on the type of conflict itself. But in all types of conflicts, the important thing is to solve challenges when they arise early. When the crisis starts the very beginning, it is the best time to solve it because it is still immature. Left alone, it can cause more serious harm (IDI 3 with Male; Ruanda Congregation, Mbeya August 2023).*

It means that the best time to resolve conflicts depends on the type of conflict. Some conflicts may start subtly, allowing the church to intervene early and prevent escalation. It's crucial for mediators to step in swiftly and impartially to facilitate reconciliation before sides become entrenched. Therefore, the optimal time to address a conflict is when it first emerges.

Looking beyond the occurrence.

Another step among many necessary steps to resolve problems in their areas of responsibility was discussed. Respondent said:

> *On the step of resolving conflict one among other ways of a leader to settle down disputes is to look beyond the incidence by question them to when do they think the problem between them first arose (IDI 5 with Male; Itili congregation, Mbeya August 2023).*

Respondents indicated that it is not always the situation itself but the perspective of that situation that causes anger and leads to disruptive outcomes. The source of conflict may stem from a minor issue that occurred days prior, but stress can escalate to the point where parties

begin attacking each other personally instead of addressing the real problem. In a calm atmosphere, it's crucial to encourage them to look beyond the triggering incident to identify the underlying cause. Probing questions like, "What do you think happened here?" help leaders look beyond surface occurrences. Defining the cause of conflict enables leaders to understand how the issue escalated. Both parties must agree on the issue and discuss unmet needs on both sides. Continuously asking questions ensures that all conflicting parties comprehend the issue, keeping them focused on the matter while avoiding personal emotions. This approach gathers information on each side's perspectives, allowing for a professional discussion without targeting specific individuals or groups.

Additionally, examining underlying occurrences emphasizes the importance of leadership awareness in church governance. Effective governance is a crucial mechanism for addressing conflicts within an organization. It has been stated that:

> *The proper procedures and operation of the church following the established rules is one of the best ways to prevent and resolve conflicts within the church. The well-being of the community and the peace of the community depends on the existence of a good operations of worship and its service in a very transparent manner without including the corruption of politics (IDI 29 with Male; Mbeya June 2023).*

The quote above highlights the clarity of church rules, instilling hope, while also indicating that the church is entangled in politics, such as unfulfilled pledges. An increasing number of people face financial hardship, and the church's debt is seen as shameful, suggesting an unrealistic budget. When meetings are held, an analysis should determine actions and follow-up responsibilities.

Additionally, examining underlying occurrences raises awareness of the church's relationship with the government. The church operates according to rules approved by the government registrar, ensuring adherence to regulations. Another concern is the relationship with other denominations or religious institutions, which emerged as crucial in the discussion. Respondents emphasized the importance of awareness regarding these relationships as mechanisms for addressing conflicts. They were asked about the nature of the relationship between the church and other denominations, and their responses were as follows:

Our relationship with other Christian's churches and other religious is good but also not good. There are Christians with good faith that has respect and dignity for everyone. It is a sad thing that there are some Christians, or some groups of Christians who see that they are holier than their peers and see that the fire of heaven has been prepared for them if they do not change to what they are. But there are also religious that consider themselves better in faith than others. They do slander and hate churches that do not believe like them. This religious crisis does exist because it has foundations from the founders of those religious.

Figure 1: Figure 7. 1 The Relationship with Other Religious Institutions

Source: A Written Statement during IDI with Female; Mbeya August 2023.

The respondent's viewpoint suggests that relationships are generally good, extending to cooperation in weddings, funerals, fundraising events, and community developments. Respondents acknowledged that these relationships contribute to maintaining peace within the community. However, some highlighted instances of jealousy and distrust among denominations competing for members, particularly regarding tithes and offerings.

They emphasized that relationships between denominations largely depend on perceptions. The Moravian Church does not segregate or exclude individuals from other denominations; they welcome others to preach the word of God. On average, relations with other denominations are satisfactory, although they are mostly indirect, except for interactions facilitated by the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT).

