Religion as a Tool for Promoting Peace in Nigeria

Abimbola Shode
Department of Christian Religious Study and Philosophy
Redeemer's University,
Ede, Osun State
abimbolashode23@gmail.com
08124119000
amd

Debbi Adegbite
Department of Christian Religious Study and Philosophy
Redeemer's University,
Ede, Osun State
adegbiteadjunct@run.edu.ng
08033245482

Abstract
The idea of religion as a peacekeeping mechanism is not new to scholarship. Several scholars have written extensively in this regard. However, not much has been done on the Adamic nature of mankind in causing religious and other forms of conflicts. Although there are immeasurable values in religion that promote peacekeeping depending on the way it is being practised. Good ways of practising religion need to be emphasized and maximized to use religion to resolve conflicts and foster peace rather than using it in a negative light to cause chaos. Therefore, using a descriptive research method, this work critically examined the Adamic nature as it applied to humans and the values in religion that are capable of overcoming it to promote peace among Nigerians specifically and Africans at large. Findings showed that while religion has been used as a cruel instrument for conflicts and violence, as a tenant of the society that it is, it is primarily aimed at referencing the Supreme Being and promoting peace and unity among the dwellers of a given community. This paper concluded on the note that because of its universality, religion plays a unique role in quelling conflicts and promoting peace. The paper, then, recommends that religious leaders should make the peace and harmony of their immediate communities their ultimate concern in the practice of their respective religions as a reference to the Supreme Being they adore.

Keywords: Adamic nature, conflict, religion, peacekeeping, society, Nigeria

Introduction

Conflict is a common phenomenon in the existence of mankind. As long as human beings exist, conflict is inevitable. Conflict occurs within an individual, family, marriage, community, organization, church, government, company, *et cetera*. There is no institution in the world whether political, religious, or secular that can claim to be completely free from conflicts. This is because conflict is an inevitable part of life and living. Conflict could be intrapersonal, interpersonal, intra or inter-organizational, intra or inter-state, intra or inter-national, and it could as well be intra or inter-religious.[1] Whichever way conflicts arise, it has the capacity to mar relationships, and it can also foster relationships depending on the way it is handled.

The word conflict is derived from the Latin word *conflictus*[2], which denotes a fight, struggle, quarrel, or clash. Conflict means a strong disagreement, war, crisis, argument, or misunderstanding between one, two, or more parties over a particular situation. One common type of conflict in the world today, especially in Nigeria, is religious Conflict. Religion in particular has the tendency to cause conflicts and at the same time quell it, depending on how it is used. This is why Marc Gopin[3] is of the opinion that religion has a dual legacy in human history regarding peace and violence; it is either a source of violence or reconciliation. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to elucidate the contributions that religion can make to peacekeeping with emphasis on its potency over the Adamic nature in man that makes man naturally prone to conflicts.

Religion, Violence and Peacekeeping

Every major religion of the world has expressed at some point, through its leaders and thinkers, a commitment to the value of peace, both in classical texts and modem reformulations.[4] Furthermore, religious actors are playing an increasingly important and valuable role in resolving international conflicts. Mennonite, Quaker, and Catholic leaders have successfully intervened in and mediated African, Asian, and Latin American conflicts, as have key Buddhist leaders such as Maha Gosananda from Cambodia and Thich Nhat Hanh from Vietnam.[5] However, a faith-based commitment to peace is a complex phenomenon. While some believers creatively integrate their spiritual tradition and peacemaking, many others engage in some of the most destabilizing violence confronting the global community today.

[1] C. Amadi-Nche. *Fundamentals of Conflicts*. Abeokuta: Crowther Theological Publishers, n.d., 4

[2] Amadi-Nche, 1

[3] Marc Gopin (2019), *Religion, Violence and Conflict Resolution*. https://www.jstor.org Accessed 05 May 2023, 78

[4] Henry O. Thompson (1978) "World Religions" in *War and Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press, 23

[5] Cynthia Sampson (2000) "Religion and Peace Building" in *Handbook of International Conflict Resolution*. Washington, D.C: United State Institute of Peace, 44

Throughout the long era of human history, religion has been a major contributor to war, bloodshed, hatred, and intolerance. Yet religion has also developed laws and ideas that have provided civilizations with a cultural commitment to critical peace-related values. The latter include empathy, an openness to and even love for strangers, the suppression of unbridled ego and acquisitiveness, the articulation of human rights, unilateral gestures of forgiveness and humility, interpersonal repentance and the acceptance of responsibility for past errors as a means of reconciliation, and the drive for social justice.

