

Ethics of Peace, Religion and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

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Abstract

Many individuals, families and organizations have continued to experience conflicts of greater and lesser impacts. The imperativeness of synergizing concepts to address this problem cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, this study examined the nexus between ethics of peace and religion with a view to build peace and resolve conflicts in Nigeria. Data were collected through observations, news media, text-books and journal articles, and subjected to historical, contextual and constructive methods of analysis. This essay posited that most of the values inherent in religions are essential ingredients needed to build peace and resolve conflicts in the society. These include values of non-violence, empathy, repentance and forgiveness, social justice, reconciliation, and dignity of human life. Some religious organizations operating in Nigeria are making impressive move toward utilizing these values to promote peace and resolve conflicts in the country. Religious adherents are encouraged to promote the aforementioned values for successful conflict resolution in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethics of Peace, Religion, Values, Conflict Resolution, Nigeria

Introduction

There is no doubt that many people in different nations of the world are in dire need of an atmosphere where peaceful coexistence, tranquility and societal friendship exist in contemporary times. The history of the modern world has been characterized with warfare and violent conflicts. Many societies around the globe have witnessed brutal wars, genocide, the use of nuclear weapons, and high rate of insurgency and terrorism due to conflict of interests emanating from myriads of ideological orientations and clash of civilizations in modern era. According to Pandey, humans are living in a violent conscious world because modern civilization is based on culture of conflicts and violence due to erosion of human values (23). In recent times, many nations, political groups, religious organizations, individuals,

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families, companies and other organizations are engaged in various forms of conflicts or wars of greater or lesser effects in different societies. In Nigeria, Boko Haram terrorism, farmers-herders conflicts, banditry, separationists' agitations and various forms of religious, ethnic, and political antagonism have become reoccurring decimals in the country's social, political, economic, and religious spheres (Atoi and Babale 231; Atoi Religious Extremism 98; Atoi Boko Haram Religious Fundamentalism¹⁵). It could therefore be argued that the history of humankind has equally been the history of conflicts and wars in different era of human civilizations.

Nevertheless, the world has also witnessed to a certain extent, an unprecedented development of the ethics of peace through religious teachings, cultural beliefs and treaties for a resurgence of interest in international cooperation and peaceful resolution of conflicts (Gillard 540). It is imperative to state at this juncture that peace has always been among humanity's highest values over the years. The idealists argued that naturally, human being is not violent, but a lover of peace and always want to maintain peace in the society (Olanrewaju 3). It is instructive to note that religion have through the centuries formulated ways of ensuring peace through scriptural texts, dogmatic traditions and doctrinal teachings. It is believed that human being got the natural instinct to keep peace from religious ideologies. Although, some believers have equally orchestrated large scale violent conflicts in the name of religion. Nevertheless, different religious traditions contain so many value systems that have the capacity to resolve conflicts and promote peace at different levels of the human society.

Therefore, this study examined the nexus between the ethics of peace and religion with a view to build peace and resolve conflicts in Nigeria by synergizing the aforementioned concepts. In order to achieve the above stated objective, data for this study were collected through observations, news media, text-books and journal articles. Data generated from the aforementioned sources were analyzed with the aid of historical, contextual, and constructive methods of analysis.

Ethics of Peace

The word ethics is etymologically derived from the Greek term *ethos* which means custom, character, or pattern of conduct. It is instructive to note that ethics is

alternatively known as moral philosophy. Ethics is a branch of philosophy that addresses questions about morality (Blackburn 126). It deals with the rightness and wrongness of human actions and inactions in the society. Ethics talks about the concept of the good person, the good life and the good society. (Atoi and Ajiji 127). Rich maintains that ethics is a systematic approach to understanding, analyzing, and distinguishing matters of right and wrong, good and bad, the admirable and deplorable as they relate to the well-being of, and the relationships among sentient beings (4). For Kalusi, ethics refers to the code of conduct or principles that govern human behaviors. He further contends that ethics is more or less a set of guidelines that define acceptable behavior and practices for a certain group of individuals or society (15).