Churches like the Christian Social Services Commission (CSSC), formed by the amalgamation of CCT and TEC, play a crucial role in promoting unity and resolving conflicts among churches. Respondent clarified:

> *On the relationship of Moravian with other denomination that have been negatively affected because other religions institutions support same sex marriage which is categorically improper for Moravian. Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) have marginalized other denomination over this. Denominations with similar goals and visions tend to use the same platform to build strong relationships between them (KII with Male; Ileje July 2023).*

Additionally, respondents highlighted the cooperation between Roman Catholics (TEC), Protestants (CCT), and Pentecostals (PCT) in various respects, fostering unity and a sense of togetherness as they collaborate harmoniously. However, some believers perceive these relationships as weak because each denomination tends to praise its own cleanliness and emphasize differences in beliefs. This perceived superiority leads to spiritual segregation, where individuals see themselves as better than others, lacking humility. Respondents noted widespread hypocrisy among denominations, which hinders genuine self-reflection and relationship-building with Christians from other groups.

Nevertheless, respondents acknowledged efforts to respect other religious institutions and maintain good relations. In contrast, relationships can be strained due to differences in worship practices, baptism methods (immersion, sprinkling, pouring), and doctrinal teachings that mislead others about the Christian faith.

It is essential to accept these differences among denominations for love's sake, which fosters stronger relationships during events and sermons. However, denominations like Pentecostal churches, facing instability that leads to member splits and new church formations, pose challenges in their relationships with others, perpetuating faith crises. While seeking unity, a common witness, and Christian service despite theological differences, Seventh-day Adventists, for instance, share beliefs with fundamentalists but reject certain teachings as unbiblical, creating distinctions even within ecumenical efforts (Taylor 2015).

The topic of education projects emerged as crucial in discussions. The Church has implemented several education initiatives, such as Mbozi Mission and Lutengano secondary schools, Rungwe, Mbeya, Kyela, Chunya, and Ileje vocational training centers. Additionally, it runs Utengule and Lutengano theological colleges, Mbeya Moravian Teachers College, and Teofilo Kisanji University. Hospitals like Isoko and Mbozi Mission hospitals, along with health centers like Rungwe, Chikumbulu, Kalembo, Bwipa, and Bulanga, were also mentioned. It was proposed that the church running these projects creates employment opportunities for youth, deterring them from engaging in illicit activities and empowering them with self-reliance skills for small-scale entrepreneurship. It was articulated that:

> *The Church must have enough accommodation including schools, vocational centers, hospitals and social amenities for the community and for the benefit of the nation (IDI 37 with Female; Ileje June 2023).*

Respondents highlighted an important mechanism for resolving unnecessary conflicts, emphasizing that the church should implement profitable business projects instead of relying on external resources, as it is envisioned as a vehicle for liberating people from all forms of oppression. These social developments resonate with Girard's theory in French psychology, introduced by Durkheim, which suggests that religion promotes social cooperation. The concept of the scapegoat, as articulated by Gabriel Andrade (2022), highlights how saints and priests (the church) ensure community stability and harmony, reinforcing societal institutions through religious practices.

René Girard's mimetic desire theory (1972) elaborates on the role of prophets and servants of God, emphasizing their task to cultivate the concept of divinity within society. According to Girard, God abhors religious violence, as exemplified by Prophet Hosea's plea: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Andrade, 2022). This underscores two aspects of cultural violence: presenting a meaningful narrative centered on victims and portraying a non-violent God (Andrade, 2022). Thus, educational projects are viewed as key strategies to address conflicts and theological misunderstandings that may arise due to illiteracy or low comprehension. Such projects provide education to individuals, including Moravian Church members.