There are two essential benefits to exploring the relationship between religion and conflict resolution theory.[6]

First, there is a vast reservoir of information in sacred texts on peacemaking and pro-social and antisocial values that affect conflict. These sacred texts contain a litany of individual struggles with the inner life that have led either toward or away from a violent disposition. What has worked and failed to work in the past, and why? What can it teach us about the relationship between violence and the religious person in a particular culture? The replicability of past methods of conflict resolution or of deterring violence should be a critical concern.

Second, religion plays a central role in the inner life and social behaviour of millions of human beings, many of whom are currently actively engaged in struggle. Diplomats and mediators could benefit from an in-depth understanding of the motives for either violence or coexistence. With this understanding, there might be more productive interactions between religious communities and conflict resolution strategies.

Adamic Nature and Conflicts

Adamic nature is mainly used in the Christian faith to emphasize the sinful nature of man as inherited in the first man, Adam. The Adamic nature is a result of the curse of the fall of Adam that has plagued the human family since God created man. According to Rick Roehm, the Adamic nature stems from the "Original Sin" committed in the Garden of Eden and by implication, every man, woman, and child on earth was born with it.[7] While the Adamic nature is a subject that is not taught across the religious world, its reality affects every fabric of religion and biblical records have shown that only Christ is capable and was able to destroy Adamic nature, however, other religions of the world through an emphasis on ethics and morality have been able to regulate the effects of this human nature.

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[6] Marc Gopin, 26

[7] Rick Roehm (2012) "The Adamic Nature in Sanctification" in Christian Life and the Word. Available at: https://www.ptl2020.com Accessed May 10, 2023.

The immediate impact of the Adamic nature was seen in the life of the biblical Cain as he deceived his brother, Abel to come with him to the field where he slayed him.[8] As a result of this Adamic nature, mankind has been plagued with killings, maiming, conflicts, destruction of lives and properties, violence and all kinds of unrest and chaos that undermine peaceful coexistence and harmony among the dwellers of a given community. Religion is capable of connecting with this natural tendency in man.[9] The word "natural" is derived from the Greek *psuchikos*, from which the word psychology was derived, which denotes the soul, the mind, will and emotions of man. Adamic nature, therefore, influences the will and emotions of humans, which then makes a man act in a certain irrational manner, which unleashes physical damage to society. Interestingly, religion is also more of the creation and product of the mind, a reality that gives rise to the psychology of religion.[10]

While Adamic nature is a phrase that is often used in Christianity, human tendencies" best describes this caption in order to make it more fitting to other religions. Human tendencies are not necessarily evil, but there are certain vices in every individual, which can be explosive and destructive if not well handled. Humans are naturally selfish and biased. These weaknesses in man are equally exported into the religious sphere, which could be said to be the cause of all kinds of religious crises and conflicts that are experienced among mortals.

One of the best ways, therefore, to relate to the Adamic nature of man so as to influence its negative tendencies on the entire being and regulate its destructive natural potentiality for the peace of human societies is the right use of religion. Religion is a tenant in society[11], and so religious leaders need to understand the fact that no religion is bigger than the society as a whole and this reality should guide the way religionists and their leaders carry out their religious activities. Every activity of religion, while it is ultimately directed to God should be done in such a way to benefit humanity. Religious conflicts, violence and volatility of many adherents of religion as a result of the natural tendencies should be discouraged and better methodologies and approaches should be adopted that would make religion and its practices friendly to the inhabitants of human communities.

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[8] R. Pascoe (2001). *The Legacy of Cain: Departure from God (Genesis 4:3-24)* in https://www.bible.org. Accessed June 12, 2024

[9] D. Crews (2012). *A Comparative Analysis of Theological and Psychological Worldview Perspectives for Synthesis*. Doctoral Thesis/Dissertation. Available at: https://www.grin.com Accessed June 12, 2024.