Peace on the other hand is etymologically derived from the Latin term *pax*, which means a pact, an agreement, a call for truce, tranquility, absence of hostility. Galtung delineates peace in a broader and more positive way by differentiating between negative and positive peace. He observes that negative peace is the absence of direct violence—people being killed, and positive peace is the absence of structural violence—dying as a result of poverty; and cultural violence—factors that blind people to injustice or allow them to rationalize it (141). In a related manner, Dijkema asserts that negative peace connote the absence of war and other forms of large-scale violent human conflict, whereas, positive peace is filled with positive content and denotes the simultaneous presence of many desirable states of mind in the society, such as harmony, justice, equity, and so on (n.p). Similarly, Barash and Webel delineate peace in threefold as the freedom from civil clamor and confusion, and positively as a state of public quiet, the mental or spiritual condition marked by freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions, and the tranquil state of freedom from outside disturbances and harassment (3-5).

Citing Heraclitus, Olanrewaju saw peace as physical and ethical principle; a property on human nature (3). According to Galtung, there are tripartite typology needed in achieving peace. They include: Peacemaking, Peacekeeping and Peace building. Peacemaking focuses on negotiation process that takes place between decision makers directed towards reaching an official settlement or resolution to specific conflicts. Peacekeeping involves third party intervention to keep apart

warring groups and maintain the absence of direct violence. Peace building focuses on the social, psychological, and economic environment at the grassroots level (Cited in Gawerc 439).

Ethics of peace is basically a guiding rules or principles for lasting peace on issues bedeviling the society, especially in understanding the contemporary problems of crisis transformation in which intractable and protracted social conflicts have taken a new dimension of dominance. The ethics of peace is central to the idea of world ethics. In fact, it can be argued to be one of the central ethical issues in international Relations more generally (MacLean 517-523). The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace is further expounded by twenty three scholars across various denominations that have collaborated to specify the ten practical steps and develop the undergirding principles of this critical approach. According to them, we must be willing to:

Support nonviolent direct action, Take independent initiatives to reduce threat, Use cooperative conflict resolution, Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness, Advanced democracy, human rights, and religious liberty, Foster just and sustainable economic development, Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system, Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights, Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade, Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations (Stassen n.p).

The aim of the ethics of peace is to develop principles that will better enable individuals and society to transform conflict by building a sustainable peace that will address the personal, structural, relational, and cultural dimensions of crises in the human society. Kant argued that dialogue and tolerance without principles may result in nothing more than yet another occasion for restatement, or even reinforcement of one's own private beliefs or political claims. Kant also elucidates his idea of 'cosmopolitan Intent', 'ethical community' and 'eternal peace', in erecting a power and a kingdom for itself within the human species, in the form of a community according to the laws of virtue that proclaims the victory over evil and, under its dominion, assures the world of an eternal peace (Kung 5-19).

Concept of Religion

To understand human life and value system in contemporary African society, it is necessary to understand the concept of religion, especially, as it affects the ethical, spiritual, social, psychological, political and economic aspects of human life. It is imperative to state that there is no generally acceptable definition of religion because it deals with both the profane and supernatural world. Moreover, most of the scholars who have defined religion over the years did so on the basis of their ideological orientations. The following are some of the definitions of religion that are frequently cited in humanities and social sciences researches. From a philosophical perspective, religion is seen as the belief in the form of the Good, a divine mind and will which is central to the existence of the universe and hold a moral relations with humankind (Manus 4).

Meister asserts that religion involves a system of beliefs and practices primarily centered around a Transcendent Reality, either personal or impersonal, which provides ultimate meaning and purpose to life (6). Immanuel Kant says religion is the recognition of all our duties as divine commands.' J.B. Pratt sees religion as the serious and social attitude of individuals or communities toward the power or powers perceived as having ultimate control over their interests and destinies (Idowu 72). James Frazer opinions that religion is propitiation and conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the cause of nature and human life (Adogbo 17). For Emile Durkheim, religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community (Adogbo 18).

The foregoing definitions have clearly established the fact that religion is a concept that talks about the relationship between the natural and the supernatural worlds. Moreover, many of the scholars are of the opinion that religion deals with a system of belief in the sacred or divine being who exercise a moral control over human beings. What can be deduced from all the delineations of religion presented above is that religion is construed as a mechanism for controlling human moral conducts and social life in the universe. This is the reason why religion is given a pride of place in many societies of the world today. The values and importance

attached to religious beliefs and practices in contemporary societies cannot be overemphasized.