However, the discussion turned to church education and its effectiveness. Respondents emphasized that church education is one of several mechanisms for resolving conflicts within an organization. The effectiveness of educational initiatives was explored, focusing on whether instructional methods, teaching practices, and learning outcomes contribute to competence. Central questions asked were: Are educational instructions adaptable for promoting competence? Do they successfully achieve set objectives and evaluations? Respondents provided insights in response to these inquiries, stating that:

> *The education that is given to us is good but it is a big problem, we ask ourselves, why this education most emphasis on the giving of money accompanied by threats that if you do not give or be responsible you will be burned by fire and that Jesus is about to come, something that brings fear to Christians, and there will be a lasting crisis until Jesus returns (IDI 21 with Male; Ruanda congregation Mbeya June 2023).*

The respondents generally acknowledged that the education provided is adequate, but they expressed concerns about its focus on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the end of the world. They argued that preaching often emphasizes fear to instill belief. There is a noted absence of seminars on the Word of God led by church leaders at various levels—congregational, district, and provincial—while groups take the initiative instead. The education prioritized aims to prevent believers from being misled by teachings from other denominations.

However, respondents clarified that the church's educational efforts sometimes fall short, resulting in a significant impact. Christians do not consistently meet the assignments and objectives set forth due to a perceived lack of competence. Ongoing mistakes further undermine the effectiveness of the education provided. Respondents elaborated that:

> *Focusing on the church leaders like pastors that do not receive frequent opportunities to develop their skills because they often lack education that is theological and how to teach and then the knowledge they have and the quality of teaching is often low (IDI 32 with Female Kyela July 2023).*

Therefore, it appears that many church members who lack knowledge find it difficult to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their education. There is variability in the grades of priests, and the rotation of priests often leads to incomplete lessons, which leaves congregants struggling to comprehend. Christians, eager to explore God's word, often seek knowledge from other denominations by switching. Furthermore, the topic on the good church's succession plan was discussed. Respondent explained that:

> *Intentionally the church need to set up the next generation for success while honoring the past. Church leadership succession planning can be one of the most significant and complex tasks a pastor will undertake in their ministry journey including of handling over to a new pastor or a worker (IDI 30 with Male; Itili congregation in Mbeya August 2023).*

Respondent's opinion as explained above remind the church that if can be able to establish a significant succession like good and proper handling, can be one among steps under looking beyond of occurrence of conflicts since the church will be able to enjoy its seasons of its growth. The outgoing workers can be pastors or any workers, primarily the aim should be to leave the organization in excellent condition and in hands of the right successor.

Securing repentance and agreement from all parties involve

Here under, was the respondent's explanation:

> *The parties to shake hands and accept one of the alternatives identified in mutually acceptable solutions can be a determinant of each side's role in the solution made, agreed and repented (IDI 4 with Male; Mbeya July 2023).*

The opinion above rests on an agreement reached that the mediator needs to get the two parties to shake hands and accept one of the mutually accepted alternatives. Since the goal was to reach a negotiation agreement, some mediators write a contract specifying actions and time frames.

However, it might be sufficient to meet with the individuals and have them answer questions regarding action plans to prevent future conflicts and address issues if they arise. This is necessary because the mediation process works between groups and individuals.

Determining each side's role in the solution is important, as both sides must have a say in negotiating a reasonable outcome. For the resolution to be effective, each party must feel it is unbiased and reasonable. Ideally, both sides will understand each other's perspectives.

Generally, conflicts can be resolved through facilitation and open dialogue, which requires time and effort as both parties set aside differences to find common ground. Initially, work with both sides to create steps for achieving the agreed resolution. Respondents suggested that a mediator should thoroughly investigate the conflict, gathering essential facts such as participants, origins, current status, interests of each party, and other relevant details.

