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RELIGIOUS – CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACE –BUILDING.

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Abstract

According to Oduaran (1996), war, hatred, bitterness, rivalries, carnage, conspiracy and treacherous plots are some of the most conspicuous alternative concepts and corollaries to the desirable and soothing of peace. Peace is desirable in creating the harmonious relationship needed to ensure meaningful sustainable development. Peace is considered a desirable goal for everyone. It is a great idea that the world had continued to dream about. Peace enables us develop in people a set of dynamics and purposeful attitudes which assist the beneficiaries to search for and uphold the value of justice and human rights. Hence, there has been frantic effort aimed at discerning the world and promoting world peace. On conflict, once it becomes either latent or open, attempts will be made to resolve it and there are many ways of resolving conflicts (Innocent, 2006). History teaches that when a conflict arrives at an open stage, there are usually alternatives to resolution. For instance, in African Traditional Religion in Ibibio culture, ayeiis a powerful symbol for conflict resolution and peace – building among parties affected. For Innocent, (2006) conflict resolution refers to a situation where different approaches are employed to address and resolve conflicts once and for all, the sources of conflict and in the process change the structure of conflict to that of peace. For Mitchel and Banks (1996), conflict resolution means: the outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually accepted to the parties, self – sustaining in the long run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries. In the light of these, it will not be wrong to say, there is a nexus between religion and culture in conflict prevention and peace-building. The methodology is a descriptive phenomenology. This is because not much empirical studies have been carried out on the issue. The study reveals that different religions have ethical standards and bequeath principles of good behaviour to their adherents. Thus, when religious and ethical values of culture are well harnessed and disseminated in an existing culture, an enabling ground would be put in place for conflict prevention and peace-building. The study concluded that Religion and Culture are indispensable in any society for conflict prevention and peace building in any given environment.

Keywords: Religion, Culture, Conflicts, Conflict Resolution, Peace-Building Process.

Introduction

According to Oduaran, war, hatred, bitterness, rivalries, carnage, conspiracy and treacherous plots are some of the most conspicuous alternative concepts and corollaries to the desirable and soothing of peace. Peace is desirable in creating the harmonious relationship needed to ensure meaningful sustainable development. Peace is considered a desirable goal for everyone. It is a great idea that the world had continued to dream about. Peace enable us develop in people a set of dynamics and purposeful attitudes which assist the beneficiaries to search for and uphold the value of justice and human rights. Hence, there has been frantic effort aimed at discerning the world and promoting world peace.

The greatest threat to world peace arises from the fact that conflict is an inevitable part of life. Ogonor (2004) observed that it is a part of human nature to disagree. However, it is important and instructive to note that it is the management of conflict rather than its occurrence that has been the bane of effort aimed at promoting peace as well as attaining developing a peaceful environment to ensure sustainable and meaningful development in the world as a whole and Nigeria in particular. This explains why Jegede (2000) said that the United Nation came into existence to stabilize international relations and give peace a more sense of foundation.

Regrettably, many countries, including Nigeria are plunged into crisis of multifaceted dimension leading to loss of human capital and material resources. For instance, Nigeria is battling with so many communal clashes among others. Nigeria as a result of these is seen as a security risk country and many foreigners have warned her citizens against travelling to Nigeria. Religion as an age-old phenomenon has played a part in all human cultures. No history of any nation will be complete without the influence of religion. It has aided social progress, educational development as well as mutual understanding among people. It has totally transformed the structures of societies to bring about peace in all spheres of life. Like many social phenomena; religion is not a static and pre-ordained given. On the contrary, it is such a complex and relative phenomenon that it hardly makes sense to discuss it outside specific socio-historical contexts. The close linkage between religion and culture implies that changes in the later may occasion shift in the nature, character and composition of the former. Today religion can be found in all new human societies. An examination of the earlier societies shows strong suggestions of religious signs and observances. Religions have continued to be a significant part of societies and human experiences, shaping how individual react to the society which they live (Fagbamila, David and Issa, 2004).

The Concepts "Religion and Culture"

Scholars find it difficult to frame a definition that will include every aspect of religion, past and present. From any analysis of religion, as soon as people begin to discuss whatever is to them "religion" the tendency will be to end up invariably with a moral consciousness and commitment to whatever they find themselves believing. But religion invariably extends to the external and secular expressions which involve such disciplines as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, history, geography and sociology which come under the aspect of phenomenology of religions. This indeed is in recognition of what of –course should be the general nature in the matter of what people regard as "Religion", so also in the study of

religious science; a measure of commitment to the truths of transcendental realities already claimed for religion (Ekarika, 2015).