Oshewolo and Maren observe that the basic dimensions of religion include the belief patterns which accommodate the sacred reality people experience through revelation, reflection or divine illumination; ritual practices which are prescribed for believers as appropriate human responses in the relationship to the ultimate source of being or value; ethical codes which are behavior directed towards other (3). However, religion has been a contentious phenomenon because of the conflicting truth-claims associated with the issue of salvation or eternal liberation which is the core teaching of most religious traditions, especially the ones that practice monotheistic faith, which they are unwilling to compromise (Atoi 129-130). Chiamogu and Chiamogu reveal that where eternal salvation is at stake, compromise of faith among believers is difficult and may be considered sinful, thereby paving way for religion to instigate conflict because adherents consider a threat to one's belief as a threat to one's very being (896). Nevertheless, religion is an important source of values and beliefs that influence the way in which people see the world and live their lives, and the aims and operation of a variety of organizations. Convinced insiders typically claim that if all its followers adopt and practice the values and beliefs associated with a particular religion, they would be happier and more moral human beings and the societies in which they live would be better places (Rakodi 65; Atoi et al 116-117).

Understanding Conflict Resolution

Etymologically, the term conflict is derived from two Latin words *cou*, meaning “coming together”, and *fligere*, meaning “to strike” (Jegade 56). According to Zvaita, conflict is perceived to be an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles (26). Jegede asserts that conflict means a state of opposition or hostility, a fight or struggle, a clash of opposing principles, the opposition of incompatible wishes or needs (56). Thompson and Hickey articulate that conflict is often considered to be opposed to human interests, harmful to social order and something to be avoided or resolved as quickly as possible (Cited in Treve 9-10). For Kirk, conflict is a state of antagonism, that is, the result of disagreements that arise between two or more people or group of people that have

either produced or threaten to produce loss of life, freedom, property or livelihood, or cause mental or physical abuse (Cited in Jegede 56). Wallensteen argues that conflict consists of three components; these are ‘action, incompatibility and actors’ (16). Conflict has a long history and expresses itself in various ways and diverse degrees over every range of human endeavors. In other words, conflict is as old as the existence of mankind (Ogbuehi 158-161). Conflict does not exist in a vacuum; it exists where there are social interactions among individuals, therefore, an indispensable feature of intra or inter-group relations (Jegede 56).

Although, an undesirable phenomenon, conflict has always been an integral and unavoidable aspect of human life, and since humans have always engaged in conflict, humans have also always engaged in various ways to end it, hence, the term resolution, which becomes a necessary and an in-disposable tool in relation to conflict (Ogbuehi 158-160). Ogbuehi delineates resolution as a thorough means of exterminating conflict so that it will not reoccur in the near future (160). Elom sees it as a set of principles geared towards encouraging warring parties to seek peace (Cited in Ogbuehi 161). This is the reason for the field of contemporary conflict resolution and why it continues to evolve. Shonk defines conflict resolution as the informal or formal process that two or more parties use to find a peaceful solution to their dispute (n.p). Conflict resolution is also open to many interpretations, but most scholars regard it as any process that seeks to address areas of conflict between parties in conflict. According to Lederach, conflict resolution is much more interested in reaching immediate agreement; therefore, its primary focus is on producing content rather than relationships (16).

Zvaita posits that conflict resolution relates to the process of rebuilding relations between conflict parties or resolving disputes through addressing the interests of the parties in conflict (43). Manning contends that the processes of conflict resolution are many and varied and can be seen on a continuum, ranging from collaborative, participatory, informal, non-binding processes, such as mediation, conciliation, third party negotiation to adversarial, fact-oriented, legally binding and imposed decisions that arise from institutions such as the courts and tribunals (3).