The mediator should listen to all perspectives and resolve the conflict using methods like advice, counseling, persuasion, and if necessary, confrontation or authoritative rebuke to highlight the faults of the conflicting parties. This approach constitutes arbitration, where a third party makes a unilateral decision to settle the conflict (Anyanwu, 2018). Furthermore, respondents remarked that:

> *The mediator will bring the conflicting parties together to resolve the conflict and that during dialogue the parties are expected to control their message and communication style (IDI 5 with Male; Itili congregation, Mbeya August 2023).*

The focus was on establishing effective communication between individuals as a foundation for preventing and resolving conflicts in a friendly and informed manner. It is crucial to recognize that intervening in challenging situations requires enhanced conflict resolution skills among church members. Ofolaranmi (2022) advocates for acquiring knowledge and skills through specialized social courses in conflict resolution.

When conflicts can be managed locally within the church, they should be referred to the appropriate authorities. The church is expected to exemplify leadership in society by managing personality clashes and internal disputes without resorting to court cases.

Respondents in the first FGD emphasized the importance of local churches establishing robust conflict resolution bodies led by competent, fair, and respectful individuals. Such individuals must earn the trust of others and be willing to speak the truth impartially (IDI 31 with Female; Rungwa July 2023). Some respondents suggested that local churches should also create peace and arbitration bodies comprising legal experts and mature believers from various denominations to consult aggrieved members of sister churches and prevent unnecessary embarrassment.

While conflict is natural in any community, including workplaces, effective management is crucial to mitigate absenteeism, productivity losses, and mental health issues. Well-managed conflicts can catalyze new ideas and innovations, fostering flexibility and enhancing

relationships. Therefore, effective conflict management is essential for the overall success of any organization (Ofolaranmi, 2022).

In Girard's theory, the devil represents an adversary inciting pride and other evils, while the Holy Spirit symbolizes protection against accusations, overturning the old paradigm of scapegoating (Andrade, 2022). Girard asserts that human nature is tainted by a tendency toward imitation and violence, perpetuated by cultural foundations. However, he believes that repentance and withdrawal from violence can redeem human nature, aligning with the Christian doctrine of atonement, where Christ's sacrifice atones for humanity's sins (Andrade, 2022). This theory signifies the importance of securing repentance and agreement from all parties involved in conflict as a step toward resolution.

The above findings explain steps in conflict resolution mechanisms that can be used in the Moravian church, including identifying the conflict's source. The following respondents elaborated on models of conflict-handling styles.

Avoidance

Respondents in the 2nd FGD elaborated on conflict handling styles as another essential mechanism for resolving conflicts within the institution. Respondent said:

> *Some people tend to avoid conflict when they don't want to engage in it. To them is one of the style to handle misunderstandings. By avoiding allows them to ignore that there is a problem (IDI 26 with Female; Mbeya June 2023).*

Respondents' opinions highlight a method that involves ignoring potential conflicts. People tend to avoid conflict when they do not wish to engage in it, as avoidance allows them to ignore the problem. However, it is essential to recognize situations where avoiding conflict is appropriate, such as when there is no clear solution or when a frustrated party needs time to calm down. On the other hand, avoidance can require more effort than facing the problem and can create friction between disagreeing parties, as it is a passive approach that sidesteps the issue. Some managers delay deadlines or avoid decisions, possibly separating opposing parties or removing themselves from the situation. This deliberate delay can lead to unresolved conflicts, causing resentment and frustration, as seen in the Kyela conflict of 1982.

Initially, the conflict may have employed an avoidance style because managers were not ready to decide how to proceed or lacked immediate resources. Furthermore, this style can fail when many people are involved and emotions like anger are high. If someone feels particularly angry or frustrated, the avoidant approach can leave them feeling dismissed. In such cases, conflict management should address underlying issues and emotions (Thomas-Kilmann, 2008).

In Girard's theory of mimetic desire (1986), Jesus' crucifixion serves as a pivotal moment that subverts the psychological order of violence, offering a pathway to social peace through the revelation of innocence. Girard argues against using violence to restore peace, advocating for complete renunciation of violence as per Jesus' teachings (Andrade, 2022). Despite challenging passages in the Gospel, such as "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword," Girard interprets these as symbolic warnings against human abuses rather than calls to violence (Girard, 1986).