[10] Matt. J. Rossano (2006) "The Religious Mind and the Evolution of Religion. *Sage Journals*, Volume 10, Issue 4. Available at: https://doi.org

[11] J.K. Ayantayo (2023) *Sociology of Religion: In the African Context*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Religion as a Potential Source of Conflict Prevention and Resolution[12]

There are at least four areas that could be explored in considering the impacts religion can make in peace-making. They are:

vii.   Individual Leadership. There are certain religious personalities, whose leadership influences have been able to quell religious conflicts and promote peace. The words, actions and reactions as well as the verdicts of these individuals carry weight. Their followers hold them in high esteem and as a result of the honour they have for their leaders, they do their bidding. Because of their influence over the people in their respective faiths and denominations, they have the capability to promote peace through their messages. This is the reason the views of these individuals are usually being sought whenever religious tensions are building up in the country. These personalities need to be drawn much more into bringing peace and stability within the religious settings of the nation.

viii.   Specific Intervention Techniques: There are some very interesting initiatives ideas and examples of specific intervention techniques. In Sudan, interfaith groups intervene when a church or mosque is burnt, and try to deflect conflict. In Nigeria also, there have been formations of NGOs that comprise people of different faiths (especially Christianity and Islam). The aim of these NGOs is to liaise with people of different faiths in order to promote peace and togetherness. They put checks and balances on leaders of different faiths so as not to make unguided statements that could cause tensions in the religious setting.

ix.   Education: Obviously there is education that consciously provides religious literacy from kinder through to the training of diplomats about religion so people are more comfortable in finding ways to speak about it. The role of education in using religion to promote peace cannot be overemphasized. When the minds of religious adherents are educated, tolerance is promoted and this usually makes room for peace.

x.   Reconciliation and Forgiveness: In many senses the ethical and often the intellectual grounding for trauma healing, for healing memories can be found in the beliefs practices and theologies of the people concerned.

Religious Values that Promote Peacekeeping

There is an abundant supply of religious values around the globe that need to be identified in terms of their importance for conflict resolution theory. Some of them are:

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[12] Homer A. Jack, ed. (1968). *World Religion and World Peace: The International Inter-Religious Symposium on Peace*. Boston: Beacon Press, 104

Empathy

The role of empathy in Western religious and secular traditions is critically important.[13] The concept or experience of empathy could be used in religious contexts, either in terms of advocacy and long-term education or more directly in the workshop setting. The advantage of its use as a basis for devising mediation strategies is that there would be a built-in spiritual motivation to engage in exercises emanating from a familiar value. Empathy is evoked by the painful story of the other party, and, in this religious setting, both parties refer to God's role in their lives. This, in turn, generates a common bond between enemies that has often led, with subtle but careful guidance, to more honest discussion and better relations.

The religious adherent must see that his/her way of looking at reality is being directly addressed by the content and method of conflict resolution. If relational empathy is a key concept that informs the conflict resolution methodologies at work, one could explore a means to view that concept in positive spiritual terms, an easy leap for many religious value systems.[14] For example, in a dialogue or conflict resolution workshop involving devout Christians and Muslims, one might frame the discussion in terms of emulation of God's empathy as a vehicle toward understanding each party's needs and aspirations. Allah is referred to throughout the Qur'an as the Compassionate and the Merciful, and Jesus' empathy with others in their suffering is well illustrated throughout the New Testament.[15]

Nonviolence and Pacificm

A critical concept for the inner life in the Eastern traditions of Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism is ahimsa, nonviolence, made famous in the West by Mohandas Gandhi.[16] Certainly, in an Asian context, the elaboration and use of this principle could be a critical cultural tool to traverse ethnic and social boundaries. Pacifism is a related, though different, concept that has had a profound impact on the early Christian church and many sectarian interpretations of Christianity.[17] Pacifists seek to actively defend peace, reject the use of force and identify radical ways to resolve problems caused by political oppression, social injustice and wars through non-

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[13] Thomas Merton (1979). The Climate of Mercy" in *Love and Living* ed. Naomi Stone and Patrick Hart (eds.). San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 34