According to Ugwu (2002) a definition that would include every aspect of religion is really difficult to find. Thus, Agha (2012) posted that religion has been defined in various ways and some scholars have gone a step further to classify the definitions according to various schools of thought. As a result of this, different disciplines have defined religion according to their world view. In this regard, religion could be defined as a total outlook on life and contact based on a system of beliefs or convictions that a supreme being exist as the source of all that is (Mason; 1996). Karl Marx and economist see religion as an economic exploitation of masses (Anele, 2014). For Thouless (1961), religion is the belief in an ever living God, that is, in a divine mind and will ruling the universe and holding moral relations with mankind. Durkheim in Scharf (1970); 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 called a church, all those who adhere to them. Idowu (1973) asserted that the term religion came from European word. It refers to the transcendental Reality of Faith, the inner reality of faith, rituals and ceremonies through which the adherents – commune and communicate with the deity.

Okwueze (2003) opined that religion is a means of regulating a pattern of life of a group of people, which also embraces experiences, beliefs and knowledge of man that helps him to understand himself in relation to others; his social; physical and metaphysical worlds. Gbenda (2006) saw religion as man's experience; awareness, attitude, recognition; conception, and understanding of the existence of the deity or the multiplicity of spiritual beings and his interaction with them. Again Umoh (2010) religion is more than simply a belief in a transcendent deity or a means to an afterlife. It is, rather, an orientation to the cosmos and our role in it (pg. 12). Thus, religion in its broadest sense is a means whereby humans recognizing the limitations of phenomenal reality; undertake specific practices to effect self-transformation and community cohesion within a cosmological context. Religions therefore refers to those cosmological stores, symbol, ritual practices, ethical norms, historical process, and institutional stutters that transmit a view of the human as embedded in a world of meaning and transformation.

Therefore, it is religion that connects humans with a divine presence, with the human community and with the broader human community. It links humans to the larger matrix of mystery in which life arises and flourishes. Lastly, the term religion refers to faith in a divinely created order of the world, with which is the means of salvation for a community and thus for each individual who has role in that community. In this sense the term applies principally to such systems as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which involve faith, creed, obedience to a moral code set down in sacred scriptures; and participation in common practices. Thus, in its most specific sense the term religion refers to the way of monastic or religious order. (Richardson 1966, *Encyclopaedia Encarta*, 2005).

On the other hand, the concept of culture is a complicated one. In his book keywords (1976), Raymond Williams; a leading theorist of culture; claims: "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English Language. The word "culture' has in fact been used in a number of different ways, both by sociologists and in every day conversation. All

the ways in which it has been sued implicitly or explicitly contrast culture with nature. The things that humans produce or do are cultural, whereas the things that exist or occur without human intervention are part of the natural world. Jencks (1993) describes culture in this sense as all which is symbolic: the learned... aspects of human society. However, the various definitions differ as to what aspects of human life and its products should be seen as part of culture.

Jencks (1993) distinguishes four main senses in which the word "culture" is now used.

i. Culture is sometimes seen as a state of mind. Thus; culture is seen as a quality possessed by individuals who are able to gain the learning and achieve the qualities that are seen as desirable in a cultured human being.
ii. Culture is closely related to the idea of civilization. Thus, some societies are more than others.
iii. Thirdly, culture is "the collective body of arts and intellectual work within any one society. This is a fairly commonsense definition and is widely used. From this point culture could be found in theatres, concert halls, art galleries and libraries, rather than in all aspects of human social life.
iv. Lastly, culture could be seen as the whole way of life of a people. This definition of culture is adopted by Ralph L. (1945). Who says the culture of a society is the way of life of its members, the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation. This is the most usually adopted definition by contemporary sociologists. In this sense, culture incorporates virtually the whole of the subject matter of sociology.

Conflict

Omotosho (2004) asserts that conflict emerges when two or more parties could not agree on an issue. According to Quincy (1971), "conflict can be described as a condition in which identifiable group of human beings whether tribal, ethic, linguistic, religious, socio-political, economic, and cultural or otherwise is in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing incompatible goals". Thus, this could be a conflict of claims or rights; an assertion of a right, claim, or demand on one side, met by contrary claims or allegations on the other. Conflict is an anthropological trait in man which exist in all humans and it is often argued that because by nature human beings are competitive and aggressive, there will always b conflict amongst them.

The human condition has shown that all men and women are filled with intrapersonal conflict in their daily lives (Morris 2004). More importantly, conflict arises from the interaction of individuals, who have partly, incompatible ends, in which the ability of one actor to gain his ends; depends to an important degree on the choice or decisions that other parties will take. Alagoa (2001) this could lead to "struggle of various levels of intensity, extending to violent combat which could lead to the destruction of group.

Conflict and peace work hand in hand and there is an inextricable relationship between them. Conflict arises out of incompatibility of interests while peace may be taken as a condition of harmony of interests. In most cases, conflict leads to peace (Innocent, 2006). In order to ensure peace, there first has to be conflicting interest as there cannot be peace without war. Thus the Roman precept which shows the link between peace and war *"Si vis Pacem Para*

Belum" meaning "if you want peace prepare for war". Since conflicts are inevitable in the society, it is therefore necessary to find means of preventing conflicts for peace-building.