In the Moravian Church, one conflict management style is avoidance. Leaders who practice this style tend to ignore conflicts altogether, exhibiting withdrawal and sidestepping, as respondents indicated. Respondents also explained another style as a mechanism toward conflict resolution.

Competing

The issue of competing in discussion emerged as one of mechanism used in conflict resolution. Respondents explained that:

> *Some managers are not cooperative, full of competing taking on a dominating position in their opinion. There's little to no collaborating, as the individual is stern in their beliefs (IDI 3 with Male; Ruanda Congregation, Mbeya August 2023).*

Respondents' statements indicate that the competing conflict management style to resolve conflict is fairly straightforward. The goal of using this style is to win, but winning can look different depending on the parties involved and what's at stake. For example, the Jacaranda violence of 2002/2003 exemplifies the competing management style. An uncooperative leader used an excessively self-confident approach, insisting on winning the dispute by any means, which is known as a win-lose strategy. This method is often not seen as bringing satisfactory resolutions, as it doesn't allow for collaborative problem-solving. In a competing style, individuals take a dominating position in their opinions. Within the Moravian Church, this style emerges when two or more employees compete for a certain post. It may also arise when the stakes are less clear; for instance, a new chairman may unconsciously compete with their team to assert authority.

Max Weber's (1864-1920) conflict theory explains that social order is maintained by domination or competition rather than by consensus and conformity, which can help resolve unnecessary conflicts in the community and organizations. The domination style, as a mechanism to resolve conflict in the Moravian Church, emerged as important in the discussion, as explained by respondents. The next style follows in detail.

Compromising

When the problem or issue is minor, and the parties are willing to work together, the compromising conflict administration style is used. Respondents explained that if an issue needs a quick resolution, a compromise might lead to the fastest solution. This style is often referred to as the lose-lose technique (IDI 12 with Male; Rungwa June 2023). When leaders address conflict with this style, they encourage each side to make significant sacrifices, meaning neither side gets exactly what they want. Ideally, after compromising on minimal issues, both parties could agree on the larger issue. In the Moravian Church, this style is often ineffective in serious disagreements, such as individual and departmental conflicts. It arises when an immediate solution is needed, which may be temporary, and neither party is satisfied. This situation occurs when urgent needs must be addressed efficiently, and the conflict's duration hampers productivity. The aim is to promote collaboration among groups or members.

Accommodating style

On accommodating as one style of conflict mechanism resolution, respondent explained that:

Accommodating plan, also known as smooth out, involves one party agreeing, giving the opposing party exactly what it needs to resolve the problem (IDI 30 with Male; Itili congregation, Mbeya August 2023).

When interacting with someone with a strong or harsh personality, you might need to use an accommodating conflict style. In the Moravian Church, admitting and accepting others' views, especially from experts, is crucial for cooperation. This method allows leaders to resolve problems in the short term while working toward long-term solutions. In some cases, accommodating can be a suitable resolution for conflicts; for instance, when a leader's opinion on a matter is weak, it is often easier to comply.

Nevertheless, respondents clarified that it is vital to know when accommodating someone might be detrimental to your or your members' best interests. This style can be appropriate when a resolution seems unattainable, and your colleague is more concerned with the conflict than you are. It may also be suitable when a coworker has more experience or knowledge, as the institution can be negatively affected by the conflict.

Accommodating mechanisms are often characterized by slight confrontation and a willingness to accept facts. Members with this style may be seen as passive and conflict-averse (Thomas-Kilmann 2008). This approach is generally the easiest way to seek a middle ground and can work when there is no clear winner in an argument. However, accommodating should not be used when one individual's needs are being ignored. It is also unsuitable for situations where one party tries to take advantage of another by not standing up for their rights and interests. This approach can escalate conflicts by allowing the other party more room to push boundaries (Thomas-Kilmann 2008).