[14] Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds. (1994). *Religion, the Missing Dimension*. New York: Oxford University Press, 133

[15] Ali Asghar (2018). *The Concept of Compassion in Islam*. Available at: https://www.islamicity.org. Accessed June 10, 2023

[16] Mohandas Gandhi (1980). *All Men are Brothers*. Krishna Kripalani, ed. New York: Continuum, 100

[17] Roland Bainton (1979). *Christian Attitudes Toward War & Peace*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 56

violent means.[18] This approach is being used by some Christian communities, especially in dealing with conflicts within them. Even for those who do not subscribe to a purely pacifist view of Christianity, the pacifist writings, primary and secondary, are a powerful basis for discussion and debate.

Sanctity of Life

Another central value in religion, which is often a source of controversy, could also be a source of reconciliation or joint commitments. In religion and ethics, the inviolability of life, or sanctity of life, is a principle of implied protection regarding aspects of sentient life that are said to be holy, sacred, or otherwise of such value that they are not to be violated.[19] The sanctity of life is a core value of Christian society; however one may feel about the way it has been interpreted or the uses to which it has been put. What has been less obvious is that this value is shared across many cultures.[20] This too could become the basis for inter-religious conflict resolution.

Interiority

Another important aspect of religious experience that will condition the nature of conflict resolution strategies is interiority. Interiority means that disciplines, even in societies that are quite communally oriented, are especially focused on the inner life of the individual. Prayer, meditation, the experience of divine love, ecstasy, guilt, and repentance all reflect the central importance of the inner life.[21] This means that conflict resolution techniques applied to religious groups or workshops might consider, where deemed appropriate to both sides, the usefulness of focusing on this aspect of human experience. Interiority, therefore, considering what it focuses on, has a great potential in dealing with the Adamic nature of man so as to hinder man from unleashing its natural destructive tendencies at the slightest provocations, while fostering peace and unity among members of the community.

Buddhist Compassion

The Four Sublime Moods of compassion (*karuna*), equanimity (*upekkha*), joy in others' joy (*mudita*), and loving-kindness (*metta*) are an important tools of conflict resolution available in the Buddhist context; they also have important pedagogic value for the general understanding of changes necessary in internal perceptions of

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[18] C.O. Gilberto (2017). "Pacifist Approaches to Conflict Resolution: An Overview of the Principled Pacifism" in *JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations*, vol. 8, no. 1, 23-43. Available at: https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa. Accessed June 10, 2023

[19] Steve Clarke (2023). "The Sanctity of Life as a Sacred Value" in *Bioethics*, vol. 37, No. 1, 32-39. DOI: 10.1111/bioe.13094

[20] Khalid Kishtainy (1990). *Violent and Nonviolent Struggle in Arab History*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 34

[21] William James (1996). *The Variation of Religious Experience*. New York: The Modern Library, 88

the "Other" who is an enemy.[22] The focus of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path has been mostly on restraint. For this reason, "Right Action," one element of the Eightfold Path, expresses itself in five precepts of restraint: murder, theft, adultery, intoxication, and lying. But there is a proactive character to the Four Sublime Moods that makes them a critical tool of conflict resolution: They enjoin the person actively to engage in compassion.[23]

Religious Disciplines

Related to the experience of interiority in religious traditions is the great emphasis placed on the discipline of the body. History tells that Gandhi, for instance, combined religious discipline, pluralism, and conflict resolution. Religious fasting and dietary restrictions were used on Gandhi's Tolstoy Farm as a means of promoting mutual respect and tolerance, as each religious community member, whether Parsi, Hindu, Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, would aid the others in the observance of the discipline of their respective traditions.[24] A good example is the effect on the participants or the witnesses to Gandhi's encouragement of Christians to help a young Muslim fast the whole day during Ramadan and to provide food at night for him. The fast itself is rooted in ancient tradition. Yet it is transformed, in Gandhi's hands, into a moment of inter-religious discovery of immense power that leads the participants to nonviolence.