The Nexus between Ethics of Peace, Religion and Conflict Resolution

The relationship between ethics of peace, religion and conflict resolution is premised on the fact that most of the values inherent in religious beliefs are essential ingredients needed to resolve conflict and build peace in the society. These include the values of non-violence, repentance and forgiveness, social justice, reconciliation, empathy, recognition of the dignity and sanctity of human life, among others. It is true that the manner in which some religious adherents practice their religion in contemporary times has contributed greatly to bloodshed, hatred, war, and intolerance being witnessed in many societies. Nevertheless, religious belief has equally developed fundamental principles, ideas and concepts both in classical sacred texts and modern reformulations in the theological circle that have continued to promote commitment to the ethics of peace and peaceful coexistence in the human society. Appleby maintains that ethics and ethical convictions, as expressed through religious beliefs, are main drivers for peace. Regardless of which religion may be prevalent, the ethical power of religion can help to unite divided societies (Cited in British Academy 28). Galtung in his ethical theory of the peace potential of religions focuses on the factors that can make religions prone to promoting violence and then extrapolates from these to identify and develop the factors that led to the potential of religions to maintain or build peace, arguing that the latter can and should be promoted. He develops a generalized model of major religions in the world and classifies them according to their inherent potential to reject both direct and structural violence (32).

Recently, research in the field of conflict resolution has paid more attention to the role religion plays in conflict resolution, as opposed to its former focus on the role it plays in making conflict intractable (Bercovitch 177). Appleby and Little et al, observe that over the last two decades, scholars of conflict resolution have produced massive studies on the relationship between religion and conflict resolution (cited in Ilo 99-100). Moreover, Gopin contends that religious actors are playing an increasingly important and valuable role in resolving international conflicts (1). The relevance of religion and by extension, faith-based actors in conflict resolution are gradually coming to the fore. Ilo provides evidences when he cites Mennonites, Catholic Leaders, and the Quakers who intervened to resolve

conflicts successfully in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (99). Bercovitch also notes how religion in the United States like members of the Jehovah Witness, the Brethren, the Mennonites, and the Society of Friends significantly and consistently made efforts to pursue conflict resolution (4). Thomas articulates that religion has a role to play, especially as it can facilitate a dialogue about ‘virtues’ for shaping a better society (Cited in British Academy 28).

Different world religions have outstanding virtues that can shape conflict resolution and peace process. In Christianity, the key concepts are reconciliation, which is based on God’s own reconciliation with a sinful humanity, the powerful model of Jesus’ self-sacrifice to redeem humanity, and his invitation to ‘turn the other cheek’, and finally his attention to the poor and the marginalized that encourages Christians to care about the dignity of the human person. It is imperative to note that there is a close relationship between social justice and reconciliation in Christianity; one cannot happen without the other. This helps to explain the important work of Christian denominations in mediation and in promoting transitional justice (Philpott 93-110). Buttry emphasizes on the Christian heritage of non-violence and peace building. He contends that Christian teaching and values provide the foundations for peacemaking, that is, Christianity provides a whole set of non-violent responses to conflicts worldwide, both within and between societies (Cited in British Academy 29).

From Islamic viewpoint, Abu-Nimer asserts:

Islam is based on fundamental human values encoded in the Qur’an, related religious writings and the Islamic tradition. Based on those values, Muslim societies have developed a considerable set of non-violent tools for conflict resolution and peace building experiences. Traditional Arab-Muslim mechanisms for dispute resolution include third-party mediation and arbitration in any form of social conflict. Such mechanisms also included traditional reconciliation methods, based on the value of forgiveness and public repentance (685).

Abu-Nimer further shows how social justice and other Islamic values can help promote peaceful conflict resolution. According to him, Islam believes that a nation cannot survive without making fair and adequate arrangements for the

sustenance and welfare of all the poor, underprivileged, and destitute members of every community. It can thus be argued that Islam is well suited to fighting against structural violence. Abu-Nimer submits that Islamic values are based on universal dignity of humanity, the equality of all races, ethnic groups, and the sacredness of human life and forgiveness; these are values that underpin any form of positive conflict resolution and help to build peaceful societies (685–687). Sachedina explicates the centrality of Quranic teachings about religious and cultural pluralism as a divinely ordained principle of peaceful coexistence in the human society (20). It is instructive to state that different religions have different degrees of potential to promote peace. There is certainly no automatic connection between the belief system of a specific religion and the use of force by its followers. Hence, Galtung rejects the notion of ‘religious conflicts’ since conflicts are multi-dimensional and complex and cannot usually be reduced to only one causal factor (32).