Girard's mimesis desire theory contends that Christianity, while sometimes associated with violence, does not inherently promote it; rather, any violence stems from human resistance to following Christian principles of non-violence and peace (Andrade, 2022). Girard's interpretation reveals a God who advocates for peaceful coexistence. The theory explains coexistence as not just an ideal but a vital aspect of our interconnected relationships, fostering acceptance, empathy, and mutual respect by overcoming differences. In the Moravian Church, accommodating signifies the willingness to adjust and coexist peacefully, resolving conflict by yielding to the opposing party.

Collaborating

Respondents elaborated on collaboration as another essential mechanism for resolving conflicts within the institution. Respondent said:

> *Moravian as an organization has complex and difficult problems including its economy situation. Having many members and stakeholders, collaborating mechanism is the most appropriate to reach its goal. It gave a safe environment for all members to involve to work together to reach the*

> *goal and while maintaining each person's individual identity and needs (IDI*
> *27 with Male Rungwe June 2023).*

The respondent's opinion sheds light on the collaborating style that seeks a solution satisfying everyone involved. In the case of a conflict over land at the Rungwe mission in the southern province, this style emphasized the need to listen and communicate with both parties. With government intervention, understanding both sides of the land use issue facilitated negotiation. The church agreed to leave a piece of land for the villagers who were using church property, as directed. Implementing this style was often time-consuming and labor-intensive, but it produced the most satisfying long-term results. This collaborating approach is valuable for creating and maintaining successful professional relationships. Known as a win-win strategy, it involves working with others to find a mutually agreeable solution. However, this style may not be the best option when the decision-maker is unclear, quick decisions are needed, or when people have strong opinions and want to assert their views. Respondents emphasized the importance for the church to create opportunities for discussing conflict resolution mechanisms and making collective decisions on how to proceed.

Dialogue and counselling

Another significant aspect discussed by respondents is the role of dialogue and counseling in resolving conflicts within the church. They emphasized that these are crucial mechanisms for addressing internal conflicts. When asked, "How should the church resolve conflicts if they occur?" most respondents in the FGDs agreed that conflicts are inevitable but can be best resolved through collaborative discussions to understand the underlying reasons and find peaceful solutions.

Respondents stressed the importance of allowing the church community to openly discuss the causes of conflicts and propose decisions on how to move forward. They noted that inclusive church meetings promote a peaceful environment. Resolving conflicts involves systematically identifying and addressing each root cause without favoritism or bias.

The respondents expressed that initiating dialogue and counseling among conflicting groups is the best approach for resolving church conflicts. If internal reconciliation fails, parties may seek legal resolution. However, they cautioned that mediation by bishops from other provinces can sometimes impose authoritarian decisions that intimidate rather than resolve conflicts.

This process aligns with Rene Girard's theory of "Mimesis," where external mediation influences desires. Girard explains how individuals imitate desires shaped by external figures, akin to celebrities endorsing products. This mediation occurs when the mediator and the influenced person are not directly connected, avoiding competitive risks. In contrast, Girard describes "internal mediation," where conflicting parties share a common context and can dialogue to resolve differences peacefully. Respondents highlighted the effectiveness of internal mediation processes in achieving genuine reconciliation within the church:

> *The help from anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists could be*
> *sought as well to apply another approach in reconciliation. The arbitration*
> *or reconciliation committee is formed for the purpose of resolving the*

> *conflicting issues and use of the constitution according to the type of conflict*
> *at hand (IDI 33 with Male; Ileje July 2023).*

The quote emphasizes that church members should strive to avoid actions leading to conflicts and learn the importance of forgiveness. Respondents expressed that prolonged antagonism within the church is detrimental, advocating for a swift pursuit of peace before situations escalate. They stressed the need to resolve conflicts quickly to prevent further harm, as discussed in the 1st FGD.