Gandhi's concern was to provide a model for religious observance that simultaneously creates tolerance. There are very few models that have been generated by the world's religions that are simultaneously authentic to a religious tradition and accepting of other traditions. Gandhi's concept of lived religiosity that is both authentic and pluralistic needs to be examined as a model for contemporary societies that mix people of many faiths. Contemporary American examples include the Jewish community's organizing of volunteers for soup kitchens and homeless shelters on Christmas Eve so that the Christian workers can spend the night with their families.[25] The key is not the blurring of religious distinctions or categories, but the peacemaking quality inherent in enabling someone else to practice his or her religion.

Messianism and Imagination

All three monotheisms have a crucial contribution to conflict resolution studies in their vision of a more just society amid new possibilities for the human social order.

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[22] Keneth Kraft, ed. (1992). *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 76

[23] Kraft, 127

[24] Surendra Bhana (1975). The Tolstoy Farm: Gandhi's Experiment in 'Cooperative Commonwealth' in Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal & Gandhi Research Foundation Available at: htpps://www.mkgandhi.org/articles

[25] Bhana (1975)

The phenomenon of religious messianic dreaming and envisioning new realities should be studied in terms of how to combine it with the imaginative element that is necessary for conflict resolution. The prophetic imagination, as it expressed itself in biblical literature, may provide a critical precedent.[26]

The contributions that Religion can make to Peace Keeping

i. Religion is often a core source of identity. Both ethnicity and religion may exist interdependently. However, religion has the ability to transcend ethnic differences.

ii. Religious teachings can provide important sources of meaning, identity and emotional support that can increase resilience in coping with adversity and facilitate mobilization to overcome it.

iii. Religion teachings can provide love, empathy and compassion that can sustain reconciliation and problem-solving across divisions.

iv. Religious teachings can provide values, norms, and motivations that support nonviolent approaches to raising and confronting differences.

v. Actors in conflict may employ religious authorities or religious language to mobilize followers and widen their base of support.

vi. Religious teachings can justify peace.

vii. Religious actors often have access to all levels of power community, nation, and international which gives them the ability to address conflicts on multiple levels.

viii. Religious actors have a deep understanding of the local context giving them the ability to work successfully at a local level.

ix. Religious actors frequently have a special relationship with the affected populations that can dampen conflict drivers, strengthen conflict mitigation efforts or both.

x. Religious actors may have unique leverage as spiritual leaders that allows them to influence and sway communities in ways that secular players in the conflicts may not. This unique leverage increases the likelihood of expanding support for peace.

xi. In many settings, religious organizations and their leaders, due to the trust and moral authority they hold from broad-based constituencies are uniquely positioned to facilitate post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

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[26] Elise Boulding (2004). *States, Boundaries and Environmental Security*. New York: Abingdon Press, 21

Conclusion

Religion, because of its universality, has a unique role in quelling conflicts and promoting peace. Where secular methodologies have failed in conflict resolution, religion has thrived. The reason for this cannot be divulged from the fact that religion has an overbearing influence on its adherents. The sacredness of the Holy Book and the Literature of respective religions and the commanding words they have in them, the influence of the leaders and mouthpieces of the divine beings or deities adherents of the different faiths believe in and the allegiance the believers of these faiths pledge to these deities make religion to have a great power in pacifying the minds of adherents of different religions in promoting peace and togetherness in the society. Though through lack of education, intolerance and unguided zeal and extremisms of adherents of different faiths, religion often gives rise to conflict. However, it is also known for quieting tensions and contentions, resolving conflicts, and promoting peaceful coexistence among people.

Recommendations

From the findings in this work, the following recommendations are thereby made:

i. Education should be made compulsory for all religious leaders in Nigeria so that they can understand the way to appropriately use religion to foster peace in society.

ii. Religious leaders should continue to promote peace and harmony among their members. Hateful and inciteful words should not be used at any given point. Religious leaders have such a great influence over their followers, so they should use this influence in a positive manner for the benefit of society.

iii. The government of Nigeria and other African countries can bring together leaders from various religions in the country to formulate policies that would guide the conduct of religion. This will guide religious leaders and their followers in the discharge of their activities and curb them from going beyond their limits. However, in doing this, the government needs to be very just and impartial. When this is done, the society will become better.

iv. Religious leaders who contravene the provisions in the agreement that were jointly put together should be bought to book. This will serve as a deterrent to others.

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