Peace building, Religion and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria

In a country where conflict and violence appears to be everybody’s problem, peace building and conflict resolution should be everybody’s concern. Peace building is a conscious and an unconscious effort that people engaged in to sustain peace. It seeks to address the underlying causes of conflict, helping people to resolve their differences peacefully and lay foundations to prevent future violence. Moreover, peace building is an effort to make the world a better place for humanity to live in (Sambou 9). The intention of peace building is to create a structure of peace that is based on justice, equity, and cooperation, thereby addressing the underlying causes of violent conflict so that they become less likely in the future. In several literature, peace building is recognized as dynamic, having something to contribute in every phase of a conflict, and always moving or changing in response to the situation and the stage of the peacemaking efforts (Gawerc 439). According to Zvaita, processes of peace building include; people to people, peace building from below, civil society-led discourses, and multi-track diplomacy (41). It is pertinent to state that religion is one of the internal factors that can provide support for peace building and conflict resolution in Nigerian contemporary society. Olupona maintains that religion in the African society constitutes every facet and fabric of the human endeavor and is intertwined with general existence of humankind (Cited in

Chiorazzi 2015: n.p). This of course, includes the area of peace building and conflict resolution. All the major religious traditions in Nigeria contain the basic elements of conflict prevention, conflict management, and conflict transformation.

It is imperative to note that a good number of religious organizations operating in Nigeria are making impressive move towards peace and reconciliation among the divergent religious groups in the country. According to Ahmed, the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), which consists of both Christian and Muslim clerics; the Interfaith Mediation Centre of Muslim Christian Dialogue Forum (IMCMCDF) based in Kaduna, Nigeria; and the International Peace League (IPL), a University of Jos student organization that encourages pluralism and understanding across religious and ethnic boundaries, are famous religious organizations with history of successes in peace building and conflict resolution in the country (cited in Omotosho 141). Similarly, Omotosho asserts that the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, the Christian Association of Nigeria, and Jama'atu Nasril Islam and the Conflict Management Stakeholders Network, are some important religious organizations that have collaborated over the years in organizing locals for educational, and infrastructural projects aimed at promoting peaceful co-existence among different religions in the country (142).

The aforementioned religious bodies play significant roles in peace building and conflict resolution through their various activities, such as, mobilization of peaceful network, fostering multi-religious cooperation, building inter-religious councils, and providing religious communities with the tools they need to effectively address religious conflict. They have continued to build peace by mobilizing stakeholders to increase dialogue across religious and political divides. The role of these religious groups in mediation and negotiation among fundamentalists across faith divides, lead communities in the reconciliation and healing that is required to transform divergent views and disagreements into a true lasting peace (Omotosho142; Haynes 8). Evidences abound that all the aforementioned faith-based organizations and some clerics across religious divides in Nigeria have continued to explore the ethics of peace inherent in their respective belief systems to resolve conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence among citizens in different parts of the country.

Conclusion

The need to connect concepts and extrapolate fundamental values that should be utilized to promote peace, resolve conflicts and ensure that the different groups in the society coexist peacefully is a step in the right direction towards building healthy and prosperous nation-state in contemporary times. After carefully examination of the relationship between ethics of peace, religion and conflict resolution in Nigeria, this paper was able to establish the fact that the major religious traditions in the country contain many essential values that have the capacity to build peace and resolve conflict in the society. Prominent among these values are empathy, non-violence, dignity and sanctity of human life, repentance and forgiveness, social justice, mediation and reconciliation, among others. It is believed that when these values are used to frame the language of conflict resolution, the society will experience lasting peace and social stability. Therefore, this essay submits that there is the need for all stakeholders involved in conflict resolution and peace building to utilize the peace values inherent in the major religions in Nigeria to resolve conflicts among individuals, families, and organizations in the country. Also, religious adherents of the major religious traditions in Nigeria should endeavor to promote the values of peace in their belief system so that people will no longer see religion as the instigator of conflict but an instrument of peace building and conflict resolution.

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