There is consensus among respondents that church leaders should undergo training to effectively manage conflicts, rather than exacerbating them through misguided interventions. True mediation involves impartiality and fair resolution, rather than favoring one side or pursuing personal agendas.

Respondents recognized that some conflicts stem from power struggles among leaders, emphasizing the importance of wisdom among elders to uphold peace and stability. They called for unbiased reconciliation efforts, urging leaders to listen attentively and refrain from hasty judgments without clear evidence. Individuals involved in conflicts were encouraged to humble themselves and seek divine intervention while adhering to church regulations.

Given human tendencies towards self-interest, conflicts are often exaggerated and escalated unnecessarily. Respondents recommended structured meetings with documented decisions following prayer, overseen by a directive committee, to ensure thorough conflict resolution. They emphasized that unresolved conflicts should be escalated to relevant authorities for further intervention if necessary.

Moreover, respondents acknowledged the church's responsibility to promote peace and welcome advice on conflict resolution, even if governmental intervention becomes necessary. They underscored the importance of humility among church members in facilitating peaceful resolutions at all levels. Respondent explained that:

> *The community should as well get involved in buttressing the established*
> *means of the church. The church also consists of church advocates who can*
> *help in situation where conflicts arise (IDI 33 with Male; Ileje July 2023).*

The respondents explained that various conflict resolution approaches are employed to achieve resolutions. They emphasized that members instigating conflicts should be excommunicated and reported to law enforcement without bias. Additionally, human rights violations or failure to fulfill church duties during conflicts should result in accountability for violating established protocols.

Dialogue and counsel, as a conversational process involving active listening, reflection, and questioning with a curious mindset, aim to achieve mutual understanding and resolve conflicts (Corey, 2012). This process involves stages facilitated by a neutral mediator, including creating a safe dialogue environment, developing shared knowledge, exploring issues, and transitioning from dialogue to action. Respondents can engage meaningfully with the mediator's support to resolve conflicts effectively.

Girard's theory posits that the New Testament completes the narrative initiated by the Hebrew Bible, endorsing the innocence of victims and rejecting violence. Jesus, depicted as an innocent scapegoat, is unjustly condemned, addressing humanity's moral dilemma (Andrade, 2022). Girard's theories offer insights into violence, redemption, and the transformative power of Christian teachings in promoting peace. Conflict resolution involves a formal process where parties find peaceful solutions, often complicated by unconscious cognitive traps and egocentricism (Andrade, 2022). On the other hand, mediation, is another conflict resolution mechanism, involves enlisting a neutral third party to help disputants come to a voluntary, nonbinding consensus (Andrade, 2022).

Therefore, strategies for peacebuilding within the Moravian Church include dialogue, mutual understanding, and education. Open communication can promote empathy, tolerance, and reduce misconceptions. Religious literacy campaigns can debunk stereotypes and foster respect, while mediation and conflict resolution processes help religious groups find common ground and peacefully resolve disputes. These processes are vital for promoting coexistence, protecting human rights, and preventing discrimination (John, 2015).

Conclusion

Conflict management within the Moravian church in southern and southwest Tanzania can be better understood through the lens of relevant theories. Two key theories provide a framework for analyzing the mechanism and styles of conflict resolution: Rene Girard's Mimetic Desire Theory and Max Weber's conflict Theory.

Rene Girard's Mimetic Desire Theory emphasized the role of imitation in human conflicts. According to Girard, individuals often imitate the desires of others, which can lead to competition, rivalry and eventually conflict. In the context of the Moravian Church, this theory explains how conflict might arise from imitative behaviors among leaders and members such as competition for positions or resources. Girard, also highlights the concept of scapegoating, where a community projects its tension onto an individual or group, often as a way of restoring temporary peace. This theoretical perspective underscores the importance of mechanisms like repentance and mutual agreement in resolving disputes as they redirect focus from rivalry to reconciliation.