Peace – Building

The late 1990s witnessed mammoth scholarly efforts at investigating the underlying issues of peace –building. Thus, by early 2000s there seems to be a surge of interest in peace-building evaluation, with numerous international meetings, publications and evaluations. As the decade drew to a close, the pendulum began to swing back, and today one can witness a resurgence of interest in outcomes focused evaluation related to peace-building (Scharbatke – church, 2011). According to Ikpe (2014) peace-building is laden with different meanings that are reliant on positioning along the ideological spectrum of subscription to the normative goal of liberal peace thesis. The most dominant interpretation, liberal peace –building is heavily contested with much questioning about how it is understood and the impact this has on peace-building practice across the world (Curtis, 2013; Krogstad, 2012; Richmond, 2006). The reason for the differences is due to the fact that there seems to be no specification on the actual period for the commencement of peace –building processes in conflict –ridden communities. This in many cases still has remained within the discretions of the state; agencies or institutions that drive peace-building process. Thus, peace – building is a desideratum especially in post-conflict societies.

According to (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013; Adebo, 2005; Bolarinwa, 2006; Isumonah, 2006; Hutton, 2014) posited that peace – building is a requisite process for speedy reconstruction of war form societies. Thus, peace –building is a major practice step and planned efforts to transcend immediate political difficulties through technical collaboration designed to find solutions to common socio-economic; physical and environmental problems affecting the city. For Galtung (1975),peace –building implies something more positive and dynamic than simply creating stability to prevent violent conflict. According to this view, it entails building political, social and economic institutions, and revolves around notions of capacity –building, good governance, inclusion, economic opportunity and individual well-being.

Therefore, the goal of peace –building efforts is reconciliation, getting the people to accept each other as part of their own group or be reconciled to mutual co-existence and tolerance. Thus; Peace-keeping "builds barriers between warriors", while peace –building "builds bridges between the ordinary people" (Cited in Bolarinwa; 2006).

Peace Process

The need for peace has been articulated in various quarters and it is true that any homes, institutions, organizations or communities without peace are bound to suffer painful consequences. Creating an atmosphere or culture of peace has been a serious challenge in this modern time. According to Bujo (2003), in African communities; ethics demands that, there be peace among people as one who paid heed to the dignity of the human person also pleases God and that one who acted against the human person also offended God. The position has been corroborated by Appollos (2010) when he asserted that everyone should engage in peace–making including man, woman and youth. This means that even though all religions preach or champion peace, the reality is that, peace has been elusive in many parts of the country. Thus, Appollos (2008) suggested that as a process; peace-building is a planned

activity, directly towards achieving harmonious co-existence among the people. According to Ibeanu (2007), peace is a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within –specific societies and in the wider international community. Iwe (1991) asserted that "peace is the resultant effect of balance and harmony among the constituent elements and forces of an organism for man as an individual moral being; it is the price of righteousness and goodwill (p. 95).
"Eyei" in African Traditional Religion in Ibibio culture as a powerful symbol for conflict prevention and peace-building.

In Ibibio culture, when conflict becomes either latent or open, attempt will be made to resolve it and there are many ways of preventing conflicts for peace to reign. History teaches that when a conflict arrives at an open stage, there are usually alternatives to resolution. For instance, in African Traditional Religion and in Ibibio culture, *"ayei"* is a powerful symbol for conflict prevention and peace-building among parties affected. *"Ayei"* of course is a palm-frond. The part in this context is the yellowish part. Whenever there is a conflict situation for instance, conflicts of land in dispute between communities or parties, when the attentions of the elders are drawn and consulted. The elders in order not for the conflict to escalate will step in and stake this palm-frond in the disputed land. Any of the parties involved on–seeing this symbol in the disputed land will immediately withdraw from further action on the land until the case is settled by the elders of the land. In the course of this, further conflict will be prevented and peace will come to stay. Thus,*"eyei"* in Ibibio culture is a powerful symbol for conflict prevention and peace-building within Ibibio culture; showing that there is a nexus between religion and culture in conflict prevention and peace-building.

Conclusion

In the words of Mitchel and Banks (1996), conflict resolution means: the outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually accepted to parties; self-sustaining in the long run and productive of a new; positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries. In other words, a situation where different approaches are employed to address and resolve conflicts, the sources of conflict and in the process change the structure to that of peace. Therefore, when religious and ethical values of culture are well harnessed and disseminated in an existing culture, an enabling ground would be put in place for conflict prevention and peace-building. Thus, religions and culture is indispensable in any society for conflict prevention and peace building in any given environment.

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