Max Weber's Conflict Theory, on the other hand, provides insights into how power dynamics and organization structures contribute to conflict. Weber posits that social order is often maintained through domination rather than consensus. In the Moravian Church, this theory sheds light on how hierarchical leadership and governance practices can both cause and resolve conflicts. For instance, conflict stemming from leadership succession or policy disagreements may be influenced by underlying power struggles. Understanding these dynamics can inform approaches like dialogue, collaboration and inclusive decision-making to mitigate tensions.

These theories compliment the practical mechanisms identified in the study such as early detection of conflict elements, dialogue and counseling, and education initiatives. Mimetic Desire Theory highlights the psychological and relational aspects of conflict while Conflict

Theory addresses structural and systemic factors. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing and addressing conflicts within the church.

Incorporating these theoretical perspectives into leadership training and theological education could enhance the capacity of church leaders to manage conflicts effectively. By grouping conflict resolution strategies in both theory and practice, the Moravian Church can foster a culture of understanding, collaboration and sustainable peace.

References

Andrade, G (2022). Intermate encyclopaedia of philosophy and its authors: Retrieved October 16, 2022, from https://www.iep.utm.ed >girard

Anyanwu, C. (2018). Herdsmen and Farmers Conflict: An Impediment to Political Development in Nigeria. Veritas International Journal of Entrepreneurship Development Volume 1.

Bulkeley, Kelly, Adams, Kate & Davis, Patricia M. (red.) (2009). Dreaming in Christianity and Islam: culture, conflict, and creativity. New Brunswick, N.J.:Rutgers University Press.

Corey, G. (2012). Theory & practice of group counselling (8 Ed,): California state university. Cengage learning

Creswell. J. W. (2014). Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative and mixed   Methods Approaches. University of Nebraska Lincoln. Sage.

Dejene, C, G. (2002). Some Aspects of Conflict and Conflict Resolution among   Waliso Oromo of Eastern Macha, With Particular Emphasis on the Guma. (Master of thesis, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia). Retrieved from etd.aau.edu.et/bitstream/handle

Girard, R. (1986). The Scapegoat. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Girard, R. (1972). Violence and the Sacred. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hutton, J. E. (2000). History of the Moravian Church (2nd Edition) John Bechar (Ed.), London: Moravian Publication Office, 32 Fetter Lane.

John D, L. (2015). A proposed manual to guide the pastoral candidate in investigating and evaluating a prospective church. Doctor of Ministry, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary.

Kinkel   (2020).   The   Moravian   History.   Retrieved   July   5,   2020   from https://www.moravianseminary.edu/moravian-studies

Kigera, M.E & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data, Medical Teacher, vol.42 (8).

Mshani, A. (2015). A probe into the causes of conflict in the Moravian Church of Tanzania: A case of Eastern Province in Dar es Salaam: Dissertation for the   Master   of   Arts   in Theology and Contemporary issues, St John University of   Tanzania.

Morton, D. (1996). The resolution of conflict: Constructive and destructive processes. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Ofolaranmi, A, O. (2022). Conflict management mechanism through social media among the Nigerian Baptist Pastors. International Journal of Management and Social Sciences, 18(1)1-12.

Ramadhani, L. (2002). The utility of mediators in conflict resolution in Africa: A case of Burundi peace talks. Unpublished MA Dissertation, Dar es Salaam: University of Dar es Salaam.

Singh, A & Jadhav, P. (2023). Purposive sampling: A tool for Informant selection: Retrieved from https://www.questionpro.com

Smith, G; Goldmon, M; Green, M. Ed (2023). Partnership in health disparities…Potential conflict: Retrieved from https:///www.ncbi.nim.nih.gov

Taylor (2015). All your question about Seventh-day Adventism. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org

Thomas, K (2008). Conflict mode Instrument Profile and Interpretive Report. Retrieved on 17 November 2022 from https://www.scholar.google.com